



CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE ORDER OF THE DAY

A MESSAGE OF REFLECTION ON AFGHANISTAN

Australia's contribution to the war in Afghanistan has now concluded with one of the largest humanitarian airlifts in our recent history. Our people, working with Australian officials, operated around the clock to evacuate as many as possible in a highly volatile and dangerous environment. While we were not able to get everyone to safety, we evacuated more than four thousand people.

Tragically, our evacuation effort was marred by a senseless act of violence against desperate and helpless people attempting to flee the Taliban. Additionally, thirteen United States military personnel lost their lives. As was true throughout the campaign, the United States bore the greater burden and loss, but in doing so enabled the airlift to occur, for which Australia is extremely grateful.

For twenty years, Australia contributed to the NATO-led mission to deny Afghanistan as a safe haven for international terrorism. Following the drawdown of international forces, we have witnessed the Taliban move swiftly and aggressively to regain control of Afghanistan.

The situation in Afghanistan is distressing and disheartening. Many of us are deeply worried for the Afghan people. We were guests of, and partners to, the Government and people of Afghanistan. Our contributions towards counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, security force capacity building, and national stability were part of our collective experience. We sought to protect our own nations and wanted to help the Afghan people.

We do not yet know the nature of the new Taliban regime, but its core ideology and past behaviour appal us all. However they will have to learn how to govern an Afghanistan changed by our collective Coalition efforts over the past two decades.

Afghanistan today has thousands of kilometres of improved road infrastructure, offering mobility and market opportunity for small traders. Young, educated people have moved into urban areas, away from the isolation and, for many, the oppression, of village life. Telecommunication networks and ICT infrastructure have brought connectivity, information and personal banking; valued by both the powerful and the poor.

And the Taliban cannot erase the example provided by so many good women and men from around the world, who showed Afghans that there are other ways to live, and that there are other possibilities for their future. These and other changes, while indirect, may help influence the trajectory of a future Afghanistan under Taliban rule. All this is yet to be seen.

To every member of the ADF, past and present, I say thank you for doing your duty and contributing to our national effort in Afghanistan. We saw numerous acts of gallantry and distinguished service. Your skill, dedication and professionalism were demonstrated, and appreciated by Australia, our partners and the Afghan people. Our nation and I can ask no more of you than that; well done.

Overwhelmingly, your contribution should be remembered with pride. Pride in the way you represented our country, pride in your courage in adversity, and pride in your compassion to those in need.

We will never forget the ultimate sacrifice paid by 41 Australian soldiers who died on operations in Afghanistan. Some of our people continue to live with lasting physical and mental scars, and tragically we have lost more of our people since they returned home. We respect and give meaning to their sacrifice by remembering them, by living lives of value to our community and by reaching out to mates in need. This is what they, our fallen, would expect of us.

To all our Australian Defence Force and wider Defence personnel, and their families, past and present, thank you for the service you give to our great nation.

Angus J Campbell, AO, DSC
General
Chief of the Defence Force

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