

# EDITORIAL

Managing Editor John Hunter Farrell



**A**LMOST seven years after Australia's entry into Uruzgan with the first SOTG rotation in 2005 and six years after we deployed reconstruction and later mentoring combat teams, the ADF is preparing a phased withdrawal of personnel and equipment from the province that consumed so much Aussie blood and treasure.

The July 17 provincial transition of all security and law enforcement authority to GIRoA marks a successful end to Australia's allocated mission of bringing the Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade 205th Corps to independent operational status.

I don't claim to be a COIN expert, but from what I've seen over the years, Australia and its US, Dutch and French mentoring predecessors have done a bloody good job of turning illiterate Afghan recruits into a functioning manoeuvre force.

I doubt that any ANA kandak would pass an ADF Operational Readiness Evaluation any time soon, but as far as proxy armies go the ANA is probably the best Australia has ever raised.

Given it is a corrupt, ethnically and politically divided, semi-armed mob prone to violent outbursts, the ANA has proven solid under fire.

While some of its soldiers have murdered their ISAF allies, the vast bulk has remained loyal anti Islamic and lean on the Taliban with vigor.

If anything, I suspect that the ANA and ANP may prosecute the insurgency a little more violently than Australia will be comfortable with now that the war is being run on Afghan Rules of Engagement. I predict a fair bit more boot and a lot less cultural sensitivity and lawyers when ISAF has no authority over GIRoA operations.

Getting out of Afghanistan may be as difficult as getting into the remote valleys were in the beginning. Just repatriating the massive amount of equipment and vehicles is a major operation on its own. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has stated that no NATO equipment is to be left without serious financial payments to the GIRoA to run it for ten years.

The road home is going to be a long one with Australia

committed to maintaining both conventional and special operations forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014. To date the year 2018 has been mentioned.

Australian combat forces, currently SOTG18 and the 3RARBG, face the same dangers and difficulties of previous rotations only now their operations will be directed by Afghans rather than ISAF's experienced counter insurgency planners.

Having met some of Uruzgan's new decision makers during an embed in May/June, I shudder at the thought that young Australians have their fate in the GIRoA's hands.

I am loathe to join the ranks of media predicting the disintegration of the ANA shortly after NATO withdraws its conventional forces.

But I do fear that the ANA may have severe difficulty maintaining the vast network of isolated fortified outposts developed under ISAF. The logistics support alone is a massive operation, one that the GIRoA cannot afford.

Hopefully the ANA and ANP will rise to the opportunity the world has provided Afghanistan.

What ever happens next will be Afghan made and done the Afghan way. This will not be pretty. And I doubt it would be wise for Australia to be part of that.

COIN is the art of empowering the government over the insurgency and Australia and its Coalition partners have done more than enough to help Afghans keep the democratic rights

that the GIRoA for all its faults has delivered them.

We have paid a huge price for Afghanistan's liberty, with 34 Australian lives lost and almost 300 wounded, a third of them very seriously. But, there was little other choice. This was the war we had forced upon us.



**J.H. Farrell**  
Managing Editor