



ON SEPTEMBER 30, the Australian Defence Force will have been on continuous high tempo deployments for 12 years, initially in Timor and then followed closely with major combat operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and finally nation building in the Solomon Islands.

The activity has been incredibly exhausting for the ADF, particularly for specialist units like the 2nd Commando Regt, Special Air Service, 2nd Cavalry Regt and 2nd/14th Light Horse Regt which have been carrying the load in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The current round of frenetic foreign deployments is however steadily coming to a close.

On August 6, the final Australian Diggers operating in Iraq with the 1st Military Police Bn crewed Security Detachment Baghdad XVIII (SECDET 18) flew out of the country ending eight years and five months of Australian operations.

SECDET's mission to provide armed escort to Australian diplomatic staff in Baghdad will now be handled by private security contractors who will continue the role after the final US withdrawal in December.

With a little luck, the ADF should be able to wind back operations in Timor Leste as well within the next year. The RDTL's Government has demanded the withdrawal of all foreign military and United Nations personnel from the country by years end 2012.

With the Policia Nationale Timor Leste assuming full control of law enforcement throughout the fledgling republic, the Australian led International Stabilisation Force's original mandate to provide security capabilities to back up the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor UN Police is now compromised and both the Australian and New Zealand governments have not yet acceded to operational direction from RDTL agencies.

While operations in Timor and the Solomon Islands have been handed over to Army Reserve combat manoeuvre elements, withdrawing the final Australian soldier from Timor Leste will release considerable capabilities and more importantly funding which is currently going down the gurgler holding up

Timor Leste while it should be standing on its own two feet.

The situation in the Solomon Island's is less clear, with ongoing but problematic progress in re-establishing the Royal Solomon Islands Police and no real local political pressure for the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands to

devolve authority back to the Solomon Islands institutions.

AFGHANISTAN

With Iraq gone and Timor Leste potentially going, the ADF will be able to focus its efforts on Afghanistan where the final resolution of the soon to be ten-year long War on Terror will be enacted.

This focus has however been very costly with 28 Australians killed in action and 184 wounded in action since Operation Slipper commenced in December 2001.

To fully appreciate the ADF's position in Afghanistan we have developed the Provincial map overleaf which shows the primary positions of the Australian campaign in Uruzgan.

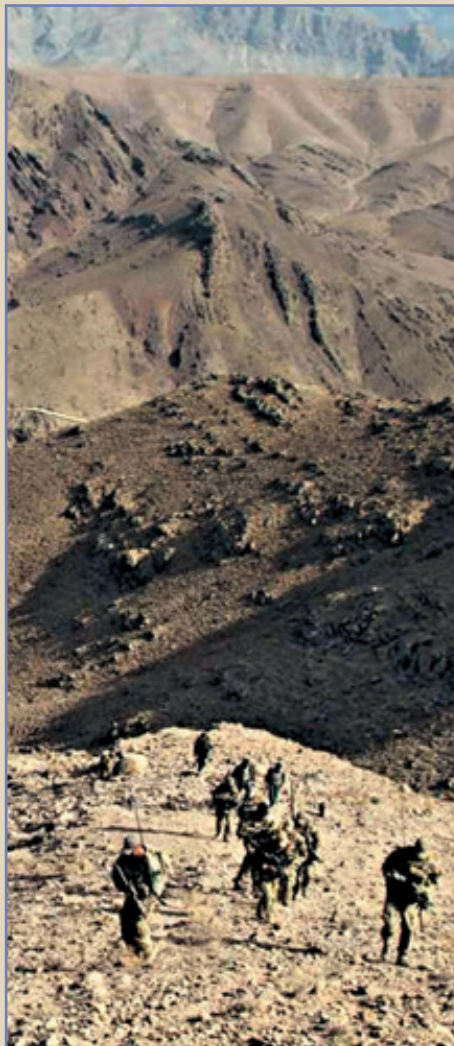
Australia is now involved directly in the outcome of the ten-year war against Islamic extremism in a way it had avoided up until mid 2008 when a change of government and a change of policy saw Australia refocus its operations from reconstruction to Counter Insurgency Warfare (COIN).

Until 2008, Australia had followed its long established 'Odd Angry Shot' policy of providing the United States with a firm and voluble political partner who deployed tiny military forces and then hamstrung its deployed soldiers with some of the most restrictive Rules of Engagement (ROE) and operational procedures of any

Coalition country.

However, since 2008 the Australian Army has evolved from a gunned up Back Yard Blitz crew, to a formidable counter insurgency force that has left the confines of Tarin Kowt District and is now pushing into the most remote of Uruzgan's Taliban valleys.

Australian Mentoring Task Force 3 soldiers, embedded within the Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade 205th Attai (Heroes) Corps are now fighting the Taliban in the back hills of the Charmestan and Chenartu regions in the far east of





Likewise, our conventional forces are attempting to build a capable fighting force out of the Afghan soldiers of the 4th Brigade - living, working and fighting beside the local Kandaks on Patrol Bases and Platoon Houses throughout Uruzgan.

Mentoring is one of the most difficult and dangerous military tasks. Originally it was a pure Special Forces role often delegated to intelligence or secret services.

As was so brutally brought home in June with the murder of MTF2 cook LCpl Andrew Jones by a 2nd Kandak Afghan soldier, mentoring foreign forces enmeshed in local civil wars is a deadly and often unrewarding game.

Worse, his killer was no Taliban undercover agent or operative planted in the ANA. He was an experienced regular soldier who had been fighting the Taliban for seven years, three of them under Australian advisors with 2nd Kandak 4th Brigade. No one knows what made him snap, but an Australian Digger paid the ultimate price for an Afghan's unpredictable loyalties. After killing our bloke, the turncoat was celebrated as a hero by the Taliban in the Baluchi Valley. Fortunately the murderer was in turn sent to God by US Special Forces who eliminated him in his home province a few weeks later.

While our allies have suffered similar attacks in both Afghanistan and Iraq, Andrew Jones' murder by a soldier we had trained since 2008 should sober anyone intent on trusting too much in proxy armies.

For better or worse we are stuck with the war we have in Afghanistan. It is a big job. Some, including many ADF Afghanistan veterans, would also say it is a shit job.

But, the Australian Army will continue to prosecute its mission. According to our Government the only way out of the dangerous valleys of the Hindu Kush is to build a local army capable of controlling the wild Pashtuns and keeping out al Qaida.

While the casualty lists grow it is easy to become pessimistic about the way the war is going and for the Australian people to wonder if it is worth sending more young Australians to fight and die in the unpredictable chaos that is Afghanistan.

For me, it is easy choice, but I'm not out on the two way range watching the sun go down on Taliban town with a bunch of untrustworthy armed Afghans for company through the long Hindu Kush night.

John Hunter Farrell
Managing Editor

Uruzgan, are pushing towards Kajacki Dam in the south west and north towards the badlands of Charcheneh and the Tangay Valley in the far west and into the Kush Khadir and Karmisan Valley in the far north of the Province.

A change in focus and command direction after the US Army takeover of Uruzgan from the Dutch in August last year has also had a dramatic effect on operations. Under the Combined Team Uruzgan banner, Australian Diggers and US troopers now routinely operate in areas of the Province that had been Special Operations only under the Dutch.

Oddly, the ADF refused to take command of what is now designated Combined Team Uruzgan after the Dutch withdrawal, demanding and getting a US commander and a few US mechanised infantrymen even though the vast majority of

troops outside the wire in Uruzgan are Australian Diggers.

Australia's refusal to command its own troops is very strange and at odds with all previous national policy. For an Army the size of Australia's to require a US Colonel to command says something about our own military leadership as much as it does about Afghanistan.

The decision seemed even stranger when seen against the timeline in which it was made, with the passage of operational control passing to the US Army at exactly the same time as Australia was ratcheting up its ground combat operations which have seen the dramatic rise in casualties since 2009.

While our Diggers are now fully engaged in hunting down and killing the Taliban and other armed militias that have run amok in Afghanistan's remote valleys, the ADF's two major

manoeuvre force elements, Mentoring Task Force 3 and the Special Operations Task Group XVI are heavily focused on the 'Afghanisation' of the war.

Just about all Australian operations are aimed at facilitating the growth of Afghan National Security Forces' capability as much as they are focused on finding and grinding the insurgency.

Our Special Forces and their US compatriots have raised and trained a number of semi independent Afghan National Police units like the Provincial Response Company – Uruzgan embedded within the Australian Special Operations Task Group. Recently the SOTG has been brave enough to deploy and recover by Afghan National Army Mi-17 helicopters. That is pure dedication to duty.

