

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE – COMMITTEES

Inquiry into the administration, management and objective of Australia's overseas development programs in the context of the 'Transition Decade' – 3 December 2012

Q11: ANSF Ethnicities and Loyalties

Mr Bizhan, ANU, observed that political fragmentation and a lack of consensus after 2014 'may prove very challenging for the Afghan National Security Force, which are combined of different ethnicities'. Further that national and international actors need to be alert to the possibility of fragmentation within the security forces and they should take 'sensitive measures to reduce this risk' (submission 13, p. 5)¹.

- (a) Could you explain for the committee the nature and significance of the different ethnicities and loyalties in Afghanistan, their origins and how entrenched they are?
- (b) In your view what is the danger that the ANSF could fragment and support warlords—that the ANSF could fragment along tribal and patronage network lines.
- (c) Has Australia conducted its own evaluation of what is likely to happen after 2014?

Response:

- (a) Afghanistan has a diverse range of ethnic groups with a Pashtun majority predominantly in the south of the country and Tajiks and Uzbeks predominantly in the north. Other significant ethnic groupings include Hazaras, Aimaks, Turkmen and Baloch.
- (b) Through continued adequate military training and support of the international community, we expect the Afghan National Security Forces to be a confident and capable force to provide security for the Afghan people.

¹ Also see, an ACFID study found that parts of Uruzgan are still under militia control and the loyalty of the militia to the Government is poor or non-existent. Phil Sparrow, *In it for the long haul? Delivering Australian aid to Afghanistan*, ACFID Research in Development Series Report no. 1, March 2011.

- (c) Defence conducts evaluations on possible scenarios that could occur in Uruzgan province after 2014 and these inform our planning processes. It would be unhelpful to speculate on what specific scenarios are likely to eventuate in Afghanistan post-2014. Country-wide assessments of Afghanistan undertaken by other International Security Assistance Force partners (such as the United States Department of Defense December 2012 Report to Congress on progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan) also inform our own planning. As the Prime Minister said in her 31 October 2012 statement on Afghanistan to the House of Representatives, "we know that as Afghan forces increasingly take the lead through 2013, the Taliban will seek to test them. We know that not every valley or village in Uruzgan or Afghanistan will be peaceful or free from insurgency. There will be difficult days ahead..."

However, Australia is committed to support Afghanistan through to transition in December 2014 and beyond. Post-2014, the ADF will continue to support the development of the ANSF through the provision of training and advisory support, including at the Afghan National Army (ANA) Officer Academy in Kabul. Australia will also consider a Special Forces contribution, under an appropriate mandate and will contribute US\$100 million annually for three years from 2015 as part of international efforts to sustain and support the ANSF beyond transition.