

Australia's Military Contribution toward the Reconstruction of Iraq

Australian Military Operations in the Middle East

Background

- 2.1 The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has deployed forces to the Middle East almost continually since the 1991 Gulf War. For the majority of this period the forces deployed were part of the naval blockade enforcing UN sanctions on Iraq. Following the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 Australia deployed a Special Forces Task Force and airborne refuelling aircraft to central Asia as part of OPERATION SLIPPER.
- 2.2 In 2003 Australia joined the US led coalition that invaded Iraq. This deployment occurred in two parts - a deployment and preparation phase known as OPERATION BASTILLE and an offensive operations phase known as OPERATION FALCONER. Both phases included a Special Forces Task Group comprising troops from the Army's Special Air Services Regiment, the Commando Regiment and consequence management and helicopter contingents. They also included an enhanced F/A-18 Hornet squadron and Royal Australian Air Force Maritime Surveillance and C130 Hercules transport aircraft. The Navy provided an amphibious command ship and a surface combatant for tasking in the northern Arabian Gulf, which included Naval Gunfire Support for coalition forces during the attack to secure the vital port of Um Qasr. Navy clearance divers were also active in Um Qasr clearing mines and booby traps in the immediate aftermath of the attack to clear the facility.

- 2.3 At the conclusion of the combat phase of military operations Australia reorganised forces under a follow on operation, OPERATION CATALYST. In this operation Australian military forces transitioned to defensive activities and defensive rules of engagement. This phase continues.
- 2.4 Most recently on 22 February 2005 the Prime Minister announced that Australia's commitment to Iraq was to be enhanced with the addition of a task group to the southern Iraqi province of Al Muthanna. This additional commitment, known as the Al Muthanna Task Group (AMTG), deployed to Iraq in May of 2005 and commences rotation with a second contingent in November 2005. The task of the additional commitment was to provide a secure operating environment for the Japanese Self Defence Force reconstruction personnel operating in the Al Muthanna province and to continue with Australia's commitment to train new Iraqi army personnel in the province.¹

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- 2.5 Australian forces deployed on OPERATION CATALYST are organised as Joint Task Force 633 (JTF 633). The elements of the JTF are assigned under the control of appropriate coalition command components, such as the Coalition Air Operations Centre in the case of Australia's C130 transport aircraft or the British Division Headquarters in the case of the AMTG. Concurrent with allocation of forces to coalition control Australia retains National Command of all forces. National Command is exercised by the National Commander or Commander JTF 633 through his headquarters in Baghdad. The specific issues associated with National Command will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6 of this report.
- 2.6 The Commander of the Australian JTF is a one star officer provided on a rotating basis by the three services at the direction of the CDF. The current Commander is Navy Commodore Geoff Ledger. Commodore Ledger acted as the host for the delegation throughout their visit to the Middle East Area of Operations.
- 2.7 Headquarters JTF633 interacts with the coalition through Headquarters Multi National Force - Iraq (MNF-I). MNF-I is a predominantly US organisation, reflecting the majority the US also exercises in the provision of combat troops, but also includes British, Australian, Polish and other coalition officers. MNF-I is commanded by General George Casey (US Army 4 star). The delegation met with General Casey in Baghdad.

¹ Prime Minister's Press Conference, *Deployment of Australian Task Force to Iraq - Cabinet Meeting*, dated 22 Feb 05, as quoted at <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview1251.html>

Australian Operations

2.8 JTF 633 currently comprises the following subordinate elements:

- A HQ and Security Detachment located in Baghdad. This group has responsibility for exercising national command and ensuring the safety of Australian Government and military personnel living and operating in Baghdad. The HQ element includes a logistic team with detachments in both Kuwait and Baghdad. The Kuwait element is responsible for receiving and on-forwarding incoming troops.
- A group of Australian officers is embedded in the main coalition HQs. Australian officers have filled valuable roles in these HQs since the outset of hostilities. Australia recently filled the billet for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations in HQ MNF-I with Major General Jim Molan. Since General Molan's departure the senior Australian embedded officer is an Army Brigadier assigned as Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations at HQ MNF-I. Australia has also had a significant role in the development of the new Iraqi Security Forces. Through the Coalition Military Assistance Training Teams (CMATT) and more recently the Multi-National security Transition Command Iraq (MNSTC-I) Australia has helped train Iraqi Army combat brigades and logistic forces and the Iraqi Navy patrol boat crews. Australia continues to be represented in the leadership of MNSTC-I by Army Brigadier Stephen Day.
- Australia contributes medical and air-traffic personnel to reinforce the largest coalition logistic base in Iraq. This group of approximately 20 personnel are located at Balad airbase, just north of Baghdad in the high threat Sunni ethnic region.
- The largest single element of the JTF is the Al Muthanna Task Group (AMTG). The AMTG is made up of 400 personnel conducting security operations in the Al Muthanna province of southern Iraq and 50 personnel training and mentoring the Iraqi security forces in the region. The two tasks of the AMTG are to provide a secure environment for the Japanese reconstruction force and to develop and mentor the local Iraqi security forces.
- Supporting operations in Iraq and more recently Afghanistan are two RAAF C130 aircraft. These aircraft fly as part of the coalition logistics and aero-medical evacuation program. They provide exclusive service to Australian elements two days per week. The C130 detachment is located outside Iraq. Approximately 130 personnel are required to maintain very high availability rates for the two aircraft.

- Two RAAF P3C Orion aircraft also support operations in Iraq and the northern Arabian Gulf. The Maritime Patrol Aircraft Group consists of approximately 160 personnel and operates from a coalition air base outside Iraq. The aircraft have been very effective in support of both maritime operations over the Arabian Gulf and land operations over southern Iraq.
- Finally the Navy continues to rotate ships to the northern Arabian Gulf. The ships form part of the sea-borne force protecting the Iraqi gulf oil platforms and interdicting oil smuggling operations. Australia also rotates through the coalition command of Naval operations in the northern Arabian Gulf, having recently completed a very successful rotation under an Australian Navy Commodore. ²

Figure 2.1 The delegation is briefed on the capabilities of the ASLAV and Bushmaster vehicles at Camp Smitty, southern Iraq



2 <http://www.defence.gov.au/opcatalyst/>