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The Australian Defence Force today and tomorrow

an address to the Institute at its 125th Anniversary Dinner at Parliament House,
Sydney, on 16 August 2013 by

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With a 15-year period during which the operational tempo was high and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) performed excellently now drawing to a close, the ADF has entered a period of significant change. It is re-setting for the future with a greater focus on the Indo-Pacific region, enhancing its international engagements and diplomacy, introducing new capabilities on an unprecedented scale, and addressing significant personnel challenges.

Key words: Australian Defence Force; Indo-Pacific region; China; United States; Indonesia; Timor-Leste; Solomon Islands; border protection; military diplomacy; Australian defence capabilities.

It is a great pleasure for Linda and I to participate in your 125th anniversary dinner. It is some ten years since I last addressed the Institute, at the time as Land Commander, and hope that the next time will not be that long into the future. Indeed 125 years is a long time and while tonight is a night for reflection, I think you would also like to hear from me about the state of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Reflecting back 125 years to 1888 and to the state of the colony at that time, the forces that had been deployed to the Sudan had been back for about 15 months. Eighteen years before, the last British regiment of the line, the 18th Royal Irish, had left Australia although there were still some marines with the Navy until 1913. Five young men who were to shape the history of the Australian Army were in their formative years: Blamey was only 4 years old, Chauvel was 23, Hobbs was 24, Monash was 23 and Bridges was 27. Australia was entering that great debate about what the future of this nation would be, how it would take shape, and how it would grow from colonies to a nation of responsible government in its own right.

Now let me draw a tenuous link between 1888 and 2013. By 1888, our deployed forces had come home and our colonies were in a state of flux about the future; and that is a rough parallel with where our Defence Force is today. In such a situation, as an organisation you look two ways – backwards at the history of the Australian Military Forces [Army, Navy and Air Force], which you examine and from which you draw lessons and about which you teach. But you also look at the issues of the day and look forward to the issues of tomorrow. So tonight I want to talk about the issues of the day and the issues of tomorrow, and provide some inspiration for those who come later.

Current ADF Operations

East Timor

Last April we wound up our operations in East Timor. We had been there, on and off, for some 15 years and it had been a very successful operation. Timor-Leste now is a country at peace with itself. It is still poor but it stands with dignity on its own two feet. It has a great future as a very proud nation under an able leader, President Tuar Matan Ruak, who has gone from guerrilla to President. He is a remarkable man and we should be very proud that our organisation, all three services supported by other government and non-government agencies, has played a profound role in helping that country come of age and have a future.

The Solomon Islands

Similarly, our ADF deployment to the Solomon Islands will finish up very shortly. We are just cleaning up now and should have moved out by the end of September [Operation ANODE formally concluded in September 2013]. We are leaving a country in which the people still feel some trepidation and apprehension about security, but we will be retaining a whole-of-government presence there including government officials and police advisers and ADF personnel will go back from time to time. For example, we will hold a major exercise in the Solomon Islands next year just to let the people know there are still military uniforms around.

Afghanistan

We will take a major step down in our presence in Afghanistan at the end of this year. We will go from a force of roughly 1600 to 400 after having had an average of 1550 in Afghanistan for the last six years. Once the strength drops to about 400, we will maintain that number next year and see what lies ahead when the current operation winds up. From 2015 onwards, we

¹Comment on this paper should be directed to Ms Alison Reis, Strategic Communications Adviser to the Chief of the Defence Force, at alison.reis@defence.gov.au.

may go into a new operation with the Afghan Government, the Afghan people, NATO² and other allies.

Of the 400 ADF personnel we will have in Afghanistan next year, about 70 will be in Kandahar mentoring the corps headquarters. Another 70-odd will be based in Kabul at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, where we are working with the British and the New Zealanders. The British call it *Sandhurst in the Sands*. We call it *Duntroon in the Dunes*. Either way, it is nice to know that the future leaders of the Afghan National Army will be coming out of Commonwealth hands. We will also have staff embedded at different levels in the Afghan National Army.

At the end of next year, the Australian Government will make decisions about any further ADF deployments to Afghanistan influenced by United Nations mandates, NATO plans and so forth. But we are looking ahead to having a presence in Afghanistan, including troops on the ground, for the next four or five years at a minimum. This is likely to include heavy involvement with aid organisations and other government functions.

One hesitates to use the words “optimism” and “Afghanistan” in the one sentence, but we are seeing some very good signs out of the Afghan security forces. They are holding their own. They take a lot of losses, but at the moment we have not seen them take a backward step as an organisation. There will inevitably be small tactical defeats along the way, but as a whole they are quite capable. There is no doubt the Afghans will fight. We just need them to develop into an armed force that is sustainable into the future – but we should not expect too much too quickly.

Border protection

You should be very proud of the work the ADF has done and is continuing to do on those expeditionary operations. Our other operation is domestic and much more topical and political. We call it Operation RESOLUTE or border protection operations off Australia’s northwest coast and in the Indian Ocean. I think we really have done a disservice to the Navy and Air Force who have been actively involved in this operation as their work has received little recognition. It is gruelling, hard, 24-7 work that is very difficult for the young men and women whom we ask to undertake it. It can be quite horrific at times. It is always stressful for the ADF personnel involved and for their Customs colleagues who are at the sharp end of it, not the least because it is a very difficult issue politically. So we should be mindful of them and they need our support in a difficult job.

The ADF’s Overall Standing

Overall, I consider the ADF is performing well. It is a great organisation and its members are tremendously proud to get out of bed each morning. We take a

battering in the press from time to time, but on the whole we are doing well and we should always celebrate with our people when we do things well.

On operations, the ADF still does what it always has done. It operates excellently. We have some of the nation’s best and most professional people. When I embed ADF officers into International Security Assistance Force positions and United States headquarters positions in Afghanistan today, the only comment I get is “can I have more?” Professionally, we are a cut above most others. For those of British background, I include the Brits in that.

There has been considerable press coverage in recent years of problems that the Navy has had with its fleet of Collins-class submarines. We did have some problems with it, but over the last two or so years, tremendous work has been done to revive this fleet to where it is operating very effectively at the present time. But frankly, I cannot get that story into the Australian media. A very senior journalist at the Fairfax papers has told me that when he tried to submit that story he was told it could not be published. So I want you to know that your Navy, with industry, has resurrected what was a difficult fleet to manage and has got it heading in the right direction.

Turning to our amphibious fleet, a year or two ago we did not have any amphibious ships that were operational. A great deal of work has since gone into resurrecting that capability and we are now on the cusp of introducing two new landing-helicopter-dock amphibious assault ships (LHDs), the first of which hopefully will sail into Sydney Harbour in the first quarter of next year. With these two ships, together with HMAS *Choules* (a landing ship dock), we will be a different navy. Our amphibious capability will be greater than at any time in our history. I do not think the wider community realises where we are heading with that capability.

In like manner, the Air Force has changed nearly all its platforms over the last ten years and we still have one or two more new platforms to come. The Joint Strike Fighter is just around the corner and the C-27J tactical transport aircraft being acquired to replace the Caribou will enter service by late 2016. Indeed, in terms of air lift capacity, Australia now has the greatest air lift capacity in the Western armed forces after those of the United States and the United Kingdom.

I doubt Australians realise the work that has gone into developing the ADF over the last decade. We get criticised in the papers regularly for poor delivery of major defence equipment projects. Yet we deliver 98 per cent of our projects to budget across the board, even if they are not always delivered on time. While we have scheduling problems from time to time, they are being addressed and the statistics do not support the theory of budget blowouts in defence projects. We should celebrate this with industry, because it is great work. While we should not rest on our laurels, this achievement is important.

²North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

Five years ago when I first joined the senior ranks of the Defence Force, our financial accounts were qualified. We have turned that around since then. I do not believe Treasury or the Australian National Audit Office can find serious fault with what we do now. We are performing very well.

We have also made some very brave decisions enabling women to serve in combat roles. This may be controversial for some, but it is important. There has not been a big rush of women seeking to join combat units – we did not expect it. But for me, the measure of success is that any person can enter any ADF recruiting office around the country now and say “I want to do that job”. If you are good enough, you will be supported to be successful regardless of gender – and that is as it should be.

Our record of providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief over the last ten years is replete with examples of the ADF’s ability to spring out of the box within 24 hours and assist in tsunamis, cyclones, flooding, and bushfires, whether at home or abroad. The ability to respond to such emergencies so quickly has become one of the hallmarks of the organisation.

In terms of foreign relationships, in 1999 when I was a brigade commander in Darwin, we entered East Timor. You can imagine how our relationship with Indonesia was at that time. In ten years, though, through a lot of hard work, that relationship has become even better than it was in the mid-1990s. We now have a really solid relationship with our nearest, largest, Islamic neighbour. As a nation, we should cherish that relationship because it is of strategic importance to us – and we should keep developing it.

There are numerous other ways in which we have made progress in recent times. For example, for some 10 years we have maintained C130 Hercules transport support for our operations throughout the Middle East. It is a 13.5 hour flight from Australia to the United Arab Emirates where our Hercules aircraft operate out of a small airfield. To have sustained those operations for so

long under such trying conditions is just a fantastic achievement from a small group of people from a small airport.

So there is a lot there to celebrate in what the ADF has achieved.

Future Challenges

But we do have some challenges looming. I have referred already to drawing down from each of our current expeditionary operations. Indeed, it is as if my career has come a full circle. I joined the ADF in 1972 just as we were coming out of Vietnam and the Army was winding down. Army’s strength was around 40,000 when I joined. We then saw battalions collapse and the Army shrink. We are in a similar situation at the moment. But we have learned a lot of lessons from that period from 1972-75 to 1990. I remind my people today that the challenge for us is to do what my seniors did for me when I was a young Lieutenant. We trained hard in that 15 years when we did not have a deployment – indeed we trained excellently. The result was that when we recommenced operational postings again in 1991 to Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, all the way up to East Timor, and now to Iraq and Afghanistan, we had a defence force that could perform with the best of them. That is the onus that is now on this generation of leaders and the young people in our organisation.

So in basic terms my job now is to ensure that the ADF is structured and postured to meet the challenges of the 21st century. That is easy said, but we need to do it. Earlier this year then Prime Minister Gillard released our first national security strategy. There was a very important message in that strategy where it said that the ADF *“is an essential part of our approach to ensuring Australia’s future. Maintaining credible high-end capabilities enables us to act decisively when required and deter would-be adversaries. It strengthens our regional influence. Importantly it contributes to the maintenance of a strong Australia-United States alliance – a relationship that is critical to our ability to deter and defeat adversaries”*.³ That was a critical statement to appear in that national strategy because it says to us that the ADF defence capabilities, all of us joined together, have an essential role in the future prosperity and stability of our country and our region.

I want to talk about four things I take from that for the ADF over at least the next five years: our international engagements; re-setting the ADF for when we come back home, the land forces primarily; re-investing in the future; and our people.

International engagements

In November 2011, President Barack Obama came to Australia and gave what is now called the Canberra



General Hurley addressing the Institute’s 125th Anniversary Dinner at Parliament House, Sydney, on Friday, 16 August 2013 [Photo: Lieutenant Colonel K. J. Broadhead, RFD].

³Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2013). *Strong and secure: a strategy for Australia’s national security* (Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra), p. 17.

Address. He talked about the United States defence pivot, which quickly became a re-balance, to the Pacific region. This re-balance and how it is enacted is very important to Australia. We are now seeing it play out in a physical sense with the United States Marine Corps building up to about 2500 marines in Darwin for about six months of the year and on top of that we will see increased use of RAAF Base Tindal and to a degree Darwin, by the United States Air Force to conduct training. There will not be different types of aircraft, but there will be larger numbers and greater frequency. We are also looking at what might be done into the future with the United States Navy out of Fleet Base West HMAS *Sterling* in Perth.

This enhanced use of Australian bases and training facilities by the United States sends a very important message to the region, especially as this is not just occurring in Australia but also in Singapore, the Philippines, and so forth. The United States, which had never left the region, is putting its emphasis back into the region and it is backing that with dollars, personnel and equipment. It also reinforces a very strong theme in Australia's foreign policy over the past 50 years that the United States was central to the stability and prosperity of the western Pacific and the wider Pacific region and that, as an ally, we should be participating in a very strong way to reinforce that message.

Now that message caused some consternation in China and Indonesia, according to the press. I have been to China and spoken with my counterpart there and I have also spoken with my counterpart in Indonesia. They have questions, but they understand this is an alliance relationship and that we are free to make sovereign decisions about who comes to our country and who does not. But what is going on there is very important to us as it will enhance our capability and strengthen in particular the ASEAN⁴ countries in the region.

In our relationship with Indonesia, we have concentrated on the people-to-people links. Two years ago we inaugurated the first ever association of alumni of Australian defence courses in another country. We have called this TNI⁵-ADF Alumni Association *IKAHAN*. We have about 900 members now ranging from retired four-star officers down to the most recent graduates, as captains or equivalent, from defence courses in Australia. It is a great avenue for us to keep in contact with TNI members, have influence at the political level and to grow the next 20 years of assurance and confidence between the two countries – something that we keep working at very hard.

We are also really investing in the United States Pacific Command with its headquarters in Hawaii. There is now an Australian two-star officer, Major General Rick Burr, seconded there as Deputy Com-

manding General for Operations of the United States Army in the Pacific. This causes a stir when he turns up in Japan and Korea leading United States delegations. The Deputy J5 or Plans Officer is an Australian one-star and the Deputy J2 Intelligence is an Australian as well. Now you do not get your foot in the door to do those things if people do not believe that you are competent.

We are also looking now at increasing our representation in South Korea, in the United States Forces Korea and the United Nations Command in Korea, both for our national interests in Korea and to provide professional development opportunities for our people as we draw down elsewhere. And you see that type of thinking repeated in India, across the south Pacific and up to north Asia in what we are trying to achieve at the present time.

So where over the last ten years we have probably taken our eye off the ball a bit in relation to our own back yard, now we are thoroughly re-investing our people and our resources into the western Pacific and south Asian area.

Future capabilities

I have mentioned already that the Air Force has gone through a major change and have referred to some of the challenges that Navy is facing presently. Navy has an ageing fleet, but is on the cusp of receiving the first of its three air-warfare destroyers and the first of its two amphibious assault ships. Action is also in hand for extending and then replacing the Collins-class submarines. There are big engineering challenges though, as we have to re-grow engineering capability that we gave up during the 1990s – but they are up for it and they are getting the funding and manpower to enable them to get there. It will be a long road ahead, but there are exiting changes coming for the Royal Australian Navy.

Army has begun a major reshaping of the regular brigades and you will see a lot of rebalancing of units between Darwin, Townsville and Brisbane over the next three or four years. Each of the reserve brigades is also being integrated into the regular brigades as a significant part of that reorganisation. We are looking to each pair of reserve brigades providing a battle group to one regular brigade. So Army will change over the next five years or so.

The biggest decisions we now need to make are: how many Joint Strike Fighters to get – Air Force wants 100; and what to do about unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). We already have some UAVs at the lower levels and we will bring in some higher-level capabilities also. At the present time we are going through all the legal issues in employing UAVs. There will be some arguments in the community but frankly, there is not much difference between dropping a bomb from a UAV than in doing so from a manned aircraft. In both cases, it is a person who drops the bomb. We will have that discussion, but there are some big decisions to be made in the short term about that.

⁴Association of Southeast Asian Nations

⁵Tentara Nasional Indonesia (the Indonesian National Armed Forces)

The other big area is cyber warfare. We have a very strong capability at the present time which we have developed closely with the United States and the United Kingdom. We also need to develop our electronic warfare capability because there is no doubt that in any future conflict Australia will operate with a degraded capability – radars, global positioning systems and radios will not work. So we need to be effective in such an environment.

Re-setting the ADF

We need to re-set the ADF and get it trained up in a number of areas. While the Army has been effective in Afghanistan, we cannot benchmark ourselves against the Taliban. They might be a resilient enemy and they might have certain techniques at which they are very good, but they are not our benchmark. So we need to re-grow some of the conventional warfare capabilities, in the Army in particular. In the Navy, we have dropped off in anti-submarine warfare capability and need to re-develop it; and Air Force, with its new fleets coming in, needs to develop its strategic lift capability and air-control capability with our fighter, early-warning aircraft and tanker combination.

One of the areas that we are not too good at and have not put enough thought into is joint collective training. It is a task that I have now levied on the Joint Operations Commander and the Service Chiefs to sort out in the near future.

People

We are in a very competitive market for people in Australia and we need to make some fundamental changes about how we employ members of the ADF. At the moment, very starkly, you are either full-time or part-time. It does not give people a lot of choice. So we are going to increase the number of employment categories in the ADF from two to seven. There will be a spectrum of conditions under which you can be employed to match where you are in your life at any given time. This is particularly attractive to women, but also to men with families or those with carers' responsibilities. We are about a year away from introducing this and it will be a fundamental change in the way people are employed in the ADF. Flexible workplace tools are being developed to enable our managers to put these changes in place. We are also moving away from the all-of-one-company approach and will be far more flexible in the way we employ and remunerate people.

The other personnel aspect is defence culture. Probably the most significant change during my time as Chief of the Defence Force has been how we have dealt with sexual, psychological and physical abuse in the ADF over the last two years or so. Let me say right at the start that I am enormously proud of the organisation and the people in it. I do not think that the ADF is an abusive organisation. I refuse to accept that frankly and I have seen a lot of the data. And when I see surveys of

which are the most trusted institutions in the country, every time it comes up that in the top three or four will be the Army, Navy and Air Force. That tells us something about how the Australian people see us – but I tell the members of the ADF you do not get that trust if you not deserve it.

That said, we have some issues that we are dealing with. I hope that the Service Chiefs and I have been very strong in terms of telling the public how seriously we take abuse. I think it requires lifting people's level of understanding of the standard of behaviour that we expect from them from Day 1 and continuing to reinforce that message. The demographic that we are primarily dealing with is young people from 18 to 26 and we all understand what can happen at that age. These people live under great pressure and many have been on operations where they have been challenged mentally, physically and psychologically; and we have to deal with that. There have been some really poor examples of behaviour and I refuse to believe that it is just a few bad apples. To accept this would be to say it is random and that you cannot do anything about it. So we lay down the standard of behaviour that we require and if you step over the line you go. It's as simple as that.

We are looking at this issue historically as well and I think the biggest challenge we now have is the Defence Abuse Review Tribunal which is looking at 50 years of our history. We have to face up to this and take it front on. As part of that, over the next month the Service Chiefs and I will sit down with a number of people who have submitted allegations. We will have one-on-one conversations with them and hear and take note of what has happened to them. We will offer an apology to them formally on behalf of the ADF. If we did not go through this process, I think we would have lost an opportunity to re-establish with the Australian population the integrity of the organisation that they hold up so high.

Conclusion

For 15 years we have been constantly deployed on operations at which we have excelled – there is no doubt about that. These include ten years of significant changes in capability and, despite some ups and downs, overall the enormous changes in the organisation have been handled quite positively. We have a generation now of young people about which we can be very confident. I like to tell older people who may have concerns about the future of this country that the kids we have today, the 18 to 20 year olds, are brilliant. When you see them on operations they are very, very good. They wear their uniform proudly, they perform magnificently and they are a demonstration of what their generation is like. So do not worry about the future of Australia – we are in good hands. And do not worry about the future of the ADF. For when the old fellows like me go, it is going to be in better hands.

I thank you very much for your support as an Institute, not just today, but over the past 125 years as

you have thought about and addressed the issues of the day; and I hope that you continue to do this and provide feedback and direction to us about how we can do what we are doing better. Thank you again for a very kind invitation to come here tonight. It has been a great honour and I wish you every success in the future.

The Author: General David Hurley graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in December 1975 into the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He saw regimental service with the Royal Australian Regiment and as an exchange officer with 1st Battalion, Irish Guards. As a Lieutenant Colonel, he commanded 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and led it during Operation Solace (Somalia) in 1993, for which

he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Promoted to Brigadier in January 1999, he assumed command of 1st Brigade in Darwin, overseeing the brigade's support to Australian-led operations in East Timor; and later as a Major General, served as Land Commander Australia. Promoted to Lieutenant General in late 2003, he became successively: Chief of the Capability Development Group; Chief, Joint Operations Command; and Vice Chief of the Defence Force. On promotion to General on 4 July 2011, he assumed his current appointment as the Chief of the Defence Force. He was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2010 for eminent service to the Australian Defence Force. [Photo of General Hurley: Department of Defence]