Introduction

Thank you Avner (Klein, CEO Point Trading) for your warm welcome and introduction.

I acknowledge and thank Point Trading as the sponsor of this event.

I acknowledge Mr Stephen Loosley, Chairman of the Council of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) and Mr Peter Jennings, Executive Director of ASPI.
I also acknowledge the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Dennis Richardson, and the Chief of the Defence Force, General David Hurley.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to again speak to ASPI.

ASPI continues to play an important role by informing public debate and encouraging discussion on important national and international strategic and security affairs.

One of the most important national security issues facing Australia in the immediate period is transition in and our drawdown from Afghanistan.

This follows transition and drawdown in Timor Leste which was completed nearly three weeks ago.

This year will also see transition and drawdown by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in the Solomon Islands, leaving a police law enforcement presence only.

These changes, particularly the drawdown from our major overseas operation in Afghanistan, will help shape future Australian overseas policy and the posture of the ADF in the years to come.

The 2013 White Paper, to be published by the end of June, was brought forward by the Government in part to deal with this strategic challenge, the strategic and practical implications of the ADF’s operational drawdown from Afghanistan, East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

This includes the implications for both Australia’s strategic environment and posture and for the ADF itself.

This consideration will ensure that the mistakes following our last such major transition and drawdown – Vietnam – will not be repeated.

These mistakes followed on from a transition and drawdown from Vietnam not marked by the same detailed international community planning as has occurred on Afghanistan from the Lisbon Summit on, but rather epitomised by the image of helicopters leaving from the United States’ Embassy roof, again underlining the old adage that people may not remember how you arrived, but they certainly remember how you leave.
As a consequence, reputational damage is always a risk in any transition, drawdown or withdrawal process. Australia has enhanced its international reputation as a result of its commitment in Afghanistan and it is important that this be maintained to the end of 2014.

The mistakes of the post Vietnam era saw shortfalls in strategic planning about the adverse impact the withdrawal from Vietnam would have on the ADF, a reduction in military numbers and the shunning of and the failure to show respect and care for our returning Vietnam veterans.

In the context of the current drawdowns, not only will there be a focus on our returning veterans, we will also need to pay particular attention to recruitment and retention rates, both generally and in specialty areas.

The White Paper will address how the ADF adjusts from commitments to distant land-based operations to a focus on the ADF’s own Force Posture, our northern and western approaches, and Australia’s backyard, our immediate region and South East Asia.

The White Paper will also reflect upon the enhancements to a number of Australia’s most important overseas relationships as a result of over ten years of operations in Timor Leste, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Solomon Islands.

**Transition in Afghanistan**

The ADF has been engaged in land based expeditionary operations in Timor Leste, then Afghanistan, then Iraq, and then again in Afghanistan since 1999.

Australia has to date suffered 39 fatalities in Afghanistan. The last fatality was Corporal Scott Smith on 21 October 2012.

Australia has as well seen 251 personnel wounded in Afghanistan since 2001. 33 were wounded in 2012. Five ADF personnel have been wounded so far this year.

On 26 March this year, the Prime Minister and I welcomed the decision by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to close Multi National Base – Tarin Kot in Uruzgan Province at the end of this year.

The closure announcement removed any possible doubt that the timetable to transition to full Afghan led security responsibility for Uruzgan would be by the end of this year.
The effect of the base closure is that Australia will no longer have a permanent presence in Uruzgan, and the majority of ADF personnel will return from Afghanistan to Australia by year’s end.

Over the past few years, Australia has had approximately 1550 personnel in Afghanistan.

Currently Australia has about 1,650 personnel in Afghanistan. That is above the average of 1,550 because it includes over 150 personnel whose task is to commence redeployment, repatriation and remediation activities as part of the transition process.

There will be some movement in the numbers over this year, and while we are redeploying and repatriating both personnel and equipment the numbers will go up and down.

The overall number of ADF personnel will not substantially decrease until towards the end of 2013.

However, by year’s end we will see at least 1000 Australian personnel return home.

This process is in accord with the November 2010 Lisbon NATO/ISAF Summit where the International community agreed to transition to full Afghan security responsibility across the country by the end of 2014.

Under this process, transition to Afghan security lead in Uruzgan commenced in July 2012.

By November 2012, all four Infantry Kandaks of the Afghan National Army (ANA) 4th Brigade were operating independently without advisers in Uruzgan.

With the commencement of independent operations by the four Infantry Kandaks, Australian troops no longer conduct joint patrols with these ANA units. As well, Australia handed over control of forward operating bases and patrol bases to the 4th Brigade by the end of 2012.

As a consequence, Australian troops had consolidated their presence at Multi National Base – Tarin Kot and commenced planning for the complex task of redeploying Australian personnel and equipment and remediating buildings and facilities.

In recent days we have seen two significant steps in Australia’s transition activities.
On 11 April, the Australian-led Artillery Training and Advisory Team (ATAT) officially completed its mission to establish a fully autonomous Afghan National Army (ANA) School of Artillery.

The School will provide the full range of artillery training courses to the ANA, from recruit training in the disciplines of Guns, Fire Support and Fire Direction, through to advanced career courses.

Since the School of Artillery’s establishment in 2010, more than 2300 trainees have graduated, including 1100 in the 2012 calendar year.

All Afghan National Army instructors are fully certified and functional equipment status is above 90%.

I had the opportunity at Robertson Barracks in Darwin last week to thank members of the Artillery units who had helped in training at the School.

This particular transition represents a significant step in the ANA and the Afghan National Security Forces’ move to full responsibility for the security of Afghanistan.

As well, last week in Darwin Force Communications Unit 9 conducted its Farewell Parade prior to deploying to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO).

This Communications Unit will support ADF force elements throughout the MEAO including at Tarin Kot, Kandahar and Kabul.

Generally, the ADF role in Uruzgan will continue as at present until the end of this year:

- Australian troops will continue to train and advise at the Headquarters 4th Brigade level with the two Combat Support Kandaks and at the Afghan Operational Coordination Centre – Provincial in Uruzgan;
- the ADF Task Group will remain combat ready to assist Afghan Forces should the need arise; and
- the Special Operations Task Group will continue to conduct partnered combat operations to disrupt the insurgency.

In 2014, the ADF will commence a training role at the ANA Officer Academy in Kabul with our British and New Zealand colleagues.
In Kandahar, the ADF will continue to provide training assistance to the 205 Corps of the Afghan National Army (ANA).

We are in conversation with NATO, with ISAF, and importantly with the United States and Afghanistan, about our role in both 2014 and the post transition 2014 period.

It is no secret that, as NATO Secretary General Rasmussen has himself said, in the first instance, we need to get precision from the United States about what the United States sees as the scale of its transition draw down, and its post-2014 transition proposals.

What the United States and Afghanistan agree about the United States presence in Afghanistan post 2014 transition, and what role any United States forces left behind will play, is the starting point.

Once that is clearer, then Australia and other NATO/ISAF countries will be able to make a judgement about what role, if any, we and they might play.

**Australia’s Post-2014 mission**

Australia is committed to support Afghanistan through to transition in December 2014 and beyond.

Australia demonstrated this commitment to the people of Afghanistan and the International community at the Chicago Summit in May 2012, with the signing of the Long-Term Comprehensive Partnership between Australia and Afghanistan.

The Comprehensive Long-Term Partnership demonstrates that Australia is committed to supporting Afghanistan beyond 2014, through cooperation in the areas of security, trade and development, and building the capacity of Afghanistan’s national institutions.

Australia is not alone in its long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

The United States has signed a long term Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan. A number of our ISAF partners, including the United Kingdom, France and Italy, as well as India and NATO itself have also signed similar Agreements.

Beyond the completion of Afghanistan-wide transition at the end of 2014, Australia is prepared to maintain an ADF presence in Afghanistan, in recognition that Australia has a national interest in supporting Afghanistan’s stability and security after transition.
In the post-2014 transition period, Australia is prepared to see the ADF continue to support the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) through the provision of training and embedded advisory support, including at the ANA Officer Academy in Kabul.

Under an appropriate mandate, Australia remains prepared to make a Special Forces contribution, either for training or for Counter Terrorism (CT) purposes, or both.

Importantly, Australia will contribute US$100 million annually for three years from January 2015 as part of international efforts to sustain and support the ANSF beyond transition. The international community is committed to helping fund the costs of sustaining the ANSF beyond 2014, which is estimated at over US$4 billion per year.

In committing to ongoing support, we are mindful of the experience in Afghanistan following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, Afghan authorities were capable of maintaining levels of security with Soviet financial and materiel support. However, with the collapse of the USSR and consequent cessation of financial support, government and security in Afghanistan effectively collapsed, leading to insurgency and civil war in Afghanistan.

Our commitment to ANSF funding reflects our enduring interest in Afghanistan’s long term security and stability. Ongoing funding and assistance for the ANSF is an essential part of maintaining security and stability.

These commitments send a strong signal to the people of Afghanistan, the Taliban and the region that the International community will not walk away from Afghanistan at the end of 2014.

Australia must continue to be clear sighted about its objective in Afghanistan.

Our objective is to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven or breeding ground for international terrorists.

An effective ANSF and other Afghan institutions will be critical in ensuring this.

As transition proceeds, Afghanistan will remain difficult and dangerous. There will be challenges and setbacks ahead and the Taliban will target the ANSF as it takes responsibility for the security of all of Afghanistan.
The IED roadside bomb threat will continue.

The Taliban will continue to focus on high profile propaganda motivated suicide bomb attacks, together with claiming responsibility for any insider attacks on ISAF forces.

And we do need to steel ourselves for the unexpected.

Two international community Summits – Lisbon and Chicago – have mapped out a sensible and much more orderly drawdown and withdrawal from Afghanistan than Vietnam, but as we discovered post the Chicago Summit with insider attacks, successful summits do not mark the end of transition in practice or reality, they simply lay out the roadmap.

Post transition, security and government influence in Afghanistan will be better and stronger close to population centres. This has always been the case in Afghanistan. Historically, the capacity of government in Afghanistan, either National or Province to impose security or effect influence has always been weaker the further one is away from population centres.

Lessons from Afghanistan and Transition

Our experiences in Afghanistan have been shared with our most important overseas partners.

This includes Australia’s Alliance partner, the United States (US), traditional partners including the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand, and other partners such as Singapore and NATO.

Our international reputation, our credibility and our reliability as a partner as a result of our experience in Afghanistan has been enhanced consistent with the finest traditions of Australia and the ADF in combat or war like operations: first class fighters, but respectful of international law and highly conscious of the rights of civilians and locals.

Australia-US Alliance Lessons

Australia and the US will emerge from our commitment in Afghanistan with practical ties closer than ever before; in particular in Special Forces and the intelligence community.
Our cooperation in Afghanistan, heightened operational tempo over the last ten years, including maritime operations in the MEAO, have led to closer defence to defence and military to military engagement with the US than we have seen since the Vietnam War.

This cooperation includes heightened intelligence sharing, Special Forces engagement with the merging of intelligence and Special Forces capability, embeds in Headquarters for planning purposes and capability procurement and interoperability.

This has been invaluable not just for our reputation but also for ADF professional development of world class skills.

We can and will continue to build on these strengthened ties.

One recent example of enhanced practical cooperation between Australia and the US beyond Afghanistan is the US Global Force Posture initiatives.

In November 2011, the Prime Minister and President Obama announced during the President’s visit to Australia, new initiatives that significantly enhance practical defence cooperation between Australia and the US in our part of the world.

Coming shortly after the 60th anniversary of the ANZUS Alliance, these initiatives strengthened an already robust partnership which has been an influence for stability and peace in the Asia Pacific region for decades.

The next rotation of over 200 Marines will arrive in the Northern Territory in the next week or so.

Australia and the US have also agreed to discuss closer cooperation between the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and the US Air Force (USAF) that will result in increased access of US aircraft through northern Australia, in particular RAAF Tindal.

At AUSMIN 2012, Australia and the US also discussed potential opportunities for additional naval cooperation at a range of locations, including HMAS Stirling, Australia’s Indian Ocean port.

These initiatives will provide tangible benefits by increasing the number, variety and complexity of training opportunities for the ADF.
They will further develop our interoperability with US forces and help the ADF develop its ship to shore capability which will be important as our two Landing Helicopter Dock amphibious ships come on line from 2014.

*Australia-NATO Relations*

Notably since the deployment of Australian forces in Afghanistan under the NATO-led ISAF mission, Australia’s relations with NATO and its member countries and partners have expanded considerably in many areas.

In January 2012 Australia deepened its engagement with NATO when it appointed Dr Brendan Nelson as its first Ambassador to NATO.

Regular high-level political dialogue also underpins cooperation. Australia’s Defence and Foreign ministers regularly attend NATO/ISAF meetings and meet regularly with NATO’s Secretary General.

Building on the dialogue and cooperation that has been developed, NATO and Australia signalled their commitment to strengthen cooperation in a Joint Political Declaration signed in June 2012 by Prime Minister Gillard and NATO Secretary General Rasmussen. This was followed up with the signing of an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme in February this year by me and Secretary General Rasmussen.

*Some Lessons*

Our experience over the last ten years in Afghanistan has also highlighted some important general lessons for the use of military force.

First, it has reinforced the well known point that it is the easiest thing in the world to get involved in major commitments, but it is substantially more difficult to get out.

That’s why, when a Government makes a decision about a military intervention, it must very, very carefully consider whether that intervention is required in a country’s national security and national interests.

In the case of Afghanistan, there was strong international community and bipartisan domestic support for the intervention in Afghanistan, mandated by the United Nations Security Council in December 2001.
Progress in Afghanistan was in my view substantially undermined as a result of Iraq, which was not the subject of a UN mandate and which did not have bipartisan domestic support.

My own view is that if there had not been a continually renewed UN mandate for Afghanistan, the international community would have withdrawn years ago.

**Support to our Veterans**

One lesson from Vietnam is the need for care and respect for our returning veterans.

The care of wounded, injured and ill veterans is a high priority for the Government and the Australian community.

In the months and years ahead, veteran care will come to be an increasingly important focus of our time in Afghanistan.

As the Prime Minister said in her Statement to the House on Afghanistan in October last year: “The next decade will see more young Australian combat veterans live in our community than since the 1970s.”

At the time the Prime Minister said that this will “demand changes in the way the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs care for service personnel and veterans”.

I am pleased to say that these changes are being made.

In February, the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon and I attended the signing by the Departments of Defence and Veterans’ Affairs of a Memorandum of Understanding for the Cooperative Delivery of Care and Support to Eligible Persons.

The MOU is aimed at better coordinating the delivery of care and support services between Defence and Veterans’ Affairs.

Put simply, it is to stop our wounded, injured and ill veterans from falling between the cracks in the system.
The new MOU builds on the Support for Wounded, Injured or Ill program, also designed to make sure that veterans do not fall through gaps between Defence and Veterans’ Affairs.

Private organisations have an important role to play as well.

Everyone will be familiar with the work of the RSL and Legacy, which have been supporting veterans for almost a century.

New organisations such as ‘Soldier On’ and ‘Mates 4 Mates’ are also playing a role.

‘Soldier On’ is a private foundation set up by two young officers to provide support to Australian service men and women who have suffered either physical or psychological wounds in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In October last year I was pleased to attend the announcement of Corporal Mark Donaldson VC as the Patron-in-Chief of Soldier On.

‘Mates 4 Mates’ is another private organisation established to provide support to wounded, injured or ill members of the ADF and their families. ‘Mates 4 Mates’ strives to ensure that our current or recently serving men or women are not without the trust, humility and strength of mateship in times of need.

The SAS Trust, Commando Welfare Trust, and the Australian Defence Force Assistance Trust are helping provide for the families and children of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. There is a particular focus here on the education of the children of our fallen.

*Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

Defence continues to enhance its comprehensive approach to screening, assessment and treatment of mental health concerns, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

ADF members dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder have access to the full range of mental health services and rehabilitation services.

Significant improvements have been made to the provision of mental health care across the ADF as part of a more than $90 million investment into Defence and Veterans’ Affairs by Government.
These include establishing eight Regional Mental Health teams supporting the delivery of mental health care.

The ADF is also working together with organisations like ‘Soldier On’ and ‘Mates 4 Mates’ to de-stigmatise mental health issues.

One of the most important factors in treating mental disorders, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is to seek support and treatment as soon as possible.

Early identification of those at risk of developing mental health issues is a pathway to better health outcomes.

These arrangements result in a high return to work rate for rehabilitated members and provide good support for veterans.

But it is essential that we continue to take steps to make the support system even better.

Awareness and education in relation to mental health issues is a key factor in preventing future problems.

That is why seeking assistance for mental health concerns was the theme of the inaugural Australian Defence Force Mental Health Day held in October last year.

Earlier this year I asked my colleague, the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and the Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, in conjunction with the CDF, Secretary and with organisations like ‘Soldier On’, to look closely to see what further comprehensive education and support might be offered across all levels of the Australian Defence Force and at all stages of an Australian Defence Force career – from pre-recruitment and recruitment to completion of service.

This initiative will help ensure all members of the Australian Defence Force are aware of the risks associated with mental health issues including PTSD and know how to address this risk.

**The 2013 Defence White Paper**

The 2013 White Paper will address the range of significant developments internationally and domestically since the 2009 White Paper which are influencing national security and defence settings.
This includes:

- the ADF’s operational drawdown from Afghanistan, Timor Leste and Solomon Islands;
- the ongoing strategic shift to our region, the Indo-Pacific and Asia Pacific, particularly the shift of economic weight to our region;
- the United States’ (US) re-balance to the Asia Pacific and Australia’s enhanced practical cooperation with the US pursuant to our Alliance relationship;
- Australia’s own Force Posture Review – the first in a quarter of a century; and
- Bearing in mind the 2009 White Paper judgment that the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) was the most fundamental economic challenge facing Australia, the ongoing adverse effects of this crisis, which have continued to have a significant deleterious impact on the global economy and Defence funding, seeing what former United States Secretary of State for Defense Leon Panetta called the new fiscal reality.

Security in our region

The White Paper will also emphasise, as the Asia Century White Paper did, that the ongoing prosperity of Australia is tied to sustainable security of our diverse region.

The Asia Century White Paper outlines national objectives for building sustainable security in our region, including:

- working with the US to ensure it continues to have a strong and consistent presence in the region, including through enhanced practical cooperation between Australia and the US;
- supporting China’s full participation in the region’s strategic, political and economic development;
- promoting cooperative arrangements among major powers in the region including promoting the development of the expanded East Asia Summit (EAS) as a crucial regional institution;
- maintaining Australia’s strong support for global, regional and bilateral security frameworks and norms based on the United Nations Charter, including through our membership of the UN Security Council; and
• pursuing practical cooperation and building local capability with regional partners across a range of areas such as terrorism, people smuggling, transnational crime, counter-proliferation and disaster management.

The White Paper will also identify new opportunities for Australia to pursue deeper strategic and security partnerships in our region following the transition in Afghanistan and the ADF’s return from Afghanistan.

**Policy and Posture in our neighbourhood**

Our recent forward posture in our immediate area – Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands – as part of regional stabilisation – will itself change significantly with the drawdown referred to above.

This forward posture and presence in the ADF’s second priority task area, after the defence of Australia, will end after nearly a decade.

So, in the context of the 2013 White Paper, how does Australia and the ADF adjust and adapt to this?

The 2013 Defence White Paper will clearly state that Defence and the ADF’s international engagement in our immediate neighbourhood and beyond is both a strategic necessity and an important strategic asset for Australia.

Port visits, training and exercises, international engagement activities, familiarisation visits both underline neighbourhood engagement and demonstrate the ADF’s capacity to meet the strategic tasks required of it by Government, whether security and stabilisation or humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

As well, practical defence to defence and military to military cooperation in our neighbourhood region – in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping training and operations, exercises and training and maritime security – help build habits of mutual respect, trust and cooperation between defence organisations, militaries and nations, and adherence to international norms.

All this not only minimises the prospect of tension, misunderstanding, misjudgement and miscalculation, but builds on and enhances positive cooperative bilateral and regional relationships.
Australia has well developed and well established defence to defence and military to military relationships and practical cooperation arrangements with a range of countries in our neighbourhood and region. Some are well known and recognised, including Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and South Korea and the United States itself.

There are also countries in our neighbourhood and region with whom we either have defence to defence and military to military relationships which are either publicly underappreciated or with whom we need to grow our defence to defence and military to military relationship. These include for example China, India, Indonesia, PNG, Tonga and Vietnam.

Conclusion

Transition and withdrawal from Afghanistan continues to be a significant strategic challenge facing Australia.

How transition both in Uruzgan Province and Afghanistan ends will impact on our international reputation, and the risks to Australian citizens from international terrorism.

It also poses implications for Australia’s strategic environment and posture, for the ADF and for our returning servicemen and women.

This is why we must give very careful consideration to planning for and managing these challenges.

We need to avoid the mistakes following on from our last such major transition and drawdown – Vietnam – and make the most of the lessons and benefits we have derived from our time in Afghanistan.

Thank you.