

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

IPAA Event | Diplomacy on the Front Line

Frances Adamson, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
General Angus Campbell AO DSC, Chief of the Defence Force

Hosted by Michael Manthorpe PSM, Commonwealth Ombudsman and IPAA ACT Deputy President

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Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: Hello everyone, and welcome to today's event, *Diplomacy on The Front Line*. My name is Michael Manthorpe, and I am the Commonwealth and Defence Force Ombudsman, as well as the Deputy President of IPAA ACT. I'm pleased to share this streamed event, delivered in partnership with colleagues at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I would like to first acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we're meeting today. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture, and the contribution they make to the life of this city, and the region. I'd like to acknowledge and welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who may be watching today's event online. I also want to acknowledge our eminent speakers today, Frances Adamson, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and General Angus Campbell AO DSC, the Chief of the Australian Defence Force.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: The format for this event is straightforward. First, we will have a keynote address delivered by Frances Adamson. Then, that will be followed by a conversation between Frances and General Campbell. And at the end, I will be asking the panel some questions, which have been put forward by you members of the audience. Today's discussion is about the role of diplomacy in advancing Australia's interests, including Australia's security interests. Our two eminent speakers have come together to reflect on the interdependent relationship that exists between the defence, and foreign affairs and trade portfolios. I've been fortunate to know both Frances and General Campbell for some years, but I've never had the opportunity to listen in on them, in conversation with each other, and certainly not a time of such global change and complexity, as we're experiencing today. So, I'm really looking forward to joining you in listening to what they have to say.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: Today's event will be made available on IPAA's website as part of the post event resources page. We'll also be taking some photographs, which will be available on the IPAA web page. A little more about our speakers. Frances Adamson has led the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as Secretary, since August, 2016. Prior to this, she was the International Advisor to former Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull. Frances has served as a diplomat in various locations, including, as an Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Deputy High Commissioner in London, and as a Representative to the Australian Commerce and Industry Office in Taipei. Frances is a recipient of Sir James Wolfensohn Public Service Scholarship, and the University of Adelaide's Distinguished Alumni Award. She's also a National Fellow of IPAA, for her service as president of IPAA ACT from 2017-2019.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: General Angus Campbell joined the Australian Army in 1981, graduating from the Rural Military College, Duntroon in 1994. He was assigned to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps, before serving in various command positions within the Special Air Service Regiment. General Campbell served in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for five years, between 2005 and 2010, before returning to the Australian Defence Force.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: He was appointed Chief of the Australian Army in May, 2015, and subsequently promoted to command of the Australian Defence Force in July, 2018. He holds a Bachelor of Science honours from the University of New South Wales, and a Master of Philosophy in international relations from Cambridge. Welcome to you both. Without further ado, Frances over to you for your keynote address.

FRANCES ADAMSON (keynote): I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the many lands on which we meet. Thank you. Michael.

I'm honoured to be joined today by the Chief of the Defence Force, General Angus Campbell, as we share reflections on the nature and relationship of diplomacy and security during these unprecedented times.

COVID-19 has changed our world. We do not yet know its full impact, but already it is the most disruptive and multi-faceted crisis we have ever experienced. It has demanded an unprecedented flexibility in the operations of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade across our many responsibilities.

From consular operations to trade negotiations...

... from driving Australia's international development program to navigating our relationships across the Indo-Pacific and beyond, with superpowers and international institutions in flux...

... from making sure Australians can access imports of vital medical supplies and PPE to analysing the impacts of the global economic downturn and helping build pathways to longer-term recovery ...

... there is no aspect of our work that has not had to adapt in 2020.

I know this is the case not just for DFAT, but also for the Australian Defence Force.

While Defence's massive contribution to the COVID response is not what we would normally associate with a defence force, it is undoubtedly contributing to Australia's and Australians' security.

I look forward to hearing General Campbell's reflections on Defence's response to COVID-19.

The disruption of the pandemic has forced us to think deeply about how our respective organisations can be more efficient, more effective, and more influential.

For me, as DFAT Secretary, COVID-19 has catalysed a re-think about my Department's role and how we work.

There are four fundamentals that as the Department responsible for foreign affairs, trade and development, we are focussed on, and we're at full stretch to make sure we measure up against each of them.

First and foremost, we need to deliver for Australians.

Since March, DFAT has been on the front line of Australia's COVID-19 response.

We've worked with Austrade and other government agencies and Australian businesses to source thousands of ventilators – over 40 per cent of the ventilators in Australian intensive care units today.

Our diplomatic network has sourced vital supplies of personal protective equipment to keep Australians safe: 30 million gloves, 1 million pairs of goggles, and 200,000 surgical gowns.

The strong connections that DFAT has helped build with the world – free trade architecture, business relationships – have held Australia in good stead to procure critical goods quickly.

We've also worked to keep Australia's economy going, particularly with respect to international trade, which supports – in normal times, at least – 1 in 5 Australian jobs.

Our officials are working, through direct advocacy at posts and formal trade negotiations, to encourage countries to keep markets open, and counter protectionist instincts around the world.

We worked to make the Government's \$500 million Export Capital Facility a reality for Australian businesses.

With Austrade, we developed the Future Learn digital learning platform, to support as many as 400,000 international students globally.

We helped Australian businesses navigate international supply disruptions, including through the International Freight Assistance Mechanism.

As well, we've accelerated the gathering of economic and business intelligence from markets all around the world, which we feed back to Australian businesses.

Through our largest consular operation, DFAT has been supporting Australians overseas.

More than 363,000 Australians and Australian residents have returned home since March – with DFAT directly assisting more than 26,600 of them.

I spoke about the incredible lengths that our staff have gone to in assisting Australian's overseas on IPAA's Work with purpose podcast earlier this year.

And we've supported our Indo-Pacific neighbours, particularly the smaller nations of the Pacific.

It is in our national interest to support a stable, prosperous and resilient neighbourhood – and our efforts to supply PPE and other medical support to the Pacific have been a key part of that, work we've often done in close partnership with Defence.

This is just one of the areas where DFAT works in partnership with the ADF, with many of these supplies delivered via Defence planes and navy ships.

The second fundamental is to be where it matters, when it matters – both domestically and overseas.

DFAT brings Australia's influence and perspective to bear around the world, and we bring our insights on the world around us back home, to help Australians understand the challenges we face.

This remains true even at a time when engagement and decision-making is done via phone calls and video-conferences, rather than face to face.

DFAT's traditional role out there as the Government's eyes and ears on the world outside is critical.

But we're more than that – DFAT is the Government's primary tool for shaping the world to reflect our interests.

DFAT's people cultivate relationships with key decision-makers and build coalitions to help support Australia's goals on the global stage. We speak from Australia's seat at the negotiation tables around the world.

Our job is to ensure that international decisions affecting our prosperity and security – everything from vaccines to trade rules, from nuclear weapons to transparent global and regional governance – are made with Australia's interests taken into account.

And we get outcomes. Our diplomats at the World Health Assembly in Geneva played a major role in securing an independent evaluation of the global response to COVID-19 and origins of the pandemic.

We often work literally side-by-side with our Defence colleagues. Only a few weeks ago General Campbell and I, together with Defence Secretary Greg Moriarty, accompanied Foreign Minister Payne and Defence Minister Reynolds to the Australia-US Ministerial Consultations, commonly referred to as AUSMIN, in Washington DC where measures were agreed to strengthen sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific and resilience to coercion and disinformation, as well as closer civil and defence science and technology cooperation.

DFAT's connection with the Australian business network, and to Australians here at home is also important.

We have a permanent presence in every state and territory, working hard to link up Australians and Australian businesses with key opportunities as they arise overseas.

Third, to be a modern department, we have to represent the diverse, outward-looking Australia that we serve.

Diversity isn't an end in itself.

It's a source of strength; it makes us more effective.

It gives us access to a wider pool of ideas, to fresh ways of thinking through old – and new – problems.

As of June this year, 40 per cent of our posts were led by women – our highest proportion ever.

And I would argue that DFAT, along with the APS itself, is increasingly open to talented people joining us at all levels from across and beyond the Service. Certainly that has been the direction that I have set over the past four years as Secretary.

And we have been active during COVID in support of one APS. We deployed 300 DFAT staff externally, including to Services Australia and the Department of Health. We are working hand in glove with other government agencies, such as with Defence in the Pacific and Timor-Leste to maintain essential services and humanitarian corridor.

The fourth and final fundamental is that we have to be prepared and stand firm in the face of challenges to Australia's national interests.

The international environment has been, far and away, a benign one for Australia over the past three decades.

But the Indo-Pacific region, so critical to our future, has become significantly more contested and polarised.

COVID-19 has accelerated this transition, with Australia's strategic context now characterised by much greater uncertainty and economic fragility.

DFAT, more than ever, has been stepping up to shape the region and protect Australia's interests and values in this period of flux.

The United States continues to play a central role in Australia's prosperity and security, and makes a vital contribution to our Indo-Pacific interests.

The world is better for the enlightened sense of self-interest the US has traditionally taken as the primary architect of the post-WWII system.

DFAT, with Defence and others, has worked closely with US counterparts to continue to promote a region that is open, inclusive and rules-based.

At the same time, China – a global power in its own right, with a sense of itself every bit as significant as that of the United States – is not standing still.

The relationship between the United States and China was already becoming more competitive prior to the pandemic and, since the crisis began, tensions have increased on almost every front.

Yet Australia's relationship with China, while more complex than ever, has never been more consequential to our national interests.

Our finest strategic policy thinkers have been hard at work on the impact the pandemic – and its geopolitical aftershocks – are having on Australia's place in the world.

Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper identified profound change in the Indo-Pacific region and outlined a policy agenda to respond to this.

Our Indo-Pacific focus remains an important constant despite COVID-19, but DFAT's job in seeking a balance in the regional order that serves Australia's interests in the face of disruption and sharper strategic competition has become more complicated still.

We have worked with Defence to grapple with the same challenges, reflected in its own 2016 White Paper and this year's Defence Strategic Update.

It has long been understood that 'war represents a failure of diplomacy'. As diplomats, we cannot allow diplomacy to fail.

Diplomacy and defence are two sides of the same coin in terms of comprehensive national power, defending and promoting Australia's interests.

Diplomacy is, in fact, our first line of defence against forces that threaten our way of life.

Diplomats keep the peace, keep trade flowing, keep terrorism away from our shores, and keep Australians safe, secure, and prosperous.

We need to continue to invest in our diplomatic capabilities and strengthen our capacity to effectively prosecute Australian priorities and interests overseas.

To paraphrase my good friend General Campbell, if we can get this right, his expensive military tools can stay in the shed.

On that note, I'll hand over to General Campbell, to hear his views on the interplay between defence and diplomacy.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Thank you, Frances. I couldn't agree more with what you've just said, and with the complexity that you've outlined. This has been a very busy and unexpected year for everybody. But, it's a year in which we are always stronger together. There is one national policy, there's one effort that we're all pushing towards. Whenever Defence is engaged as part of that effort, it's always with our partners in DFAT, in a wide range of other government agencies and departments. This is a team Australia effort. I think you've really well laid out, both the challenges and also the span of issues that need to be addressed. It is a period in which we're living in challenging times, and we need to be innovative, but we need to be joined up in our response. That's what has always impressed me in, whether it's military operations that we undertake, or it's defence, cooperation, and engagement in our near region. We do this with DFAT, not instead of DFAT, with DFAT, and that's the way it must be.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Indeed, it would be odd and ultimately wasteful, if that wasn't the case. So, whether it's the Defence Cooperation Program in Papua New Guinea, the assistance that was offered both to the Mission and also the people in Lebanon recently, after the disastrous explosion, or it's responding to the COVID-19 needs of the Southwest Pacific where we can, these things are done stitched together. I'm very proud to be part of that story, because it's a story for Australia, and Australia in a constructive way in our region. I think it's a great story.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Well, it won't surprise anyone, I suppose, that we agree strongly on the need to work together. I must say, rarely a day goes by in this department when I'm out and about, and I don't see one of your ADF colleagues in uniform, either here, because we're running a crisis, or joining us because we've got something important to talk about. And of course, my colleagues are regularly over the other side of the lake as well too. But, I think there's another point I'd make. I had the privilege really, of serving in the office of the Minister for Defence, in the second half of 2010. I really came to realise then that, Defence is an extremely impressive machine, if I can put it that way, made up of some wonderful people, as you know.

FRANCES ADAMSON: But, it's important to understand that, we understand as civilians, how to relate to you, what you need by way of tasking, which obviously comes often from decisions taken at the political level, about what we should be involved in, what we shouldn't be involved in. But, I've got personally a huge respect, and I'm sure I've said this to you before, but let me say it in front of the cameras, for the way, the meticulous way in which you work. I think you've mentioned a couple of examples recently, and certainly the ADF lift into Lebanon, when we were wanting to deliver humanitarian supplies, plenty of examples closer to home, that often happen beyond the gaze of most Australians. TC Winston, I was thinking of, in Vanuatu. It's not as if we deal with normal life and we deal separately with COVID, we've had to deal with them overlapping each other.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Therefore, the safe delivery of humanitarian supplies in response to a tropical cyclone, but to do it in a COVID safe way, that's not a straightforward thing to do. Defence needs to know the length of the runways, the weather conditions, the load factors. Having been on, from time to time, on C130s and the occasional C17, and just seeing the skill with which your colleagues do that, and the enormous effort that goes into training, so, we respect each other, we understand each other. I think increasingly, we've got a shared sense of purpose, of national purpose, and particularly when it comes to the shape, if you like, and the character of our region, the way we can work together with partners, which vary in size from the smallest Pacific islands in a way, to some of our largest and most capable partners across the Indo-Pacific.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I know my colleagues who've worked with yours in this enormous operation called Talisman Saber, they've played civilian roles, obviously, when it comes to that. But, I think they've understood more deeply how all of this works, and the contribution that civilians can make, whether they're playing the roles of ambassadors, whether they're working on humanitarian responses, or whether they're colleagues who are imbued, if you like, with women, peace and security, that UN Security Council Resolution, and what all of that means.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Because, when we do our work together as effectively as we possibly can, we know that we can achieve real impact, and we can in that much bigger canvas that you and I are both very mindful of, I think we can actually make a difference. Whether we wear a uniform or not, I think we all serve Australia proudly, and we also understand how important it is. You'd use the term train, and the ADF does a lot of training, but it also does a lot of what I would call development, and we do too, including how we can best understand each other.

FRANCES ADAMSON: So, I think our efforts overall, whether it's COVID, or non COVID, are very, very complimentary. But, the more that we take the time to understand each other, and I'd say to my colleagues, including perhaps some of our grads, that if you have an opportunity to work with defence, and the same goes actually for colleagues across the service who are listening in, because this is not just the two of us, we work including, obviously through the Office of The Pacific, with a wide range of departments, to ensure that the governments step up in the Pacific, an area about which I know you care deeply, is absolutely tuned into the needs of our Pacific neighbours.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Absolutely. I would emphasize, Defence is a big part of government. Like, the Australian Defence Force, let's say roughly 60,000 full-time, maybe 25,000 part time, 16,000 or 17,000 defence civilians, a large number of variable contractors off and on, this is a big enterprise. We know we can get a head of steam up moving in a particular direction. The beauty of that interplay, in particular between Defence and foreign policy officers, diplomats out in the field, who have the touch of the setting, is to be able to move the scale of Defence and make sure it's constantly pointing in the right direction. That's dynamic and adaptive. Left to our own devices, we can quickly and unintentionally become a blunt instrument. But, the world doesn't need blunt instruments. It needs really finely polished responses, to complex challenges.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: That means the feedback loops, the response that we can offer to DFAT and others, they can offer to us, constantly adjusting and producing for Australia. I think that that's been something that over these last couple of decades, we've seen progressively a deeper and deeper appreciation, not just in the direction between our two organisations, but across government, of how to deliver on government policy, in settings that need constant attention. Because, we're not the only players, and everyone gets a vote in an operational setting, or in a humanitarian disaster. So, it has to be constantly iterative.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: I think that imperfect as we are, we have come a very long way. I'm talking about Defence and the ADF here, we've come a very, very long way in understanding, and more deeply appreciating... As I say to my people, "You need to be able to stand in the shoes of the others, and realise why something matters to them, to really appreciate how we're going to get the best outcome." We're trying. I think every unexpected event that COVID is throwing up to us, or other security settings in our region, is both another challenge for us to deal with, but it's also another opportunity to learn, and to grow stronger as a community. I like to think that that's where we're going.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Certainly, our Defence Strategic Update, which was just released about six weeks ago, I would encourage everyone to read it, because it is commendably easy reading, and it's actually the slimmest of our Defence Strategic Policy document for some decades.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Yeah, I can recommend.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Yeah. It's been widely and well received. But in it, shaped by competition, capability, deter, and respond as may be required. This shaping function, it is as we've said, it's a team effort. It's a very, very large part of what we do, and it's something that we have to do every day. You don't develop real partnerships, not just with other government agencies, but with partners overseas, being an occasional visitor. You need to be constantly engaged. This is diplomacy. To the degree that there's a lower level military diplomacy effect, we need to be able to master that, as much as the hard power aspects of the less preferred outcomes that we've got to think about, but try to avoid.

FRANCES ADAMSON: No, I think that's right. As you've just made a number of really important points there, and of course, I do genuinely highly recommend the Defence Strategic Update. It's something that anyone listening to this really, really should have on their reading list, if they haven't read it already. I suppose the other thing I'd say, and I think you touched on this is, and I know this is something the Prime Minister feels very strongly too. Australia is not a bystander. He made his point in a recent Aspen speech. He talked about an Australian way of foreign policy. We're not bystanders. We are active, we are engaged, we are there to make a difference.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I do, and I know you do, you do Mil-to-Mil talks, you talk a lot to your counterparts, I talk quite a lot to mine, but I must say, when Greg Moriarty and I are sitting together as we do each year with our Indian counterparts, Defence and Foreign Affairs, we can see the multiplier effect, if you like, that we're able to have, as we seek to further develop. We're now, as of the recent virtual summit between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Morrison, we've become comprehensive strategic partners. When you look at the capability that Defence brings to that relationship, and the importance now of the Indian Ocean, one of the reasons that we talk about a focus on the Indo-Pacific, and the work that we do together. Of course, in Indonesia, Foreign and Defence Ministers themselves meet together in this two plus two format, and that's replicated with the United States through AUSMIN, with the UK, with Japan, with the ROK.

FRANCES ADAMSON: So increasingly, I think my colleagues and yours, see at Ministerial level, at leader level, the ways in which we work together, and what that can produce by way of outcomes. The region is changing around us, and it's vital for Australia to be able to develop relationships, particularly with like-minded democracies, but not solely with, where we can bring interest to bear that is similar, whether in defence overtly of a rules-based order. Of course, it's really important in our region, that if there are differences, and if those differences might lead to something called a dispute, that they're able to be settled peacefully in accordance with International Law. I think when it comes to that, we're absolutely aligned too. We might have different ways ultimately of dealing with it, but we're driven by the same motive and the same values, I suppose.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Yeah, exactly. It's a team sport, and it is in the best sense of the term, it's a contact sport. It's active. You have to move forward to engage, and bring something with you. I think Australia has a really good reputation for that. That we both want to engage, and we want to offer something, to be a constructive partner. That makes building those partnerships something that's doable, and that we've got a great track record as a nation, in doing. You're quite right about the strengthening links, military to military, between Australia and India, I'd say Australia and Indonesia, there's many countries. But, in that Northeast Indian Ocean area, where the three nations clearly have common security interests, that's a space where there's more work to be done. I think that there's work that people are interested in doing, but they're interested in doing it with a partner that can bring something to the table.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: As Australians, I think that we perhaps take for granted, or don't necessarily appreciate that, this is a country both with a great history of doing so, and with lots of potential to continue to strengthen the field. That's certainly what we want to do.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Now, I mentioned in my speech, something that I know you attach a high priority to, and that is diversity.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Sure.

FRANCES ADAMSON: We're both now champions of change, whether we attend in person or whether we dial in. I know this is an area in which the ADF has been leading for a number of years. There are some particular challenges, I suppose, but I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about that, just as I have a little bit.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Thank you. You're quite right. I think of a mental model here about, why do we do this? Well, to me that the rain of talent falls evenly across the Australian population. So, if I am in a competition for talent, a competition against you on occasions and others, I want the best talent. I unreservedly want the best talent that I can get for the Australian Defence Force, and then more generally for the Australian Government. Now, that's blind to gender, and to any other way you categorize human beings. So then I think, "Well, what kind of Defence Force do we need?" To use a sporting analogy, and with apologies to those who play these sports, I think I'm looking for a cricket team, with some fast bowlers, and some lead batsman, some all-rounders, great wicket keeper, I need some captains and so forth.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Diversity, creating a team, and it's only through team that the success is achieved. With respects to what I know is far more complicated a sport than I'm about to suggest, I'm not looking for 11 weightlifters, I'm looking for a cricket team. That cricket team comes in all shapes and sizes. If you are open to seeing talent, you get a stronger organisation. So, there's an enormous amount of self-interest, but underlying that, is a basic ethical belief in the equality and the potential of all our citizens. And, what's not to like?

FRANCES ADAMSON: Absolutely. Look, as I said, I'm very keen for the foreign service. Our foreign service department, my department, to be broadly representative of the Australian people in all of their talents, including, and I've been really reminded of this during COVID, including because, when you're dealing with a crisis, you need people who can think differently, who can bring different experiences to bare, different experiences of other parts of government, or lives led in other worlds, not necessarily overseas. I also know, and I've learned too that, that kind of diversity doesn't happen by accident. You actually have to encourage it, and nurture it. I think you actually need to measure it as well. You need to be transparent about it.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I'm proud of the fact that we've got something like 120 Indigenous colleagues in the department. But, that's only around 3%, and we need to do better than that. We need to understand how best to support them, to continue to fulfill a wider range of obligations, that many of them have, but at the same time, value their contribution, as we really must and do, including in the way we present ourselves overseas, the way we relate to people in our own region. It also includes staff with disability. Again, a smaller than proportion than I would hope it to be, declare themselves as having a disability in this department. It's only a little bit over 3%. We understand it to be a larger number in practice, but we actually want to attract more. We know that we're not fully representative of the Australian population.

FRANCES ADAMSON: One thing though, I'm particularly pleased about is that, 40% of our Heads of Mission at the moment are women. Women can service anywhere in the world. They currently are in places as diverse and taxing as Beirut and Baghdad, and a whole lot of some of our small Pacific colleagues, as well as some of our bigger posts too. So, I'm very proud of that. It's difficult to do that at a time when COVID I think is placing immense stresses and strain on our workforce, wherever they're serving, and their families, from whom in the current environment, they're often separated for long periods of time.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Could I say Frances, and very sincerely, your leadership and a commitment to measuring and counting, is driving fundamental change. That same approach is being taken in Defence. This is a long story for the Australian Defence Force, a historically very male dominated workforce. Now, we see 15% in the Army, 23% Navy, 25% Air Force, and moving up. But, you've led, others before you have led, but you've led, and we need to have the data to understand if we're making change. To anyone who's doing this, anyone who's facing these challenges, if you truly want the talent that Australia has at your fingertips, lead and measure, and you will get it.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I think we should hand back at this point, to Michael Manthorpe -

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Sure.

FRANCES ADAMSON: ... Because he's got questions from colleagues. Over to you, Michael.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: Yes, I do. Thank you Secretary and General Campbell for those remarks. I'm sure everyone listening would feel that we could sit here and listen to you engaging on a very wide variety of topics for some considerable time. But, time is tight, and we have a number of questions from our audience, which some of which pick up some of the themes that you've touched on, including the first one, which is from Sharen Phillips, at the Department of Finance. Who observes that, while everyone seems to be talking about China and it's stance for recent times, and the impact that it's having on the world, I would like to hear more about how the panel views the diplomatic and security relationships Australia has with Indonesia and India, and what the future might look like in relation to those two countries. Over to you.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Well we touched on, quite naturally, on Indonesia and India, when we were speaking just now. But, I'm conscious that, and perhaps the question has been asked because there are a very wide range of contributions being made across the APS, in terms of developing further relationships with Indonesia already. Very broad indeed. I think President Jokowi, was one of the last leaders to visit Australia before COVID put a halt to that. But, I know that whether it's, you know, Treasury and Finance colleagues, whether we're working on big development challenges in Indonesia, or health challenges, a very close partner, and a leader in the region, a comprehensive strategic partner, as we know, and one with which we have very close interactions.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I think I've lost track actually, of the number of conversations the Foreign Minister's had, our Foreign Minister, with Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi of Indonesia. I think across the board, it would be fair to say that, many Ministers of departments represented amongst the audience, will be regularly in touch with their Indonesian counterparts too. But, Defence has had a very long engagement with Indonesia, so we should give you an opportunity to talk about it.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Thanks, Frances. Indonesia is one of our geographically adjacent neighbours. It's the largest country in ASEAN. It's views matter in the world. Being a neighbour, we want a friend, and we're determined to build a deep partnership. Certainly, I spend a great deal of time working with my counterpart Panglima, Air Chief Marshal Tjahjanto. He is a very, very nice man, who is looking to strengthen the relationship, to really show innovation in what we can do. That's because, I think both countries know our strategic futures, our futures as neighbours, our futures together, and they should be seen as bright futures with opportunity. I think that's the case, but you have to work at it. It's a relationship, you have to work at it.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Yeah.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: With India, a vibrant populous democracy, with extraordinary potential, and a significant part of the Indian Ocean story, I think that there's a lot untapped. We've just recently signed a logistics agreement, and also a science and technology agreement. So, these are pathways to strengthen the defence to defence relationship. I think that there are areas both of common military training and development interest, but also there are strategic insecurity interests, which we'll see that relationship grow. So, I am very optimistic in regard to both relationships, and indeed to the possibilities of the trilateral, amongst the mili-laterals, or mini-laterals that we deal with.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Absolutely, that's right. In the days when I used to travel, I visited India. I have five times as Secretary, more often actually than any other country. We've now built, and this is what leaders do. They come together in a virtual summit, they agree that we should become comprehensive strategic partners, they set their expectations and their ambitions very high, and we work away then, to ensure that we can deliver on those, not over periods of months or years in the single digits, but over decades. We're in this region together, and there are challenges for both of us, but an enormous amount that we can do.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I should mention, because it's now entered into force, the Indonesia Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, IA-CEPA, and as soon as COVID allows, we'll be able to do much more, I think, in terms of developing the trade and investment relationship between us.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: That's great.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: That's great. The next question is from Thomas Mansfield at the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, who, picking up in fact on the point you just made Frances, about the difficulty of travel at the moment, given that overseas travel and in country experiences are hard to access and are to be hard to access for some time to come, how can staff in your agencies, but also in the public sector more widely, other agencies that are perhaps less full time in the international sphere, how can we improve our cultural awareness and engage effectively with the Indo-Pacific region?

FRANCES ADAMSON: Do you want to go first?

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Can I say, first, in all of the teleconferences and the video conferences that have been held over the last seven, eight months, none of them technologically has failed on me. That is an enormous sense, a vote of confidence and sense of possibility, not just for now, but for the future. If COVID-19 was COVID '09, or even COVID 1999, this wouldn't have been possible. So, I think we have a basis to maintain connection. There's a lot of work at many levels in Defence, to do just that. At the same time, I see the proliferation of podcasts for senior leaders, for interest groups for think tanks, to get their message out, in ways that they would otherwise have normally done through a conference.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: So, I would also encourage people to be engaging in what is a flood of really high-quality podcasts. Then, if you have time, because of work and life circumstance, we need more people to be speaking these languages, to be understanding deeply the cultures, engage, commit to learn, and to see learning as a continuous experience through your life. It's got to be an effort, but I think it's an incredibly rewarding effort.

FRANCES ADAMSON: I agree, absolutely. And a couple of additional points I'd make; I think actually, sort of in ways we hadn't fully anticipated, the inability to travel has been a tremendous advantage for Australia and Australians because, we used to have to spend a lot of time on planes-

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Yes.

FRANCES ADAMSON: ... To get - and we did huge amounts of time, to get to other places to talk to people, and they'd spend time coming to talk to us too. But, we bore a disproportionate burden, given our geography. I think what we realised, it took just a little while, but as soon as we did, we're on the phone, we're video conferencing, we're doing it all the time. It's been very interesting to observe the Prime Minister and our Ministers, really probably have more contact with foreign counterparts. Not just the traditional ones either, but ones that we can learn from in a COVID environment. The idea of like-minded, I think has changed a bit, and needs to change a bit during this period, where we've been challenged, and we need to work through challenges in an agile way, but also in a very creative way. I think that's knocked down a few obstacles. That's been a really good thing.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Second thing I'd say is, I'm sure it's been the same for Defence. You write about podcasts, there are too many to listen to. We've got two ears, but you can only listen to one at a time. I think though, the courses online and DFAT's running actually at the moment, its first... Well, it's a small-scale version of a MOOC, so it's called a SPOC, and we're doing that at the moment, in terms of understanding the world.

FRANCES ADAMSON: We've got large numbers of people across the APS signed up for this. That's a really, really good thing. Our language labs, if you like, are being conducted online, and that's giving colleagues an opportunity to deepen their knowledge, to refresh their language, to prepare for overseas postings, to get ready. Then, we've refreshed the material, we've developed things specifically for online courses, and that's enabling us to develop our people, some of them in isolation for longer periods of time.

FRANCES ADAMSON: So actually, there's a tremendous amount there on the opportunity side of the ledger, and from DFAT's perspective, I want us to be very open about sharing what we've developed with the service more widely.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Could I just add a bit of a shout out to our Australian Defence College?

FRANCES ADAMSON: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: They in a sort of, we would describe it crash action, went fully online.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Yep.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: It took a couple of months, but the entire courses we offer for the mid-career and senior career programs online, working with the relevant university providers. But in addition, they also provided language appropriate training modules for Indonesian Armed Forces, for colleagues in Timor-Leste, for nations who were asking, "What do we do in terms of managing COVID-safe behaviours and techniques and so forth?" And out came these packages. A wonderful way to make a contribution, and very, very well received, warmly received.

- FRANCES ADAMSON: Excellent.
- MICHAEL MANTHORPE: Excellent, indeed. Indeed, I should add that IPAA also has a host of a podcast material out there, that Work with Purpose podcast is full of content, for people who may not have looked at it. I think we've got time for one more question, from Gill Savage at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. The 2020 Defence Strategic Update articulates the focus for Defence, with respect to the Government's emphasis on grey zone statecraft. What focus does DFAT have on grey zone statecraft, and how is this shaping DFAT's current and future capability?
- FRANCES ADAMSON: Well, I'd like to give General Campbell an opportunity to comment on it too. In fact, we might even start with you. There's quite a bit that DFAT's doing, that we're doing together, but there may be colleagues who are joining us today, who were perhaps not absolutely certain what grey zone means. So, why don't you introduce the concept, and then I'll talk about what DFAT's doing?
- GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: So grey zone, it hasn't got a formalized definition, but it's the use of a variety of techniques that may span different forms of national power, that push, and push, and try to coerce or achieve a particular state's policy objectives, without pushing so far that you move over the line into an outbreak of physical military conflict. So, you keep it below the threshold of conflict, you operate in what might be a quasi-deniable grey space, where your economic, or political, or perhaps military positioning, starts to coerce states into complying with what you want.
- GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Now, what I wanted to start with, using that as a basis of the conversation, this is not new. This has been an approach by states for millennia. The techniques that are now available, some of them are new. The cyber domain techniques are brand new, and they can be at scale, they can be globally ubiquitous, and they can be with extraordinary perception impact. The, let's say gunboat diplomacy, which of course Australia does not participate in, the gunboat diplomacy kind of grey zone effort to influence and intimidate, that's not new. Certain forms of economic coercion are not new. But, when you are wrapping them together, the modern world provides a much more powerful set, to not just influence political elites, but influence whole populations.

FRANCES ADAMSON: No, thank you. Thank you for setting it out in those terms. I suppose from a DFAT perspective, I'd simply say, we're very conscious of this. It's an area where almost by definition, DFAT and Defence, and a range of other partners I should say, but today we're highlighting DFAT and Defence, but there are a range of other partners involved in this too. It's the area where, the exercise of influence can tip into an interference. Where, something that is being regarded as an economic opportunity can become a vehicle for coercion. So, part of what we're wanting to do, including through the work that we're doing on disinformation, with a particular focus in origin actually, on ensuring that what is actions that Australia was taking, support that we were giving our neighbours, positions more broadly in relation to COVID, were understood. It's a very positive agenda. It's not always been presented necessarily by others as a positive agenda, and we wanted to be absolutely clear about that.

FRANCES ADAMSON: So, part of what we're trying to do, is to ensure that there's transparency. Often, the term sunlight is used. It's shining a light on something, and calling it out for what it is, and ensuring that some of our neighbours I suppose, are better equipped. You talked about cyber intrusions, well, the challenges of cyber, and of course, building cyber resilience. There are a range of practical things that we can do about all of that too. But, I think we need to be alert to that. We need to, I'd use a word that's really in a way, a word from your world, which is resolve, a very strong resolve when it comes to calling out these behaviours for dealing with them, for strengthening our own national resilience, but assisting our neighbours as well too.

FRANCES ADAMSON: Some of these things go then to what I would call an international order, to a global order based on rules, rather than the sort of order where a situation is settled or determined by the exercise of power. That's obviously where Defence absolutely certainly comes in too.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: I think sunlight is incredibly powerful because, much of the grey zone depends on this question of ambiguity or uncertainty. The other element to dealing with it is to be very clear, what are your national interests, and what is this thing sovereignty that we regard highly as we should, and we wish to protect? If I think, if you have that understanding and that sense of yourself, that sense of identity as a nation, and to the degree that is possible, you are willing to look to point and call out where these things are going on, you've got the basis to then ask the question, what form of more complete response is appropriate, if indeed it is appropriate? I think that, this is a... Well, this space is now a very active. It's a modern expression of a very old technique. It's one that we're going to have to live with, and we're going to have to work to deny on occasions to defeat, constantly into the future.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: I think that, that is something that we can help others with, but each nation will need to think about understanding its national interests, and understanding what it wishes to pursue in the world. Very, very important in terms of having a foundation, from then to ask the question, what can we do with this grey zone activity?

FRANCES ADAMSON: I think this absolutely the work, if you like, of our generation and the generation to come. Again, I find myself quoting the Prime Minister, but when he talks about the sort of region Australia wants, it's a region of sovereign independent states resistant to coercion, and absolutely open to collaboration and cooperation when it's in our mutual interest. So, it's not just about Australia, principally it is of course, but it's about our neighbours and how we can assist them, make the decisions that their people expect their governments to be able to make, freely and without the pressure that sometimes is brought to bear.

GENERAL ANGUS CAMPBELL: Absolutely.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: Well, thank you very much Frances and General Campbell for those thoughtful and in some ways challenging remarks. It's been a terrific discussion, I think. On behalf of IPAA, I would like to thank both of you for speaking with a very large online audience today. I'm not going to attempt to paraphrase everything you said or anything of the sort. I think we've learned from the podcast era, that it's very important to keep to time. All I would say is, that as an Australian, I find it profoundly reassuring that the most senior people in our diplomatic corps, and our Defence Corps, are seeking to work together in a sophisticated, thoughtful, strategic, integrated way, in the context of the challenges that Australia confronts. I think that is unambiguously a good thing.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: So, it's been a pleasure for IPAA to partner with DFAT to stream such a conversation out to our members and beyond, during these unusual times. IPAA of course has embraced the opportunity to share more digital content. There's lots of it accessible on the IPAA's website, including the Work with Purpose Podcast, which we work on with the APSC. I encourage you to keep your ears out for other IPAA events that are coming up. One that is noteworthy, that is worth mentioning before wrapping up today is, that on the 14th of September, IPAA will be hosting the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Phil Gaetjens, for a discussion.

MICHAEL MANTHORPE: So, I'd like to thank everyone for tuning in today. I thank the team at IPAA and DFAT, and our speakers. On that note, I close today's proceedings. Thank you.