



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Australian Defence Force

SPEECH

Monday, 17 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Prentice, Jane, MP

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Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (11:53): I thank the Member for Solomon for moving this motion in support of the Australian Defence Force personnel serving overseas. I know that her electorate is home to a significant number of serving ADF personnel and their families based in Darwin. I know that she has a genuine interest and concern for their ongoing welfare. I join with the comments from the member for Lingiari and the acknowledgement that he has paid to many of our serving personnel.

Similarly, my electorate of Ryan is home to about 7,000 defence personnel—one of the largest Defence Force populations of any electorate in Australia. The reason for this is that Ryan is home to the Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera, where many of these personnel are stationed, and neighbour to Amberley air base, in the adjacent seat of Blair. Having an active Defence Force base in my electorate means that I have the honour of attending many formal occasions at the base. Tradition and ceremony are important to the ADF, and few ceremonies are more poignant than the farewells to ADF personnel as they depart on active missions overseas.

On two occasions this year I have had the honour of participating in ceremonies to farewell troops about to be deployed overseas. It is a strange mix of emotion—excitement and solemnity from the troops; pride and apprehension from their families. Above all else, I am always struck by the outstanding professionalism and quality of Australian Defence Force personnel. We should always remember the service they provide to our nation in protecting our freedoms and advancing our interests overseas.

At the time the Member for Solomon submitted this motion, more than 2,000 ADF personnel were serving abroad. In the consideration in detail of the defence portfolio, the Minister advised me that that number now stands at more than 2,500. Several hundred of those are from 7 Brigade, based at Gallipoli Barracks. Around 300 ADF personnel are currently at Camp Taji, in Iraq, as part of Operation OKRA. Taji is a major defence base, and Australian forces are working with our New Zealand counterparts to train the Iraqi army. This is an important job, as the Iraqi army is at the front line of global efforts to contain and defeat ISIL—or Daesh—who currently occupy parts of Iraq and Syria. We need to do all we can to ensure that Iraqi forces have the knowledge and training they need to get the job done. In addition to forces stationed at Taji, Australian Hornet fighter aircraft are flying out of the United Arab Emirates in support of the mission. A further 170 special forces and related forces are on the ground at the international airport compound at Baghdad and have been there since September last year. They have been doing the very important job of training Iraqi counter-terrorism special forces.

Aside from Operation OKRA, a further 1,000 Australian personnel are supporting Operation HIGHROAD in Afghanistan and Operation ACCORDION in the broader Middle East region. A further 300 are involved in Operation MANITOU, tasked with promoting maritime security and stability in the Middle East region. Outside of the Middle East, several hundred ADF personnel are participating in Operation RESOLUTE, to keep our maritime borders secure in our region.

Even after the initial headlines fade, Australian Defence Force personnel keep working until the job is done. For example, a total of 34,000 personnel rotated through Afghanistan during Australia's decade-long engagement in that nation. In fact, our engagement in Afghanistan is the longest military involvement by Australian personnel in the history of our nation. While we acknowledge the service of our Defence Force personnel as they depart to advance our interests in conflicts overseas, we must also remember the families they leave behind. Coming from a family with strong links to the Defence Force, I know that it can be difficult when loved ones are deployed overseas. As Australians we should acknowledge the sacrifice of the families of Defence Force personnel, just as we do for the troops themselves.

Australia has a long and proud military history. From the Boer War to the forging of the traditions of Anzac during the First World War, through the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam and more recent conflicts, Australians have served their country with distinction in times of conflict. We honour them, we thank them for their service

and—to the current ADF personnel serving overseas—we wish them a successful mission and, importantly, a safe return.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned, and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.