

# Australia Prepares to Fight Terrorism

An Australian Special Operations Force Task Group is currently deployed in the Afghanistan theatre to help prosecute the Global War on Terror. MGen Hindmarsh examines the SOF today, analyzing changes for tomorrow.

How will ethos, strategies and technologies change in the world of 2020?

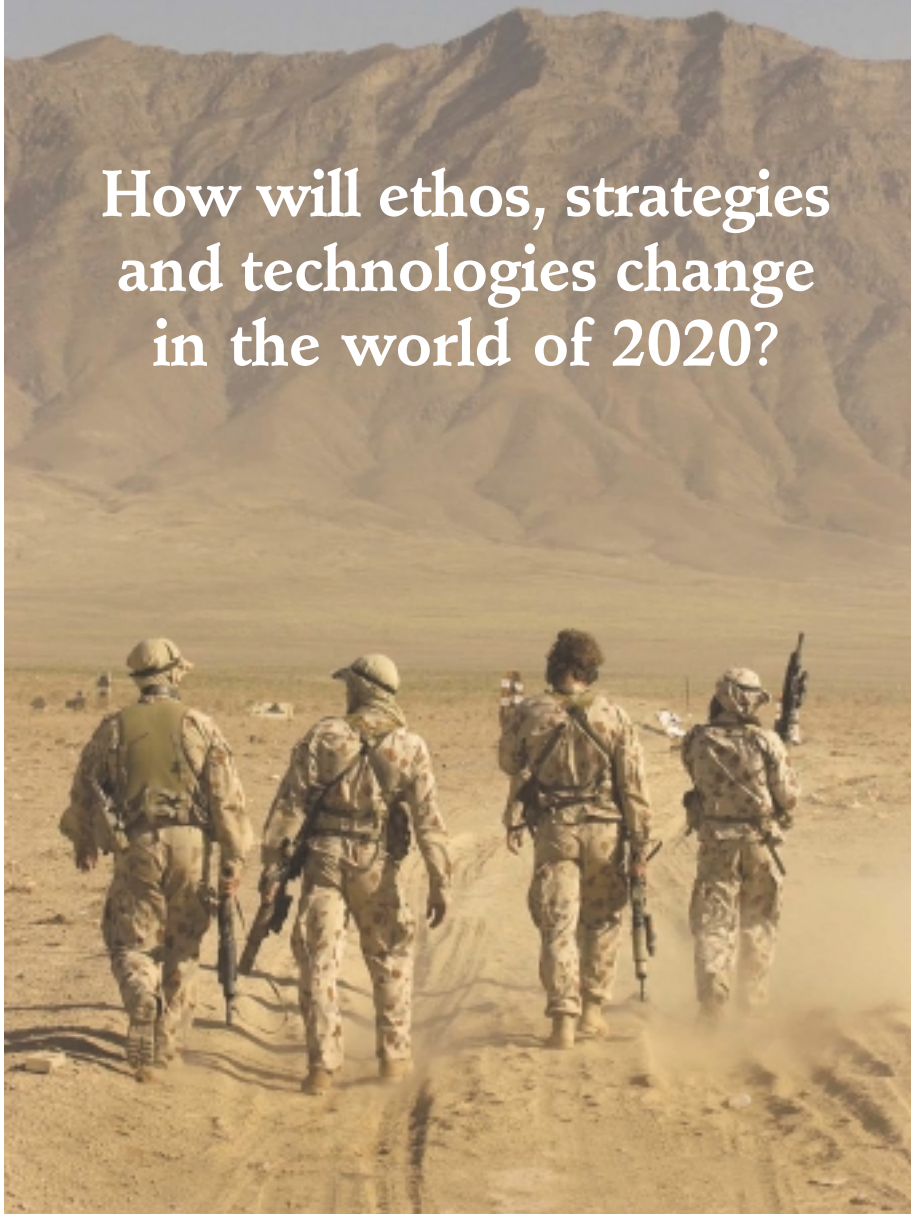


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The 7/7 London bombings and the recent Bali bombings are salutary reminders of how resourceful and ruthless transnational terrorism has become in the pursuit of its goals. Accordingly, as military professionals, we have a duty to ensure that our soldiers are well equipped, in every sense of the word, to meet this insidious challenge. Given the tasks they face and hardships and hazards they will endure, we need to analyze the current and future nature of the threat and ask “how best to prepare the next generation to combat it”? In short, we need to recruit and train the warrior who can not only operate effectively in the current environment but also overcome the anticipated challenges of 2020.

Who is the Special Operations Force (SOF) Soldier? He is not Superman in uniform. Rather, SOF soldiers tend to be ordinary men called upon to do extraordinary tasks for their nation. What enables them to rise to this level is combination of three interrelated issues – selection and training; technology and equipment; and a strong culture and ethos. The first produces the SOF soldier, the second a capability, the third is that mixture of intrinsic values and tradition binding it all together. It is this thorough and well-tested regime that lifts the individual soldier’s operational capability to that of the SOF soldier ready to fight the War on Terror.

## The Nature of the War on Terror

When faced with the non-conventional threat of global terrorism the modern nation state has increasingly turned to its Special Operations Forces to meet the challenges of this new operational threat environment. The traditional view of Special Operations Forces operating deep behind enemy lines is irrelevant when there is no front line. Terrorists do not respect borders but rather exploit them. The challenges faced are often not in the mainstream of society but at the seams of our world. It is in that shadowland where those who would choose to do us harm operate.

*An Australian Special Operations Force (SOF) Task Group Patrol conducts a range practice at Bagram. Part of a substantial naval, land and air commitment to the International Coalition Against Terror, Task Group Patrol sees between 850 and 1300 Australian Defence Force personnel serving in operational areas in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and the Persian Gulf at any one time.*

Extrapolating to 2020, the SOF soldier will be expected to conduct mission profiles along the full spectrum of military activity and beyond. This will range from warfighting – engaging the enemy with the full suite of combat capability – to peace support operations such as delivering humanitarian assistance and all manner of military and quasi-policing functions in between. Adding to the level of complexity, the same force may be required to conduct any or all of these operational tasks sequentially, or even concurrently, within the same mission. These missions will require not just a military force but an integrated force from various Government agencies.

More so than ever, the SOF characteristics of organizational agility and individual ingenuity using human level engagement and personal contact will be required. Predictions as to the future nature of war are often misleading. What we can reasonably surmise, however, is that the enemy will be tough, the battlefield discontinuous, the operational environment chaotic, and the mission complex. It is in this arena that the SOF soldier will need to excel.

## Selection & Training

Quality personnel are the bedrock of success in any human endeavor. One of the unique principles of Special Operations Forces is the privilege of conducting their own selection and training regime. The Special Operations tradition of personnel selection is more than a screening process. It facilitates a shared sense of comradeship through adversity and it becomes a rite of passage, forming a bond on which lives will depend.

The Australian approach to selection is based on assessment of the ‘whole person.’ While the physical and mental standards are tried, tested and easily measured, they merely provide a baseline. Beyond these attributes, we look for character traits which are hard to define and measure but easy to identify – particularly when absent. Rather than select a ‘model’ soldier we seek diversity in background and experience to enhance our collective utility.

*Australian soldiers in a Surveillance Reconnaissance Vehicle (SRV) patrol outside the perimeter of a forward operating base in Afghanistan.* >>



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**– MGen Hindmarsh**

Clausewitz advises us to be strong everywhere but especially at the point of attack. To attempt to prepare for all contingencies however is to prepare for none. Mission essential skills must be balanced against ancillary supporting skills. Mission skills are those that are generic to all military activities maintained ready to ‘plug and play.’ For example, every deployed Special Forces asset must be able to communicate, if they cannot they not only serve no purpose but are a liability since additional forces maybe required to extract



PHOTO: CPL JAMIE OSBORNE

them. Ancillary supporting skills such as mountaineering or freefall parachuting need to be maintained at a latent level ready to enhance to full operational capability once the mission comes into focus. The challenge here is that it is exactly these specialist skills that distinguish the SOF soldier from his more conventional brothers-in-arms. To remain balanced takes a combination of sound operational analysis, risk management and organizational discipline.

## Technology & Equipment

Technology increases in the latter half of the 20th century dramatically effected weapon systems, personal equipment, communications and information systems to name but a few. The adversary is well versed in the skillful use of mass media technology such as the internet and mobile global communications. While the nation state does not retain the monopoly on warfighting materiel, it still retains the technical edge in research and development of new capabilities and equipment. We need to leverage this advantage before our adversaries do. The old adage of “equipping the man, not manning the equipment” holds especially true for SOF.

Technology must be leveraged to first protect the force, second, to enhance combat effectiveness, and finally to increase lethality. For example:

- Human beings are fragile and need to be protected against environmental and battlefield hazards. Technical initiatives will include climate-controlled “clothing suites” with integrated lightweight ballistic body armor to allow the wearer to operate in the extreme temperatures and terrain that the SOF soldier will be exposed to in the War on Terror. Devices to constantly monitor the soldier’s health and biometrics along with mechanical translators and head-up displays delivering a near real time stream of terrain analysis, target intelligence and so forth will be standard, in order to network the SOF soldier into the information matrix.
- The SOF soldier is carefully selected however there is still only a finite difference between them and their adversaries. The application of technology to boost human performance provides that combat multiplier effect. The future is now for tools such as a net-

worked common battlefield picture so that what one soldier sees the whole team sees. Space-based technologies such as the Global Positioning System have enabled unheard of precision. Encrypted satellite communications transfer pictures and messages in almost real time from the field linking the deployed elements with decision makers and analysts. Night vision equipment continues to have a significant effect on the battlefield by increasing tempo. Along with these high end capabilities we need to address those quality of life aspects such as 'lightening the soldiers load' through a combination of miniaturization and light weight materials, improving field rations, and designing a better combat boot.

- Advanced weapon systems using 'brilliant' munitions and Metal Storm® technologies will allow the SOF soldier to deliver either precision engagement or massed effect firepower as required by the battlefield circumstances. SOF soldiers however are not just shooters in the shooter-sensor grid but can also become sensors for larger more lethal platforms such as attack helicopters and aircraft for delivery of precision munitions. Alternatively, some missions, for just as important reasons, such as

reduction of collateral damage, need to achieve a less than lethal effect. The decision to use non-lethal or lethal force may be one an individual SOF operator makes instinctively without higher command reference, with far-reaching consequences. This judgment requires both maturity and moral (and perhaps physical) courage.

### Culture and Ethos

As the nature of conflict evolves, it can be observed that technology and equipment and the supporting training regime are also constantly adapting to new operational requirements. In fact, Special Operations Forces take pride in their ability to 'morph' and accept new roles while shedding defunct tasks. The soldier of 2020 will differ markedly from his predecessors in terms of skills and equipment and represent a quantum leap in combat capability, however, in personal attributes, he will be the same man.

The basic Special Operations culture and ethos, which is imbued from day one of selection, and ingrained and reinforced throughout the tough training cycle, will endure. It is the stuff that compels men to fight when the overwhelming instinct is flight. It sustains the organization across

time and allows the SOF soldier to feel he is part of a larger purpose and subordinate his individual needs for the greater good.

**The War on Terror** will be a war won by inches. There is unlikely to be any Dunkirks or Dien Bien Phus, but nor will there be any Normandys or Inchons. We must be prepared to face the enemy wherever he appears and whatever guise he takes. This will take agility, it will take ingenuity and it will take great skill and courage. All these qualities are the hallmarks of the Special Operations Forces soldier. Our opponents are ruthless. The indiscriminate use of suicide bombers shows the extent of their fanaticism. Julius Caesar, when faced with a similar challenge of protecting the civilized world against the barbarians at the gates, observed that it is easier to find men who will volunteer to die, than to find those who are willing to endure pain with patience. The SOF soldier is selected and trained to endure, and to win. **FL**

*Major General Michael S.J. Hindmarsh's major command duties date back to 1979. In recent years, he commanded Special Operations Forces in Kuwait and in Iraq. MGen Hindmarsh was appointed Special Operations Commander Australia in 2004.*

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