

Visit to the Middle East Area of Operations

Background

- 1.1 On 25 November 2010 the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Senator Michael Forshaw, officially wrote to the Minister of Defence, the Honourable Mr Stephen Smith MP, seeking his support for a Defence Sub-Committee visit to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO). The stated aim of the visit was to enhance the members' understanding of the situation in Afghanistan and Australia's role in the country.
- 1.2 The Minister of Defence supported the proposal of a visit by a Delegation from the Committee to the MEAO and recommended that the visit occur in May 2011, prior to the commencement of the fighting season. The Chair then sought approval from the Prime Minister and Presiding Officers on 10 February 2011 for the visit to occur as an Additional Parliamentary Delegation. On 1 March 2011 the Prime Minister approved the Delegation consisting of three members of the Defence Sub-Committee to travel to the MEAO. After discussions between the Opposition and the Minister of Defence the Committee Chair formally sought approval on 3 May 2011 from the Prime Minister for a fourth member of the Sub-Committee, from the Opposition, to become part of the Delegation. On 8 May 2011 the Prime Minister approved that the delegation was to be made up of four members, two from the Government and two from the Opposition.
- 1.3 In consultation with Defence, the period 14 to 18 May 2011 was selected for the visit. This window was prior to the commencement of the fighting season and prior to the Relief in Place between MTF-2 and MTF-3. The

visit would include briefings and visits to ADF elements based at Al Minhad Airbase in the UAE.

Planning

- 1.4 Planning for a delegation to a destination as dangerous as the MEAO, particularly Afghanistan, required significant amendment to the usual Parliamentary Delegation planning process and is worthy of discussion in this report.
- 1.5 Defence advised the Committee that they could only provide adequate security for the delegation while it travelled in the MEAO if the existence of the delegation was kept secret until after the event. Knowledge of the delegation's visit in advance had the potential to offer insurgents a target that, if attacked, could have influenced Australian public support or policy makers and endangered the members and the ADF personnel providing them protection.
- 1.6 As a result of the need for high levels of security regarding the visit, planning for the delegation was limited to a small group within the Parliamentary Relations Office and the JSCFADT Secretariat, the members themselves and a small number of their key staff, and Defence's Joint Operations Command staff.
- 1.7 These limitations presented significant challenges to both the organisers and the members of the delegation. That these challenges were overcome and a safe, effective visit to a dangerous and uncertain location resulted brings great credit to all involved.

Delegation Aims

- 1.8 The delegation had three specific aims in undertaking the visit to the MEAO, as follows:
 - Its primary purpose was to demonstrate the Parliament's strong bipartisan support, and the support of the Australian community, for Australian personnel deployed on these demanding operations.
 - Second, the delegation, in meeting with ADF and other Government agencies' personnel and with key Afghan leaders at Village, Provincial

and National level, was able to review the current situation in Afghanistan first hand.

- Finally, the visit was intended to provide the Committee with situational awareness of the ADF's operations in the MEAO, in order to allow members to be better positioned to review Australian Defence and Foreign Policy.

Figure 1.1: Green Zone of the Mirabad Valley, Uruzgan, Afghanistan



- 1.9 The comprehensive itinerary allowed the members to achieve each of these aims. The highlights of the itinerary were as follows:
- 14 May 2011 – JTF 633 Operational Update Brief covering intelligence, operations and personnel issues across the MEAO and a dedicated counter IED brief and walk through of the IED lane at AMAB.
 - 15 May 2011 – Visit Australian and Coalition forces in Uruzgan Province Afghanistan and the conduct of a round table discussion with the key Provincial Afghan leaders, including the Governor, Police Chief and Commander 4th ANA Brigade.
 - 16 May 2011 – Visit Australian and ANA forces at Patrol Base Musaza'i, Mirabad Valley, Uruzgan, including a Musaza'i Shura with local leaders.
 - 16-17 May 2011 – Visit Australian and Coalition forces at Kandahar Airbase, including a round table discussion with other Australian Government agency personnel working at the Headquarters of Regional Command South.

- 17 May 2011 – Travel to Kabul to receive an ISAF operational brief from Major General Michael Krause AM (Australian Army), Deputy Chief of Staff- Plans Headquarters IJC. The delegation also visited the Afghan Parliament to hold discussions with three Afghan Parliamentarians: Khalid Pastoon (Deputy Speaker of the Afghan Parliament), Fawzia Koofi (Chairwoman of the Defence and Territorial Affairs Standing Committee) and Hasham Watanwal (Representing Uruzgan Province and Deputy Chair of the Defence and Territorial Affairs Standing Committee).
 - 18 May 2011 – Visit the Australian Artillery lead coalition Artillery Training Team-Kabul at the Afghan Army's School of Artillery.
- 1.10 To conclude the visit, Commander JTF 633, Major General Angus Campbell AM, provided a comprehensive classified exit brief providing an Australian assessment of the situation across the MEAO, but most notably within Afghanistan.

Figure 1.2: Delegation receiving an Operations Update at Combined Team Uruzgan HQ by its Commander COL Jim Creighton US Army



Acknowledgements

- 1.11 The delegation members greatly appreciate the considerable efforts made by ADF personnel, both in Australia and in the MEAO, to ensure that the visit was safe and successful.
- 1.12 The delegation was warmly received and professionally briefed and hosted at each location despite the demanding operational tempo faced by all members of the deployed force. The delegation found that all personnel

displayed an honest and frank approach to questions from the Sub-Committee members and were very positive regarding the purpose of the visit.

- 1.13 The delegation would like to thank Major General Angus Campbell AM, Commander JTF 633 and the Australian National Commander in the MEAO, who provided the Committee the access and resources it required to meet its aims and gave the benefit of his considerable experience of military operations in Afghanistan in general, and his impressions of the progress of those operations after almost six months in Command. In particular the delegation thanks Colonel Andrew Maclean, Chief of Staff Headquarters JTF 633, for hosting the members throughout the visit and for providing them with the benefit of his considerable experience and contacts. Thanks are also due to the Staff at Headquarters JTF 633 for coordinating the visit and providing the delegation with the access required to meet its aims.

Figure 1.3: Mr Stuart Robert MP, Ms Gai Brodtmann and LTCOL Stuart Kenny (at rear) arrive at PB Musaza'i Landing Zone, Mirabad Valley, Uruzgan



- 1.14 Thanks must also go to all the Australian, Coalition and Afghan personnel across all of the visited Force Elements in the MEAO, all of whom warmly received the delegation and were generous in giving their time during high tempo operations. The personnel impressed the delegation with their professional and frank explanations and discussions with members. While it is not possible to acknowledge all personnel who assisted and briefed the members, the delegation wishes to mention the following individuals:

- Air Commodore Oddie AM, CSC and the members of Headquarters JTF 633;
- Wing Commander Tony Houghton and the members of FCU-5;
- Lieutenant Colonel Ron Armstrong, Major Peake and the members of FSU-4 for providing force preparation training, administrative support and hosting the delegation at KAF;
- Group Captain Andrew Heap of the Air Component Command and the airmen and women of the command who professionally moved the delegation through the MEAO;
- Colonel Jim Creighton (US Army), Commander CT-U, and his deputy Colonel Denis Malone for hosting the delegation throughout its visit to Uruzgan Province;
- Mr Bernard Philip (DFAT), Director Provincial Reconstruction Team and his team for providing detailed briefings and organising meetings with key Afghan leaders in the Province;
- Lieutenant Colonel Darren Huxley, CO of MTF-2, Captains Kirby and Wallace, and the other officers and soldiers of MTF-2;
- Lieutenant Colonel 'G' (name protected), CO of SOTG-16 and the officers and soldiers of the SOTG;
- Wing Commander Paul Aggett, CO Multi-National Base Tarin Kowt and the officers, soldiers airmen and women of the unit;
- Lieutenant Colonel Neil Monaghan, CO RWG 6, and the other officers and soldiers of RWG 6;
- Wing Commander McMullan, CO Heron Detachment, and the other personnel of the detachment;
- Mr Tim Millikan, DFAT Representative, and other non-military personnel embedded with RC(S);
- Major General Michael Krause AM, Deputy Chief of Staff- Plans, HQ IJC, and the other officers embedded within HQ IJC;
- Lieutenant Colonel Marty Griffiths, Chief of Staff HQ JTF 633-A, and the other personnel of the HQ;
- Lieutenant Colonel Kane Mangin, CO ATT-K, and the other officers and soldiers of the Australian element of the Artillery Training Team; and
- The officers and soldiers of 2nd Commando Regiment who provided the security to the sub-committee throughout its visit.

- 1.15 The delegation also wishes to thank the Australian diplomatic staff in the United Arab Emirates and Kabul for supporting the program. In particular, the delegation thanks the Australian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Mr Paul Foley, for hosting the delegation's visit to the Afghan Parliament and sharing his wealth of experience on Afghan politics with the delegation.

Figure 1.4: Delegation standing with a CH-47D of Rotary Wing Group, Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, L-R Senator Mark Furner, Ms Gai Brodtmann MP, Dr Denis Jensen MP and Mr Stuart Robert MP



- 1.16 The delegation thanks Commander Joint Operations Command and his Operations Staff for facilitating the visit from Australia. In particular, the delegation thanks Colonel Craig Furini CSC and Lieutenant Lucy Frauenfelder RAN who were the Committee's interface throughout the planning phase.
- 1.17 Finally, the delegation expresses its appreciation for the efforts of the Committee's Defence Adviser, Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Kenny CSC, who accompanied the delegation and was intimately involved in the planning of the visit.

Report Structure

- 1.18 This report provides a record of the main issues arising from the various components of the visit. Many aspects of the visit involved classified briefings and displays which cannot be reported in this delegation report because of the requirement to protect the safety of deployed ADF personnel and their coalition and Afghan partners.
- 1.19 The report is structured as follows:
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of Australia's current commitment across the MEAO.
 - Chapter 3 describes the contributions and operations of Australian and coalition forces in Uruzgan Province and the conditions on the ground.
 - Chapter 4 describes the Australian capabilities at Kandahar Airfield and Australian contributions to ISAF's Regional Command South.
 - Chapter 5 discusses the Australian contribution in training the ANA in Kabul.
 - Chapter 6 discusses the observations made by the delegation in discussions with Australian and Afghan leaders in Kabul and at AMAB.
 - Appendix A outlines the delegation's itinerary.