

**SENATE ESTIMATES OPENING STATEMENT
VADM RAY GRIGGS, ACTING CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCE
01 JUNE 2015**

Thank you Chair, good morning Senators.

Please accept Air Chief Marshal Binskin's apologies. The CDF is currently attending the Five Power Defence Arrangements, Chiefs of Defence Force meeting in Malaysia, so I will represent him over the next two days.

Senators, in the 14 weeks since the last Estimates hearing, Australia has commenced a non-combat training mission in Iraq. This Building Partner Capacity, or BPC mission, is part of the international coalition's effort to assist the Government of Iraq to disrupt, degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh. Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States are among a range of nations also committed to training Iraqi forces.

Approximately 300 Australian Defence Force personnel, primarily from the Brisbane-based 7th Brigade, are deployed to Taji north of Baghdad alongside around 110 New Zealand Defence Force personnel.

Known as Task Group Taji, the combined military force has started work to train soldiers from the Iraqi Army's 76th Brigade, a formation within the Iraqi 16th Division.

ADF trainers will initially work with the 76th Brigade in providing a range of training from training individual soldiers through to training for brigade level operations. This will help build the Iraqi Army's overall capacity to conduct and coordinate operations. Importantly, our training also includes instruction on the Laws of Armed Conflict

Australia's BPC mission is conducted under Operation OKRA which also encompasses the Air Task Group and the Special Operations Task Group.

Both of these elements are now on their second rotation. The Air Task Group continues to conduct air combat and support operations alongside our Coalition partners to combat Daesh while our Special Operation Task Group continues to advise and assist the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service of the Iraqi Security Forces.

The operational environment in Iraq remains complex and dynamic, characterised by fluid and constantly evolving tactical circumstances. Recent events highlight this context.

Since the last hearing, more of Iraq has come under the influence of the Iraqi Government. This has been primarily due to the successful operations in the Tigris River Valley around Tikrit. As in any conflict; there have been setbacks. The loss of Ramadi after a protracted effort by Daesh forces was one of these setbacks. Already however, the ISF and other pro Government forces are conducting clearance operations around Ramadi. It is important to note that the vast majority of Ramadi had been in Daesh hands for many months.

Public commentary around the Ramadi battle has, in my view, not reflected either the protracted nature of the fight, nor the broader complexities of the campaign itself. What we need is careful assessments and measured judgements not glib sound bites. We must take a campaign view and not be drawn into the daily ebb and flow at the tactical level. There is no doubt that Daesh freedom of manoeuvre has been more constrained due to the combined effects of the coalition air campaign and Iraqi ground forces, but this does not mean there will not be Daesh offensives and tactical successes. Daesh is adaptable and a capable enemy, but as the Iraqis, assisted by coalition forces have shown over the last 10 months, Daesh's advances can be blunted and they can be defeated.

More broadly in the Middle East region, Australia continues its commitment in Afghanistan where about 400 ADF personnel continue to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces under the NATO led Resolute Support Mission.

On the maritime front, Australian Navy ships have had a near continuous presence in the Middle East region since 1990. As the 60th individual ship rotation since 1990, HMAS *Newcastle*, is now on patrol with the US-led Combined Maritime Forces and is part of Australia's contribution to the international effort to promote maritime security, stability and prosperity in the Middle East. An enhanced security environment ensures Australia's safe and open access to the region while fostering trade and commerce.

Newcastle recently replaced HMAS *Success* as the Australian ship in the region. During her five month deployment, the ship's company of *Success* conducted 23 boardings, 11 Maritime Security Awareness visits in support of NATO Operation OCEAN SHIELD, and three other visits to vessels in Middle Eastern waters. She also provided logistic support to ships from a number of nations in 28 replenishment activities. *Success* has recently undertaken several major operational and exercise deployments and was judged the Navy's most operationally efficient ship

last year. Many members of the Committee will recall the discussions about this ship in 2011 and 2012. What we have seen is an amazing turnaround which is testament to the positive results from the Rizzo Reform Program to improve the maintenance and sustainment of Navy's fleet.

Of course, none of our operations in the Middle East region would be possible without the essential support functions provided by around 450 ADF personnel assigned to Operation ACCORDIAN. These men and women are largely unheralded but play a key role in enabling operations.

Throughout 2015, the ADF has also conducted a range of humanitarian and disaster relief operations at home and abroad. When Tropical Cyclone Marcia ripped through the Queensland communities of Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Byfield in mid February, the Army responded deploying up to 233 personnel. Reserve soldiers cleared debris in the Rockhampton and Yeppoon areas to help restore essential services. More than 100 soldiers from 3rd Brigade Emergency Support Force cleared debris from critical infrastructure, public buildings, schools and nursing homes in the Rockhampton, Mount Morgan and Yeppoon areas. Two MRH-90 helicopters also deployed to Rockhampton to provide aerial reconnaissance and logistics support to the recovery efforts.

Four weeks later, the ADF stepped up to support the people of Vanuatu in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Pam. Over five weeks the ADF provided a significant and well received contribution to Vanuatu's recovery under Operation Pacific Assist under Operation PACIFIC ASSIST 15.

Over 500 ADF personnel were deployed with a range of capabilities including AP-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft which provided vital imagery to assist in assessing the damage while King Air aircraft flew general reconnaissance missions. Australia also provided three Army S-70 Blackhawks and a Navy MRH-90 helicopter which provided access to isolated areas. HMAS *Tobruk* in her last months in commission deployed to deliver vital supplies, equipment and Army engineering support to isolated island communities.

The ADF also used RAAF C-17A Globemaster and C-130J Hercules aircraft to transport an Australian Medical Assistance Team and an Urban Search and Rescue Team plus 200 pallets of humanitarian aid, stores and equipment.

These aircraft evacuated almost 250 Australian and other foreign nationals from Port Vila to Australia.

In late April, two C-17 aircraft deployed to Nepal to deliver around 13 tonnes of much needed Australian aid following the devastating and tragic earthquake there. The C-17s also evacuated more than 100 Australians and other foreign nationals out of Nepal.

A range of our standing operations both at home and around the globe have of course continued with our people performing exceptionally well and largely without fanfare.

Finally Senators, in what has been a very busy period operationally, I would like to personally acknowledge the exceptional efforts of tens of thousands of ADF personnel in the commemoration activities to mark the centenary of the Gallipoli landings. The ADF provided an unprecedented level of support this Anzac Day, participating in more than 1400 events across Australia and around the world. Our support included the Anzac flotilla off the coast of Gallipoli, fly-overs of more than 200 towns and cities and thousands of catafalque parties and individual personnel who attended events from our capitals to some of our smallest regional centres. I think their contribution added significantly to what was a fitting commemoration.

The Anzac Day commemorations followed a series of parades in every state capital, plus Townsville, to formally mark the end of Operation SLIPPER. These welcome home parades provided an opportunity for the community to say thank you to the 34,500 Australians from all three services who deployed to Afghanistan and the Middle East, as part of that operation over the past decade.

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