

PROGRESS IN AFGHANISTAN SINCE 2001

Afghanistan is a war-ravaged country that faces immense development challenges. While the challenges are huge, progress is being made. Australia is helping.

Security

Brief History

Major combat in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) began on October 7, 2001. The operation consisted primarily of US air-strikes on Taliban and Al Qaeda forces, facilitated by the cooperation between small numbers (about 1,000) of US and Coalition special operations forces (including Australian forces) and CIA operatives. The end of the Taliban regime is generally dated as 9 December 2001 when the Taliban surrendered in Kandahar.

During 2001 to mid-2006, US and Coalition forces and Afghan troops fought relatively low levels of insurgent violence. There were no Australian units deployed in Afghanistan between December 2002 and September 2005. Violence increased significantly in mid-2006, particularly in the east and the south. Due to the absence of effective governance in many rural areas, some Afghans turned to the Taliban at this time.

In December 2009 President Obama announced a revised strategy for Afghanistan and a surge of 30,000 US troops for Afghanistan. The full complement of these additional troops has been in place only since late September 2010. Progress remains uneven, but ISAF now has the right strategy, an experienced Commander in General Petraeus, and the resources needed to deliver the strategy.

Current Progress

Al Qaeda has been dealt a severe blow in Afghanistan. It no longer has safe havens or training camps in the country. But ISAF and the Afghan government still face a persistent insurgency, particularly in the country's south.

In 2010, ISAF launched counter-insurgency operations to reclaim Taliban-held ground in the south. These operations in the south are broadly on track. Gains from Operation MOSHTARAK in Helmand Province have been encouraging, with the momentum of the insurgency there being reversed. But challenges remain in implementing effective, sustainable follow-on-governance. The current focus of operations in Kandahar Province will be critical in blunting the insurgency further in its heartland.

While the insurgency has demonstrated resilience and the ability to recover from losses, high-tempo Special Forces operations are disrupting the insurgency and retarding its ability to regenerate quickly. In the three months up until September this year, Coalition Special Forces conducted over 3,300 operations, which resulted in the death or capture of significant numbers of insurgents. Violence across the country has increased, but this is to be expected, as ISAF and Afghan forces enter new areas contested by the insurgents.

A critical component of the ISAF strategy is building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces so that transition for security responsibility to the Afghan Government can proceed, and a responsible conditions-based drawdown of international forces can commence. Key to this effort is sufficient numbers of Afghan recruits, and their adequate training. While retention of personnel continues to be challenging, the growth of the Afghan National Security Forces is exceeding targets.

- NATO anticipates that Afghan National Security Force strength at the end of 2010 will be 262,000 personnel.
- The growth of the ANSF is ahead of schedule.
 - The Afghan National Army reached its October target of 134,000 personnel in August.
 - The Afghan National Police also reached its October target of 109,000 personnel three months ahead of schedule.

Building the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces will take time, but an enhanced focus and increasing quality of training is slowly producing results.

Australia's contribution

In Uruzgan, Australia's primary mission to train and mentor the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade is on track.

- The capability of the ANA 4th Brigade to conduct security operations has increased and the Chief of the Defence Force assesses it will be ready to lead security operations in Uruzgan within two to four years.

The 4th Brigade's recent efforts in successfully completing Operation TOR GHAR, a series of resupply missions between Tarin Kot and Kandahar, has demonstrated improving capability. The 4th Brigade also recently provided security for parliamentary elections in Uruzgan, without direct support from Australia and other coalition forces.

The Coalition continues to take back areas long held by the Taliban, such as Gizab and Mirabad Valley and put sustained pressure on the Taliban provincial leadership through high-tempo Special Forces operations.

Additionally the Australian Federal Police has been contributing to the development of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and has trained in excess of 800 ANP officers to date as well as making a contribution to the institutional strengthening of the ANP.

Governance and Development

Overall progress since 2001

Progress in Afghanistan's development over the past nine years includes:

- A dramatic increase in **school enrolments** - from around one million in 2001 (none of whom were girls) to over six million today, one third (or over two million) of whom are girls.
- A significant increase in the availability of basic **health services**, which were available to less than 10 per cent of the population under the former Taliban regime, but are now extended to around 85 per cent of people.
- The identification and management of over 39,000 **community-based infrastructure projects** - such as wells, clinics and roads - in over 22,000 communities throughout Afghanistan, through the Afghan-led National Solidarity Program.
- The rehabilitation of almost 10,000 km of **rural roads, supporting the employment** of hundreds of thousands of local workers, through the National Rural Access Program.
- The telecommunications industry has created about 100,000 jobs since 2001.

- 10 million Afghans today have access to telecommunications, compared to only 20,000 in 2001.

Afghanistan's national economic growth has also been strong, albeit from a very low base. It has averaged 11 per cent since 2002, and 22 per cent in 2009-10 off the back of a strong harvest, according to the World Bank.

- There have been two elections for the lower house of parliament since 2001.
- Around 27 per cent of seats in the lower house and one sixth of the seats in the upper house are reserved for female members.
- The lower house has significant powers, including the right to reject or approve draft laws, to hold votes of no confidence in Government ministers and to reject Cabinet nominees.

The Taliban suppressed free speech.

- Afghan people now have access to over 400 print media publications, 150 FM radio stations and 26 television channels.
- These give Afghans an outlet to discuss publicly issues that were previously off-limits, such as human rights abuses and women's rights.

Australia's contribution

AusAID's development assistance program in Afghanistan has grown from \$26.5 million in 2001-02 to \$106 million in 2010-11.

Australia's development assistance focuses on improving the Afghan Government's capacity to deliver core services such as health and education, and supporting agriculture – a key driver for income generation.

Around 50 per cent of Australian aid to Afghanistan is delivered through **Afghan Government systems** – a figure well in advance of many other donors. Delivering aid through government systems increases sustainability and supports local capacity. Australia directs its support to the Afghan Government through the World Bank-administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, using its tested accountability and monitoring systems.

Australia's main military and civilian effort is focused on **Uruzgan province**, the development needs of which are profound:

- Uruzgan ranks as one of the least developed provinces in Afghanistan.
- The literacy rate for females is zero and only 10 per cent for males, compared to national figures of 12.6 and 43 per cent respectively.

Here, too, Australian aid is having an impact on communities. Our development assistance expenditure in Uruzgan is expected to reach almost \$20 million in 2010-11. This growth reflects Australia's civilian leadership role within the Provincial Reconstruction Team, following the withdrawal of the Netherlands.

Our aid program is only just beginning to increase, but already Australia has:

- supported basic health and hygiene education – provided to 1,780 primary school students, 34 per cent of whom are girls,
- enabled community demining and mine risk education – over 100 locals have been trained and over 132,000 square metres of contaminated land cleared, and
- improved food security through the distribution of wheat and other food items, including take home rations for female school students.

Australia is working to build capacity within the provincial administration and encourage stronger linkages with the central government. A key element of this is to support the reach of central government programs into Uruzgan, delivering basic services and supporting the legitimacy of the Afghan Government.