

Return to AMAB and Final Comments

Exit Brief by Commander JTF 633

- 7.1 On returning from Afghanistan to AMAB, UAE, the delegation was met by Commander JTF 633, MAJGEN Angus Campbell. After returning the delegation's personal protection equipment, MAJGEN Campbell escorted the delegation to his office to conduct an exit brief to the group. The following key personnel were in attendance:
- Commander JTF 633: Major General Angus Campbell;
 - Deputy Commander JTF 633: Air Commodore Oddie; and
 - Chief of Staff HQ JTF 633: Colonel Andrew Maclean.
- 7.2 The key discussion points were as follows:
- CT-U now provides security to approximately 70% of the Uruzgan population.
 - It is assessed that the construction of roads in Uruzgan are key for the economic and social development of the province, which in turn will also improve the security situation.
 - ⇒ Tarmac roads provide all weather access for trade and to government services such as health and education; and
 - ⇒ Tarred roads are very difficult for insurgents to emplace IEDs.
 - The key observations for the 2011 fighting season are:
 - ⇒ The fighting season has not kicked off as expected as there have been lower levels of violence throughout Afghanistan compared to previous years.

- ⇒ There has been a very good poppy season due to the mild winter, therefore, it is expected that the Taliban will have additional funds available for 2011.
- ⇒ The level of violence throughout the northern summer will indicate how effective ISAF's winter campaign has been; autumn will be the time to make that judgement.
- The Afghan Government needs to continue its discussion with the middle and lower level leaders of the Taliban about reconciliation and reintegration. MAJGEN Campbell does not believe that the higher level leadership of the Taliban will ever reconcile due to their extreme views and the long history of conflict.
- Key to transition of security is the need to ensure that we leave an ANSF that has the skills and capabilities to deal with those insurgents that have sat in their secure bases in Pakistan to wait out ISAF until 2014.
- The Afghan Government must develop governance to an appropriate level so that the local population won't be disaffected. They do not have the capacity to develop their governance to western standards.
- It is not sufficient that Afghanistan has an effective security apparatus (ANA and ANP) whilst the government is weak. However it is recognised that for good governance and government services to be functioning in many areas of Afghanistan there must be a satisfactory level of security.
- As the international community decreases its support in the security sphere it must shift its focus and resources to increasing the capacity of the Afghan Government and the country's development.
- The Taliban's sophistication should not be underestimated or taken for granted. The Taliban monitor the international media via the internet so that they are aware of the concerns of citizens of other countries. Attacks are planned around certain events in the political cycle of the countries with forces in Afghanistan, so as to put pressure on the governments of those countries to withdraw their troops.

Concluding comments — Dispelling the myths

- 7.3 The delegation arrived in the MEAO unsure of the progress in Afghanistan, particularly Uruzgan Province. However, by the time members left the MEAO the group as a whole felt cautiously optimistic about the prospects for the success of the mission.

7.4 The delegation notes that significant progress has been achieved for the Afghan people as a direct result of the UNAMA and ISAF operations over the past decade. Some evidence of this is as follows:

- school enrolment has grown from 900,000 in 2002, with virtually no girls attending, to 7.3 million in 2009; among them, 37 per cent (2.7 million) are girls;
- the number of teachers has grown eightfold from 20,700 in 2002 to 158,000 in 2008, of which almost 29 per cent are females;
- more than 4,480 schools have been established since 2002. Nearly 3,500 school buildings have been constructed or rehabilitated, and a further 924 are currently under construction;
- founded in 2008, the Afghan Independent Bar Association has seen a threefold increase in members, from 400 to almost 1,200 at present, evidencing a growing recognition of the role and the importance of an independent legal profession among law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and the courts;
- around 85 per cent of the Afghan people now have a healthcare facility in their local area, compared to under 10 per cent in 2002;
- 1.6 million more Afghans now have access to safe drinking water;
- 1,231 kilometres of roads have been constructed, connecting 264 villages to district centres and markets where products can be traded and services accessed;
- wages for 3.74 million employment days have been provided to local skilled and unskilled Afghans during the construction of infrastructure projects, with a further 2 million days already planned for ongoing projects;
- 95 districts have experienced the benefits of disbanding illegal armed groups by receiving specialised funds to put towards a district-level development project of their choice;
- with micro-hydropower plant construction, 131,988 more Afghans can access power for lighting, communications and business ventures;
- economic growth has been strong, with a predicted 8 per cent average growth this year. The economy is estimated to have grown by 22 per cent last year due to good harvests. Government tax revenues exceeded \$1 billion for the first time last year;

- opium cultivation is declining and the country as a whole is becoming less dependent on growing poppies, which now constitute just 5 per cent of the size of the legal economy.¹
- 7.5 The visit was a remarkable opportunity to meet with the men and women of the ADF and other Government agencies involved in a complex military operation in a challenging and harsh environment. As a result of the visit, the delegation now has a better appreciation of the challenges faced by our people in the MEAO and a better understanding of the nature of operations.
- 7.6 The delegation was very impressed by the dedication, pride and professionalism of the Australian personnel in the MEAO. The delegation was proud of the efforts of the Australian personnel in Afghanistan who are working in challenging environmental and social conditions, with many in Uruzgan living in very austere conditions and placing themselves in harm's way every day.
- 7.7 The visit provided an important opportunity to convey directly to all Australian personnel deployed in the MEAO, to our coalition partners and to the Afghan government the bipartisan support of the Parliament of Australia towards the mission in Afghanistan.

Senator Mark Furner
Defence Sub-Committee Chair and Delegation Leader

Mr Michael Danby, MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

¹ Information obtained from the: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, accessed 3 February 2012, <www.unama.unmissions.org>; UK Department of International Development, accessed 3 February 2012, <www.dfid.gov.uk/afghanistan>; and UN Development Program Afghanistan, accessed 3 February 2012, <www.undp.org.af/>.