

# Counterinsurgency in Uruzgan 2009

**Colonel Peter Connolly**

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## Acknowledgements

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This paper is dedicated to the men and women of MRTF-2. Their resolve, flexibility and sense of humour under pressure were a source of great strength and pride.

With thanks to all those who have supported MRTF-2 and the production of this paper.

## The Author

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Colonel Peter Connolly trained at ADFA and RMC Duntroon between 1987 and 1990. He commanded the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment from November 2007 – December 2009. His operational experience has included deployment to Somalia as a platoon commander in 1993, East Timor as a company commander in 2000, Afghanistan as J3/5 of Regional Command South Afghanistan in 2006, and as Commanding Officer Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force Two in 2009. After command he became Director Force Structure Development in Strategic Policy Division, and is now posted to the Pakistan–Afghanistan Coordination Cell in the Pentagon.



# Abbreviations

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ABCA – American, British, Canadian and Australian  
AMHOO – Acute Mental Health on Operations  
ANA – Afghan National Army  
ANP – Afghan National Police  
ANSF – Afghan National Security Force  
BC – battery commander  
CM – capability milestone  
CO – commanding officer  
COMD TF-U – Commander Task Force Uruzgan  
CO's TAC – commanding officer's tactical headquarters  
CT-A – Combat Team Alpha  
CT-B – Combat Team Bravo  
CWIED – command wire improvised explosive devices  
DIO – Defence Intelligence Organisation  
DSTO – Defence Science and Technology Organisation  
HAC – human atmospheric card  
ISAF – International Security Assistance Force  
ISR – intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance  
JMRC – Joint Mission Readiness Centre  
JNCO – junior non-commissioned officer  
JTF – joint task force  
KIA – killed in action  
LAV – light armoured vehicle  
MCBAS – Modular Combat Body Armour System  
MEW – Ministry for Energy and Water  
MRRD – Ministry for Rural Reconstruction and Development  
MRTF-2 – Second Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force

MTF – mentoring task force  
OMLT – operational mentoring and liaison team  
PMV – protected mobility vehicle  
PPIED – pressure plate improvised explosive device  
PSYOPS – psychological operations  
RAR – Royal Australian Regiment  
RCIED – remote control improvised explosive device  
RMO – regimental medical officer  
ROS&I – Reception, Onward movement, Staging and Integration.  
RSM – Regimental Sergeant Major  
SIEDs – suicide bombers  
SNCO – senior non-commissioned officer  
SO – staff officer  
SOPs – standard operating procedures  
SOTG – Special Operations Task Group  
TF 31 – Task Force 31  
TF-U – Task Force Uruzgan  
TTPs – tactics, techniques and procedures  
TTS – Trade Training School  
WIA – wounded in action  
XO – executive officer



# Introduction

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The Second Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force (MRTF-2) deployed to Uruzgan, South Afghanistan, in May 2009 with the short-term aim of providing security for the Afghan national elections, and the strategic goal of developing the capacity of the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to conduct counterinsurgency operations. The battle group formed at 1 RAR in Townsville during March 2009 with soldiers from across the 3rd Brigade, supported by specialists from across the Australian Defence Force. MRTF-2 entered Afghanistan in the middle of a very active ‘fighting season’ in the face of an evolving threat from the Taliban and had a strong impact on the progress of the counterinsurgency within the province of Uruzgan. MRTF-2’s approach was to dominate the threat, poised for decisive close combat, while maximising its influence on the people and the environment, with the objective of supporting and preparing the ANA to conduct the counterinsurgency independently. The success of MRTF-2 came as a result of the strength of character, resolve and initiative of all ranks.

Counterinsurgency requires a careful balance between the ability to win the support of the people, and the application of close combat to destroy the enemy with precision whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. This paper examines these issues from a commander’s perspective with a focus on counterinsurgency operations in Uruzgan in the second half of 2009. It will provide a synopsis of MRTF-2’s approach to counterinsurgency and its application to two deliberate operations. It will then consider some of the lessons learned and techniques developed by the battle group during the tour. These include: the development of the threat and the measures we adopted to counter it; the development of systems and techniques to influence the local population, the coalition and the threat; measures for

preserving the mental and physical health of our soldiers; and proposals for enhancing mission specific training and an approach to whole-of-government cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The majority of images in this paper were taken and produced by MRTF-2 photographer Corporal Rachel Ingram.

# Background

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## Environment

A large portion of Uruzgan is *dasht* (desert) or steep mountains of rock. These areas contain little life except for the nomadic *Kuchi* tribespeople. A small portion of the terrain consists of valleys in which all the available water, crops and life exist—these are referred to as ‘green zones’. The green zones are where the people live, and generally where the Taliban operate.



Charmeston Green Zone, September 2009.

Green zones are extremely complex environments in which all land is privately owned and all structures are man-made. There are clay walls (which can be several feet thick) around most fields and around all dwellings. The

Afghans live in compounded, high-walled residential complexes called *q'alas*. The flow of water to fields is controlled by a maze of deep and well crafted irrigation canals, many of which have walls on their banks, often supplied by large subterranean waterways known as *karez*. The tracks through the villages are designed to be negotiated on foot or on an animal (but not vehicle), with walls on either side of them, and generally cross the canals over very narrow and precarious foot bridges. Most communities grow three crops a year: typically poppy, wheat and corn. Each of these crops becomes high and dense as it matures, but the corn in particular can reach eight feet, creating a very dense close-country environment towards the end of summer. There are also dense orchards of almonds and apricots. The width of these valleys can range from merely half a kilometre to as much as ten kilometres. Maximum temperatures in summer can be above 45 degrees Celsius, while in winter minimums can be well below freezing. This is a challenging environment requiring largely dismounted operations.



Corporal Daniel Richardson and Private Chaka Dau patrol through an irrigation canal in the Baluchi Valley, July 2009.



Green zone in Mirabad Valley, September 2009.



River crossing at Now Joy.





Corporal Jason McKlaren of 5 Platoon CT-B crosses a canal near Sorkh Lez (left) and Private Ben Maddaford of 2 Platoon CT-A in corn near Now Joy (right).  
Mirabad Valley, September 2009.

## Context

The province of Uruzgan is the supporting effort of Regional Command South. The main effort is Kandahar (which is the Taliban's primary objective), and Helmand (a major source of revenue through poppy production) is close behind it. Prior to the US force increases in 2008 and 2009, Regional Command South struggled against the resurgence of the Taliban in 2006 and 2007 with only one battle group in each of the four provinces that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had occupied.

In Uruzgan in 2006, the area of Sorkh Morghab was a high-threat area, and Special Forces took several attempts to fight their way into the Baluchi Valley. Now Sorkh Morgab has a growing market, medical centre and a

mosque (designed and contracted by Australian engineers), the southern Baluchi Valley and Mirabad Valley are starting to develop, and Chora is comparatively prosperous. In 2006 the 4th ANA Brigade did not exist; now it has three infantry kandaks on the ground and is about to receive a fourth, and their level of skill is varied but steadily improving. These snapshots indicate steady progress. It is slow, costly and difficult, but nevertheless worthwhile.

MRTF operated alongside a Dutch battle group and provincial reconstruction team, under the operational command of the Netherlands formation headquarters known as 'Task Force Uruzgan' (TF-U),<sup>2</sup> which provided a large portion of the enablers and logistics in the province. The Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade<sup>3</sup> was the real 'terrain owner', with two (and later three) infantry kandaks on the ground and under-developed combat support and combat service support kandaks. MRTF developed a mentoring and partnering relationship with 2nd Kandak,<sup>4</sup> 4th Kandak and Headquarters 4th ANA Brigade. We had mutually beneficial relationships with the Australian Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) and the US Special Forces Task Force 31 (TF 31). We received outstanding support from the new US aviation battalion, Task Force Wolfpack, which was equipped with reconnaissance, attack and utility helicopters. All of these units, apart from the infantry kandaks, had their headquarters based in Tarin Kowt. For matters relating to Australia's interests we answered to the national command of Joint Task Force 633.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Brigadier Tom Middendorp handed over a matter of weeks before the elections, and was replaced by Brigadier Mark van Uhm (who remained COMD TF-U for the rest of MRTF-2's tour).

3 Commanded by Brigadier General Abdul Hamid.

4 Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ghul Agha.

5 JTF 633 was the Australian National Command Element for the Middle East Area of Operations. COMD JTF 633 in 2009 was Major General Mark Kelly and his deputy was Brigadier John Caligari, followed by Brigadier Wayne Budd.

## Structure

The original structure for MRTF-2 was directed to reflect exactly that of MRTF-1, with a single operational mentoring and liaison team (or ‘OMLT’, which was referred to as ‘OMLT-C’) to mentor the ANA’s 2nd Kandak,<sup>6</sup> a single combat team (Combat Team Alpha, or CT-A), a combat engineer squadron (16 Combat Engineer Squadron from 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment), a combat service support company, and a battle group headquarters. Immediately prior to deployment, government decided to increase the force structure of MRTF-2 to enable an increased mentor effect (to be known as OMLT-D) and to provide adequate combat power for operations in support of the national election security tasks (to be known as Combat Team Bravo or CT-B). This represented an increase in personnel and capability of 50 per cent on top of the original MRTF structure.

These additional sub-units commenced their concentration and combined arms training in Townsville as the original elements of the battle group deployed into Uruzgan, making for a challenging first three months in both locations. This incremental reinforcement had a number of effects: equipment was held in operational quarantine between March and May while the National Security Committee of Cabinet decision was being made, causing a shortage of equipment for the original elements to train with; the arrival of CT-B only three weeks before the election led to their rapid introduction to the area of operations at a critical time; and the arrival of OMLT-D after the election left them somewhat dislocated from the experiences of the remainder of the group for a considerable period.<sup>7</sup>

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6 *Kandak* is Afghan for ‘battalion’.

7 With the late decision by the National Security Committee of Cabinet to send a second OMLT (as MRTF-2 commenced deploying), there were very few options for creating one. The well structured and highly qualified 1 RAR rear details element became the basis for the OMLT-D headquarters. There was then little option but for 3 Brigade to form a composite rear details under 2 RAR. This was not a very satisfactory arrangement for the units involved, but the alternatives were equally problematic.



There was never a time where all members of the group were assembled in one location.

By September our strength sat at around 730, with a battle group headquarters, battle group enablers (including mortars and snipers), a diverse and growing intelligence group, and seven sub-units<sup>8</sup> (two OMLTs, two combat teams, a combat engineer squadron, a protected mobility squadron and a combat service support company)<sup>9</sup>—see Figure 1.

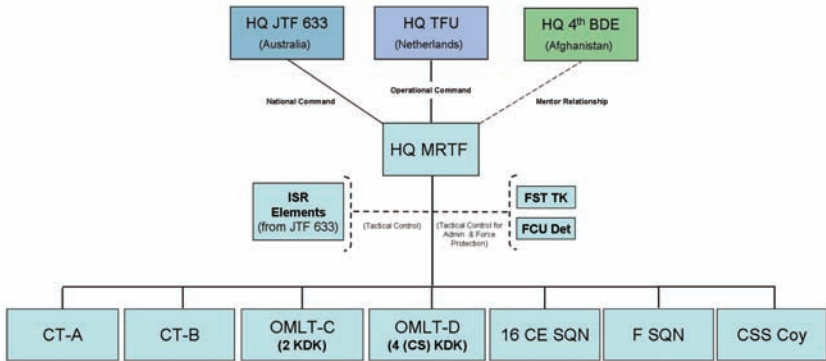


Figure 1: MRTF-2 Structure

- 8 Due to a range of manning caps directed for these different elements, no two sub-units within the battle group had the same structure. The original MRTF operational manning document required CT-A to have nine man rifle and combat engineer sections, inclusive of vehicle crews. For this reason infantry, engineer and artillery soldiers were trained to crew their vehicles within this combat team. If they had been given an armoured corps crew, the section would have been too small to do its job effectively on the ground. When CT-B was created it was capped at 120. Because we had some choice in this structure, I opted for two-man armoured corps vehicle crews and eight-man sections in the back—the minimum acceptable size for infantry and combat engineer sections. This avoided having to train more crews at the last minute. Due to its cap, CT-B only had two platoon groups, while CT-A had three.
- 9 The commanders of these elements were: OC CT-A (Combat Team Alpha) – Major David Trotter; OC CT-B – Major Damien Geary; OC OMLT-C (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team Charlie) – Major Brenton Russell; OC OMLT-D – Major Gordon Wing; OC 16 CE SQN (Combat Engineer Squadron) – Major Scott Davidson; OC F SQN (Protected Mobility Squadron) – Captain Craig Malcolm; OC CSS COY – Captain Cameron Willett; Battery Commander – Major Peter Meakin; Mortar Sergeant – Sergeant Michael Phillips; and Sniper Supervisor (and OC ISR) – Sergeant Brett Kipping.

MRTF-2 handed over to Mentoring Task Force One (MTF-1) in February 2010.<sup>10</sup>

## Philosophy

MRTF-2 pursued four concurrent and interdependent lines of operation as part of a counterinsurgency-oriented mission:

- to **mentor** and build the capability of the 4th Afghan National Army Brigade;
- to **secure** the people;
- to **influence** the population, the insurgency and the coalition; and
- to **develop** infrastructure and capacity within Afghan communities.

These lines described the different aspects of our mission that required resourcing, and provided a useful structure for the weighting and adjustment of main effort and supporting efforts.<sup>11</sup> These are explained below. The prioritisation and synchronisation of resources to achieve specific effects on these lines of operation was achieved through a ‘targeting’ process which considered all resources and effects required to meet the commander’s intent.

The *mentor line* of operations was the main effort of the battle group. All other lines of operation complemented this output, working towards 4th ANA Brigade being capable of conducting independent counterinsurgency operations. The philosophy adopted by MRTF-2 drew heavily from the foundations established by MRTF-1 (7 RAR Battle Group) with the 2nd (Infantry) Kandak. Our two operational mentoring and liaison teams (OMLTs), each consisting of approximately seventy mentors between the ranks of private and major, had the lead on this line. We offered respect

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10 The author handed over to his successor, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Hocking, as CO of both MRTF-2 and 1 RAR at the end of his posting tenure in Tarin Kowt on 12 December 2009.

11 These were derived in specific reference to the MRTF mission, role and area of operations.

for Afghan experience and culture, and reinforced ANA ownership of the operation and the terrain, while at the same time demanding tactical outcomes and professional development. We encouraged the development of patrol plans for normal framework operations from the bottom of the chain of command (generally company level), and involved the ANA brigade and kandak commanders heavily in the planning and execution of all deliberate operations. OMLT-C took over mentoring of the 2nd Kandak from MRTF-1 in seven different patrol base locations. On the arrival of OMLT-D, we commenced the mentoring of the 4th (Combat Support) Kandak, and became closely engaged with Headquarters 4th ANA Brigade to pave the way for this mentoring role to be formalised. This involved CO MRTF developing a close relationship with Commander 4th Brigade, which assisted in building stronger links between the chains of command, enabling close cooperation.

The mentoring mission is frequently misunderstood in Australia. Because it was often referred to as a ‘training’ mission in the media, the domestic audience had the impression we were teaching the ANA in classrooms or ‘secure areas’. In reality, the mission of building the 4th Brigade’s capacity has required Australian OMLTs and combat teams to conduct partnered combat operations with ANA kandaks since the outset of the mission under 7 RAR in October 2008. Due to the aggressiveness of the insurgency and the dispersal of the ANA, we conducted patrols and operations side by side in high-threat areas, seeking to raise Afghan skill levels and achieve an operational effect simultaneously. As part of these activities we also learned from the ANA—particularly about the environment and the people. This mentoring effect was achieved by small groups of Australian soldiers operating independently at small OMLT team level partnered with Afghan patrols of squad to platoon size (on average five to seven Australian mentors with ten to twenty-five Afghans), patrolling out of small ANA patrol bases which were dispersed across the area of operations. This meant that it took much longer to raise skill levels than if we were able to focus on skills in a non-operational training environment.

The *secure* line of operations is a supporting effort to MRTF mentoring objectives. We consistently reinforced and partnered with elements of the 4th ANA Brigade in order to ensure certain tactical preconditions were met on the ground and in doing so reinforce Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) credibility and Afghanistan government legitimacy. Though this line was normally a supporting effort it became the main effort for key objectives such as election security.

At the beginning of the tour, MRTF combat team elements (normally as a platoon group) would often be assigned under tactical control of an OMLT company team commander (normally a captain) to operate in support of a particular ANA company commander. Alternatively an OMLT element could be placed under tactical control of an Australian combat team commander to enable the ANA to operate in support. These mechanisms were exercised in three major deliberate operations. They allowed an extremely successful partnership between MRTF, 2nd Kandak and 4th Kandak, while maintaining the integrity of the Australian chain of command. As the tour progressed, smaller elements (section or platoon minus) were embedded with OMLT elements for longer periods of time. This embedded combat power achieved a reinforcing effect, and better enabled persistent framework operations. It also sought to generate groupings and a footprint similar to those which would subsequently be used under MTF. The generation of confidence and credibility through tactical success was key to establishing a capable new force in a combat environment, and by successfully partnering with the 4th Brigade, MRTF reinforced these objectives.

The *influence* line of operations aimed to develop and maintain a positive perception in the minds of all relevant audiences<sup>12</sup> of the capabilities of the Afghanistan government, the ANSF and ISAF. By developing the trust of the population in the government and the counterinsurgency force,

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12 The local population, the insurgents, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the Afghanistan government, the coalition (International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)), and international and domestic (Australian) audiences.

we sought to separate the insurgents from their support bases. This line of operations emphasised the great importance of soldiers' actions at the local level to influence and convince the people. It also placed importance on cultivating and maintaining strong and positive links with all coalition partners.

This required a well-synchronised information operations capability. The intent was for information operations to drive the way we operated by manipulating the influence line across all other lines of operations. We adopted the philosophy that all of our actions (including manoeuvre, construction and key leader engagement) would influence perceptions for many different audiences. The aim was to ensure that we achieved a positive influence that contributed to the achievement of our objectives and mission, without developing unintended consequences. This was facilitated through the development of a system of human dimension analysis so that we better understood who we were influencing, and the employment of a targeting system to allocate priorities to the generation of key effects (both 'soft' and 'kinetic').

The *develop* line of operations sought the provision of infrastructure, construction related skills and the empowerment of local communities with the aim of enhancing local national support for the Afghanistan government and the ANSF. This is a continuation of the solid framework established by Reconstruction Task Forces One to Four, and was achieved through the integration of MRTF efforts with the Netherlands Provincial Reconstruction Team, AusAID, Afghanistan government agencies and local leadership. This line produced extremely complementary effects to those required by the *influence*, *mentor* and *secure* lines, and was fundamental to the achievement of those objectives as part of a holistic approach to counterinsurgency.

Our ability to advance the *develop* line invariably increased in areas where the other three lines of operation have produced a successful outcome—if the local people trusted the Afghan and Coalition forces, were convinced of their capability to provide security and were actively seeking means

to advance their own community through cooperation and commercial development. This was particularly evident in Tarin Kowt and Sorkh Morghab, and now the South Baluchi Valley and Chora, with potential developing in the Mirabad Valley. The principal means of advancing the *develop* line were the works team, trade training school and the new concept of ‘community mobilisation’. These mechanisms required disproportionately small investments in manpower in return for sizable gains in influence.

The Works Team made large contributions to communities through the development of schools and public works (for which MRTF had a budget of over \$10 million per annum). This effect was well-established through the four rotations of the reconstruction task force between 2006 and 2008 and the investment in capital works was even greater under MRTF 1 and 2. The trade training school trained local youth in various building trades, providing skilled labour for development. The Ministries for Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) and Energy and Water (MEW) were strong supporters of this program, due to a reputation that had developed since the school was established under RTF-1 in 2006. We exported this success ‘outside the wire’ to Chora in the second half of the tour, leaving locally trained instructors to continue work in Tarin Kowt. The vision is to further spread this effect as areas gradually become more permissive.

‘Community mobilisation’ was a concept developed by the combat engineer squadron to fill the capability gap between the efforts of the Netherlands provincial reconstruction team and the MRTF-2 works team (described later under adapted operational techniques), which was implemented in conjunction with our expanding program of clearance and framework patrolling. This became an important tool for generating ‘influence’, particularly in the Baluchi and Mirabad Valleys.

# Operations

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While this section gives focus to two major deliberate operations—election security and securing the Miribad Valley—and the effects they generated, it is important to note that there were three other deliberate operations, and more importantly that the soldiers of MRTF conducted ‘framework operations’ on a daily basis throughout the area of operations. These framework patrols involved OMLT mentors operating with small teams of Afghans at platoon and squad level, combat team elements working at section and platoon group level, and later on armoured elements operating at patrol level. Often these elements combined at the lowest level, and invariably with the support of combat engineers, joint fires teams and medics. It is only through the daily acts of professionalism, dedication, risk and resolve of these soldiers that the battle group was able to achieve the lines of operation described above. Focus is given to these two particular deliberate operations because they best illustrate our techniques and their modification, and were representative of our more substantial achievements. Furthermore, there was considerable employment of normal framework operations within these deliberate operations.

## Election Security

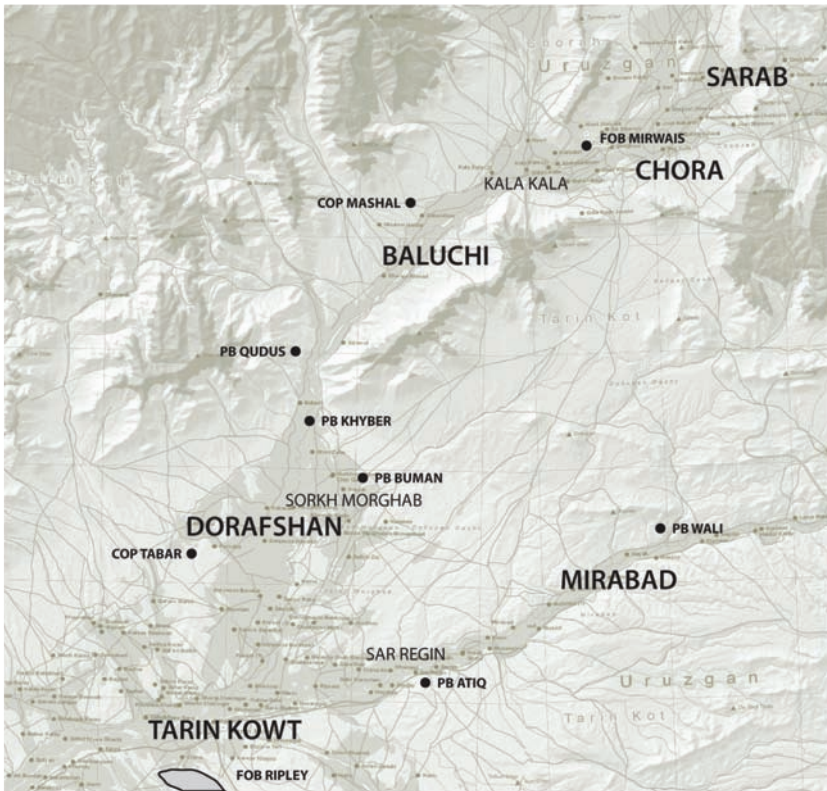
Our first challenge was to provide security to the Afghan national elections. Establishing a role that was acceptable to Task Force Uruzgan, suited 4th ANA Brigade and met our national requirements was difficult. The out-going Commander Task Force Uruzgan (COMD TF-U) intended to use MRTF and 2nd Kandak elements separately. Possible tasks included securing a combat outpost with a combat team, while another was to act as

an air mobile reserve for another province. The situation was complicated by the impending relief in place of the Netherlands battle group on the eve of the elections in Chora. Eventually we were successful in gaining COMD TF-U approval for a more comprehensive course of action based on MRTF providing security in the Chora, Baluchi, Sorkh Morgab and Sar Regin areas because of its mentoring relationship with 2nd Kandak. It was our conduct of Operation TUFANI BABAR (a shaping operation prior to the elections in the Baluchi Valley, Chora and Sarab areas from 7–20 July), in keeping with TF-U requirements, that confirmed this role.

We planned in partnership with 2nd Kandak and in consultation with Commander 4th Brigade far earlier than other elements of the coalition within Uruzgan. The aim was to begin shaping operations well before the elections in order to sufficiently know and influence our environment in time to achieve the optimum result on election day. We conducted operations in partnership with the 2nd Kandak to shape the areas of Sarab, Chora, Baluchi Valley, Sorkh Morghab and West Mirabad in July and then provided security through Operation CRAM GHAR from 6–23 August 2009.

The election security plan involved a system designated by ISAF in which Tier 1 (polling centre security) was to be provided by the Afghan National Police (ANP), Tier 2 (local security) was to be provided by the ANA, Tier 3 (air and ISR support) was provided by ISAF resources and Tier 4 (reinforcement) was to be provided by coalition battle group elements. Emphasis was to be placed on ANSF presence, with coalition forces to be kept out of view within reason. We planned in detail the application of this guidance to the context of Uruzgan with CO 2nd Kandak and Commander 4th Brigade. An ANA/OMLT presence was positioned at platoon level in the vicinity of every polling centre. Accepting that in many cases there would be no ANP, or that they may just arrive on the day, with a limited ability to deal with the threat, the ANA prepared to fill both Tier 1 and 2 roles, and made arrangements as appropriate with local ANP. MRTF was organised in six mounted platoon groups positioned in key locations across the area of operations, within two combat team tactical areas of





Map 1 – MRTF-2 and 2nd Kandak area of operations.

responsibility (CT-A in Kala Kala, Chora and Sarab, and CT-B in Baluchi, Sorkh Morgah and Sar Regin).

CO 2nd Kandak and I agreed on a series of scenarios that would require reinforcement of the local ANA commander under Tier 2, and some extreme situations that would require transition to Tier 4 with the relevant MRTF combat team commander becoming the supported commander. We agreed to command jointly from a tactical command post in Patrol Base Buman, on the edge of Sorkh Morgah, from which we could coordinate such reinforcements as required on the day. These scenarios and



2nd Kandak/ MRTF-2 Pre-Election ROC Drill, Headquarters 2nd Kandak, Chora, 18 August 2009.

coordination measures were confirmed in a rehearsal of concept drill held at Headquarters 2nd Kandak in Chora on the evening of 18 August.

These operations allowed in the order of two thousand Afghans to participate in democratic elections on 20 August 2009 in our area of operations without loss of life. On the day, under international scrutiny through our embedded media, we withstood large amounts of 107mm rocket fire, which we responded to with 81mm mortars or 25mm cannon in Sarab, Sorkh Morghab and Sar Regin. The insurgents were prevented from getting into any of our fifteen polling centres to detonate their suicide bombs. However, the shaping phase had come at a price with the battle group suffering one killed in action (KIA) and ten wounded in action (WIA) and the ANA suffering four KIA and four WIA within the 2nd Kandak area of operations during MRTF-2's first two months on the ground.

## Securing the Mirabad Valley

When I first met Brigadier General Abdul Hamid during a reconnaissance in June 2008, he expressed a desire to expand 4th Brigade's sphere of influence to the east. On receipt of a third infantry kandak he sought to clear the Mirabad Valley, and place the new kandak in a series of patrol bases spreading beyond Charmestan to Khas Uruzgan. In the course of preparing for the elections, he actually received his 3rd Kandak, but the complexity of well-meaning national interests within the coalition led to a lengthy discourse on who should establish the new kandak's area of operations.

Task Force Uruzgan was enthusiastic to see the eastern axis cleared and the kandak inserted to extend the Afghan Development Zone east of Tarin Kowt, but did not have the resources in their three-company battle group. Task Force 31 (US Special Forces) were keen to extend ANA influence up the valley to reduce the isolation of their forward operating base at Khas Uruzgan, and were prepared to make it happen, but there was disagreement as to whether the kandak would be Netherlands or US mentored. Ultimately we knew that the 3rd Kandak and the Mirabad area of operations were to become Australian mentored under MTF-1, and that it was in Australia's interest to have a Mirabad patrol base established by MRTF-2 before MTF took on the role of mentoring the whole 4th Brigade. Finally, the shaping



Reconnaissance of the Mirabad Valley for Operation BAZ PANJE.

of the valley had commenced with some mentored and partnered ANA company operations involving major contacts by MRTF-1 in March 2009, and was followed by some well-designed and resourced screening and counter-leadership operations by the SOTG in July and August 2009.

Given this context it became evident that a partnered operation between MRTF and 4th Brigade elements was the most likely solution, but it took lengthy coalition negotiations to have this confirmed. During this time we remained closely engaged with all parties and planning groups, but took the ‘CO’s TAC’<sup>13</sup> (Tactical Headquarters) on a series of reconnaissance patrols as far east as Charmeston, Now Joy, Nayak and Sorkh Lez from the north and the south. Having surveyed the ground, the sites and the routes to access them, we presented the options to Commander 4th Brigade and Commander Task Force Uruzgan. In doing so we generated the leverage to influence the decision.

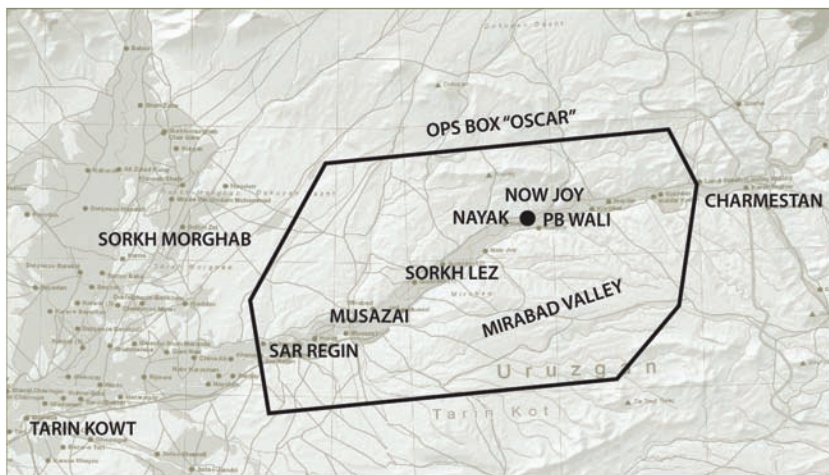
The result was a battle group operation called Operation BAZ PANJE (Falcon’s Talon) in the Mirabad Valley that we conducted in partnership with both the 2nd and 4th Kandaks. The aim of the operation was to clear and dominate the valley, then build a large patrol base for a new ANA infantry kandak in order to allow ANA influence to spread to the east, in accordance with Commander 4th ANA Brigade’s intent.

We were successful in seizing the initiative throughout the valley, frustrating the enemy and slowly winning the trust of the local people. The operation commenced 24 September and Patrol Base Wali was completed at Now Joy in December.

The operation commenced as a large battle group clearance which was closely coordinated with and supported by SOTG who provided special reconnaissance several days prior to the insertion of MRTF ISR elements

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13 A grouping of two light armoured vehicles and three Bushmasters with a combat engineer section, and generally escorted by a rifle section under command of a cavalry troop commander. Normally it would carry the CO and his team (BC, RSM, Sig and one or two others) on battlefield circulations (visiting dispersed elements in patrol bases or on patrol).



Map 2 – Area of operations for Operation BAZ PANJE

and then handed over to them. The next day a command/offensive support/logistics node was established in the centre of ‘Operations Box Oscar’ on the high ground north-west of Nayak, based on the CO’s TAC, two sections of mortars and elements of the CSS company. From the 25 September elements of Combat Teams A and B, and 2nd Company of the 2nd Kandak were inserted onto the edge of the valley using a combination of airmobile (with US Blackhawks from Task Force Wolfpack) and mounted insertion, and moved considerable distances on foot into the green zone at various points along its length. Gradually over two days the platoon groups and company headquarters found appropriate locations where they could stay for a short period in the green zone and conduct a high tempo of clearance and engagement with the local population through a steady series of *shuras*<sup>14</sup> and key leader engagements. The clearance limited the Taliban’s freedom of manoeuvre and separated them from any support within the local population. At first we maintained sizeable gaps between platoon locations,

14 Pashtun term for a meeting, generally of elders.





CO's *shura* with elders from Mirabad Valley, Now Joy, 30 October 2009.

which were closely watched from sniper and light armoured vehicle (LAV) positions on the high ground to the south of the valley to enable the precise engagement of any attempt at a counter-attack. This initial phase sought to shape and destroy any threat that remained in the valley by providing them with spaces where they were not overtly threatened, and attempting to bring them above the detection threshold by presenting them with apparently small groupings. Over the following days, these gaps were filled as more platoon groups were inserted into the valley. The companies and platoons saturated the valley with small, unpredictable dismounted patrols over a long period of time (discussed in the Adapted Operational Techniques section shortly).<sup>15</sup>

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15 This scheme of manoeuvre was designed by the XO, Major Anthony Swinsburg and developed by S5 Major Roger McMurray.

The Taliban were confronted with a dilemma: they could either rise above the detection threshold to counter this domination (in which case they would probably be destroyed) or surrender the initiative, and with it access to a very large number of weapon caches in what had been considered a Taliban safe haven only six months before. After slightly less than two weeks, when the clear phase had established dominance over the valley, we reduced our footprint to a sustainable level of an Australian company (minus) and an ANA company (minus). This was judged sufficient to maintain the appropriate level of domination and protection while the Australian and Afghan engineers commenced the sizeable task of building a large patrol base on the edge of the green zone.

The site selected for the patrol base was the preference of Commander 4th Brigade out of approximately eight sites that were reconnoitered.<sup>16</sup> It was half way between the US preference in the east (Charmeston) and the Dutch preference in the west (Musazai—which was within three kilometres of the already existing Patrol Base Atiq at Sar Regin that had been built by the Dutch in March 2009). The intent was to build a base large enough to house an ANA company plus an additional platoon, along with partnered coalition forces. This would enable the new kandak to influence a significant portion of its area of operations without being dissipated and fixed in several smaller patrol bases. Such a large base could support two elements deployed on long range patrol in the valley, while one was being trained inside the base, and yet more personnel could be on leave (the concept of a proper ‘red-yellow-green cycle’ which is discussed later in this paper).

It was on flat ground (which made for an easier build) on the very edge of the green zone. The base was designed to allow ANSF/Coalition forces to easily access the complex terrain without being seen from a distance,

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16 OC 16 CE SQN (Major Scott Davidson) and the S5 (Major Roger McMurray) participated in the recons and provided specialist advice, which was further enhanced by the detailed site recon conducted by the construction troop during the actual operation. The final decision to build north of the river on the edge of the green zone was made by Brigadier General Hamid.

enabling our forces to more readily protect and influence the population and to dominate the enemy. It was accessible to the local population, allowing them to provide information and relate to the ANA without being easily identified. This stood in contrast to most other patrol bases in the area of operations which were built on steep hills—easier to defend but isolated from the community, allowing patrols to be easily observed a long time before they entered the green zone, and therefore less capable of dominating the enemy. It could be accessed by overland routes through the *dasht* (desert) from the north, and had its own helicopter landing zone adjacent to the patrol base which was over-watched by an ANA standing patrol position on high ground to the immediate north. The site was a compromise on many levels, but ultimately was chosen to generate a persistent and dismounted Afghan Army presence in the green zone along the entire length of the Mirabad Valley.



Patrol Base Wali (from the North) under construction at Now Joy, October 2009.

The operation involved an ANA infantry company (from 2nd Kandak) in establishing the security footprint, and the ANA engineer company from 4th Kandak in constructing a significant portion of the patrol base. The end result was the installation of a large, functional ANA patrol base in a



dominating position in the Mirabad green zone, with good access to the people and the complex terrain. This is an enduring counterinsurgency effect.

## **Adapting with the Threat**

In the months preceding our arrival, MRTF-1 had experienced a new threat in the Baluchi Valley: there had been a number of WIA due to low metal content pressure plate improvised explosive devices (PPIEDs) targeting vehicles and some rapidly emplaced remote control IEDs (RCIEDs) targeting dismounted mentoring patrols. The incidence of these attacks increased dramatically during our first month on the ground: this was the height of the ‘fighting season’ and the month immediately preceding the Afghan national presidential elections. It was also a time where MRTF expanded its ‘sphere of influence’ through increasing the radius of mentored dismounted patrols and eventually increasing the amount of combat power and the partnered footprint with the ANA on the ground.

The first serious casualties were from the crew of an engineer Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle (PMV)<sup>17</sup> that was destroyed while following its search team on 7 July, the first day of Operation TUFANI BABAR. The section had been unable to detect the IED due to the equipment available at the time. Less than two weeks later Private Ben Ranaudo was killed and Private Paul Warren was seriously wounded by a low metal content anti-personnel mine which triggered a sizeable IED while they were participating in a dismounted combat team cordon and search to the southwest of Kala Kala. During the following month we lost four more PMVs to low metal content PPIEDs. We were extremely lucky there was no loss of life and only relatively minor wounds from a long stream of poorly employed or constructed RCIEDs used against dismounted patrols, several

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17 Lance Corporal Tim Loch and Sapper Ivan Pavlovic of 3 CER. Both returned to Australia for treatment, one via Germany.

of which were part of complex attacks (supported by machine guns and rocket propelled grenades from different directions with the aim of shaping our reactions).

Such experiences early in the tour caused us to review and to question our techniques. In retrospect this was a healthy process. It was critical at this early stage for the soldiers to see their commanders (from the CO down) share the risk with them on patrol, and for those commanders to take the lessons learned from participating in platoon and OMLT patrols to generate plans, techniques and structures that addressed both the threat and the environment. It was also critical for the soldiers to believe in what they were doing and to be confident that they were using the best techniques and equipment. The sappers were the hardest hit—the sheer frustration caused by the difficulty of finding the threat combined with the high tempo demanded of them by the situation resulted in exhaustion. The vehicle crews were stretched by the heightened expectation of the threat. The soldiers conducting dismounted patrols from both the OMLT and the combat teams (largely infantry, artillery, engineers and medics) were frustrated by taking casualties from this unseen threat and often being unable to retaliate. However, all took it in their stride, maintaining strong battle discipline. This resilience was incredibly important to the achievement of our mission. We continued to dominate the terrain, refusing to yield initiative to the Taliban, and at the same time demonstrated our commitment to supporting the ANA and protecting the Afghan people. The perception of our actions was a delicate matter as the national elections loomed in the near future, and the ‘optics’ could influence the confidence of both the ANSF and the local population.

Importantly, we conducted routine and critical reviews of our tactics, techniques and procedures to enable an adaptive and agile response to changes in the enemy’s methods. This was central to both enhancing our tactical effectiveness and improving our force protection. The most important technique to assist us in surviving this threat and maintaining our momentum was the employment of good ‘battle cunning’—to be as

unpredictable as possible, and to be capable of rapid and aggressive close combat when required. It was through the difficulty of this early experience that we really pushed the process of adapting our methods in order to prevail. It was important to not be a slave to prescriptive tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), such as those for obstacle crossing or searching vulnerable points, given the assumption that the enemy was always watching our reactions, gauging our distances and noting our crossing points.

This need is always a challenge when soldiers are trained for and deployed to an unfamiliar environment with a new threat. It takes time for everyone to know the environment well enough to feel confident in adjusting the TTPs from the original template to what is required specific to the situation at that point in time and space. This makes the first weeks of a deployment a dangerous time, but a rite of passage that everyone needs to pass through in order to be operationally effective. Anything we can do to advance this level of awareness prior to deployment should be done, and it is not something that is achieved in a single mission rehearsal exercise. It calls for a long period of combined arms mission specific training, with an advanced application of simulation technology. We are a long way from achieving this in the ADF at present.

Our dismounted patrols would regularly, and at times radically, change direction and means of movement to frustrate the Taliban who continued to lay IEDs along predicted paths. The focus of all members on the environment around them was crucial, and the feeling for the environment possessed by some ANA soldiers was at times a decisive factor. The OMLT patrols in the Baluchi Valley were the most extreme example—frequently experiencing complex attacks, and playing a game of ‘cat and mouse’ with RCIED layers almost daily. On one OMLT-C patrol<sup>18</sup> in August near Qal’eh-ye Now, the ANA commander’s decision to shoot in the vicinity of where he thought an Afghan was hiding in a corn field caused the Taliban to abandon an RCIED they were about to detonate on a mentored patrol. While

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18 Team 3 commanded by Captain Duncan Foster.



Team 3 OMLT-C and 2nd Kandak platoon on patrol near Qaleh-ye Now, 12 August 2009. From front: Lance Corporal Alex Clahane, Captain Duncan Foster with interpreter, ANA Commander. Corporal Dallas Ward and Private Kyle Harris are with the forward ANA section. Sergeant Stephen Prangell and Private Luke Reading are in depth.

OMLT members were alarmed by the *Zabet's*<sup>19</sup> actions, they were thankful for the results. During a patrol from CT-B east of Sar Regin in September the section commander,<sup>20</sup> having noticed the soil ahead was muddy, crossed to the other side of an irrigation ditch his section was patrolling near, and shortly afterwards five of them were knocked unconscious by a large IED on the other side of the canal. This IED would have had far more serious consequences if they had been more predictable.

We reduced the employment of armoured vehicles in overwatch, to make them less predictable, at times keeping them in dead ground or

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19 Dari term for senior non-commissioned officer.

20 Corporal Robert Dean.

planning on the use of other direct or indirect fire support (if required) for legs of specific missions. This was particularly important in the Baluchi Valley, where the Taliban had responded to years of Australian TTPs by placing large numbers of IEDs on most of the favoured support by fire locations.

We experimented with methods of exerting a more persistent dismounted presence within the green zones in order to better protect and influence the local population, and to disrupt and isolate the Taliban. This method was not easy due to the characteristics of the local culture and rural terrain. It took form in the post-election period and was then used to considerable effect in the Mirabad Valley from September onwards.

One of the greatest concerns as the elections approached was the enemy's plan to proliferate suicide bombers (SIEDs) in populated areas—specifically to target polling centres. The best weapon against this threat is well trained and inquisitive Afghan soldiers. Unfortunately four members of 3rd Kandak were killed and three wounded to an SIED in the Chora Bazaar two days before the elections, when they had their guard down. On the day, however, the ANA were extremely effective. The Taliban were evidently extremely frustrated by their inability to get through the ANA



OMLT-C patrol through Chora Bazaar in November 2009. The site of the SIED blast on 18 August (which killed four soldiers from 3rd Kandak) was to the right of the motorbike.

cordons, and resorted to stand-off attack with a large number of 107mm rockets being fired in the vicinity of several patrol bases and polling centres throughout the 2nd Kandak area of operations to no effect. None of the reported SIEDs in the area were employed and there were no ANSF or civilian casualties.

The final cycle of enemy activity was in response to the clearance and domination of the Mirabad Valley in Operation BAZ PANJE. We had developed a method of inserting dismounted platoon groups (both Afghan and Australian) into key locations, where they would 'rent' or occupy a local *q'ala*, and sustaining them in location for up to two months.

The section and platoon minus patrols were then able to dominate the terrain, significantly influence and know the locals, and create a substantial dilemma for the Taliban. The enemy were isolated from local support, forced to change their own methods of movement and resupply, and eventually resorted to stand-off attack due to the unpredictable nature of movement of the multiple dismounted patrols. The most noteworthy metric was that through the use of these techniques, over fifty caches were discovered within a small area over two and a half months—including anti-armoured weapons, ammunition and large quantities of IED components. The enemy's preference for command wire improvised explosive devices (CWIED) was generally defeated by patrol techniques (fifteen were discovered and disarmed over two and half months), and by the employment of combat engineers in small numbers (often just a pair behind the scouts and commander) on dismounted patrols. The enemy eventually resorted to stand-off small arms attack, having lost a large share of their firepower and supplies for the winter months. Thus, on a local level, MRTF-2 seized the initiative in a valley that had formerly been regarded a safe haven and established a persistent ANSF presence to maintain that effect. Such experience of success is essential for the ANSF to become a competent and credible force. Only by building on this experience will the Afghan Army become capable of independently conducting the counterinsurgency.

# Adapted Operational Techniques

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The battle group adapted a number of different methods of operation in search of the optimal effects to prosecute the counterinsurgency and in response to developments in the threat. These modifications to tactics, techniques and procedures were born of the desire to better understand, influence and protect the people, and in doing so to dominate the enemy and deny them support.

## 1. Dispersed Operations

By establishing outposts in *q'alas* and saturating the area with unpredictable section and platoon group patrols we could take the fight to an increasingly elusive and IED-dependent enemy, while also living amongst the people to gain their trust. My feeling had always been that by empowering the section commander to operate within the platoon commander's sphere of influence, giving each a measure of autonomy, we would get our best results against the Taliban. While Australians have used this technique of dispersed operations in past counterinsurgencies, it was relatively new in Uruzgan and many other high-threat areas of Afghanistan. Due to the level of the threat it had been normal to view the platoon group with its integral vehicles to be the smallest unit of action (with these not remaining in the green zone for any significant period of time). This has generally been the case for conventional and special forces.

When considering the conduct of dispersed operations in a high-threat battlespace like Afghanistan, it is important to keep in mind that such a technique can only succeed while the enemy is operating at a low level of concentration (which is currently the norm), and the level of threat





Elements of CT-A moving between *q'alas* in Barakzai, July 2009.

must be actively monitored for change at all times.<sup>21</sup> As with all operational techniques, the required level of force concentration is the judgement of the commander, and the threat needs to be assessed continually and assumptions tested. Furthermore, it would appear that it is only when the enemy is reduced to a level of threat that allows the counterinsurgent force to operate in smaller concentrations itself that the population is able to be significantly influenced by the counterinsurgent.

To lodge a platoon in the green zone for up to six weeks, enabling it to dominate a specified area with platoon minus and section patrols, ambushes and observation posts, required a number of conditions to be set.

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21 There were times back in 2006 when a sub-unit was considered the smallest viable unit of action in provinces like Kandahar because the enemy was prepared to swarm in much higher numbers and employ 'semi-conventional' tactics. This was particularly an issue for the Canadians in Kandahar and the British in Helmand around the time of Operation MEDUSA in August–December 2006.





Corporal Adam Churchward leads his section patrol from 2 Platoon back into the platoon house at Sorkh Lez.

- First, the platoon commander needed cash. The green zone is a sea of man-made properties—there is nowhere you can adopt a platoon harbour. The answer is to ‘rent’ a *q’ala* (which is easier said than done). This funding line had to be applied for and approved by the national chain of command.
- The second condition was logistics—water and food needed to be plentiful enough to allow them to stay. We managed to get hold of a large number of water purification kits as an emergency measure (noting the irrigation canals were not something soldiers particularly wanted to drink from) and found that with money platoons could normally buy good local fruit and bread to supplement their diet.
- The third was the appropriate groupings to fight and win in close combat. Platoon groups took their joint fire teams, combat engineer sections and medic/combat first aiders with them dismounted in the green zone. Availability of offensive support from mortars or direct

fire support from aviation (normally US attack or reconnaissance helicopters) or light armoured vehicles in overwatch was carefully coordinated, particularly in the early stages of the clearance before we became familiar with the environment.

- Fourth, communications were essential to ensure fire support, casualty evacuation and resupply. A system was developed using joint fire team data systems to enable use of data communications. This was particularly useful (when it worked) to send patrol report details (including ‘atmospherics’ of the local population) up the chain of command.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was the availability of mobility to insert, resupply and extract these groupings from the green zone. This led to the regrouping of armoured assets. It also required more creative solutions.

*Q’alas* were selected for occupation by considering the following principles: providing presence and support to permissive areas, demonstrating persistence and resolve to non-permissive areas, interdicting



Lance Bombardier Yannick Fitzsimmons (Joint Fires Observer) and Corporal Dane Jeffries (Combat Engineer Section Commander) patrolling as members of the 2 Platoon Group in Sarab.

insurgent lines of communication and supply, and disrupting the insurgent network. Targeting known insurgent safe houses and support nodes for occupation as platoon houses presented the advantage of disrupting insurgent freedom of action while demonstrating coalition force presence within a population zone. These counterinsurgency-oriented considerations had to be carefully balanced with the traditional principles of defence and offense.



Private Luc Mathery of 5 Platoon conducts resupply by ATV for the platoon house at Sorkh Lez (left). Chinook at Now Joy (right).

The original concept was to regularly move between locations within the green zone approximately every 48 hours or so. Unfortunately the effort of finding a location acceptable to the local population and then establishing supplies was in practice so extensive that platoon houses were secured for significantly longer periods. This involved some risk, but was mitigated by active and disciplined patrolling, and dedicated engagement with the local community to develop high levels of situational awareness and control. During Operation BAZ PANJE, this was proven to be a worthwhile approach, where the benefits outweighed (and mitigated) the risks.

However, as mentioned earlier, it is critical to continually scan the environment and update the commander's assessment on this balance.<sup>22</sup>

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22 In the summer of 2006, 3 PARA found that such an approach was not successful when faced with large concentrations of enemy in Now Zad and Musa Qala in Helmand Province. These forces lacked the numbers and fire power to dominate the terrain and the threat, and to influence the population.

The experiences in Kandahar and Helmand in 2006 and 2007 suggest that in those cases it was necessary to first deal with the threat by using larger concentrations of coalition forces with greater manoeuvre and firepower to reduce the threat, before then using smaller, more dispersed forces and to introduce greater numbers of mentored indigenous forces. Such progress enables more open engagement and influence with the local population. The use of multiple ‘satelliting’ small team patrols denies the insurgent the ability to coordinate a complex attack and swarm an isolated element.

Our ability to conduct the kind of dispersed operations described above rests heavily on the imagination, independence, toughness and resilience of our people. In particular, the high calibre of our junior commanders (both JNCOs and officers) enables us to employ directive control.<sup>23</sup> I have found that given latitude they don’t just demonstrate competence—they positively thrive on the challenge of independence, and the opportunity to employ their battle cunning. This often means that by employing smaller groupings with a smaller, less recognisable footprint, we can achieve better results in gaining the initiative by finding more caches or out-manoeuving



A pair of OH58-D reconnaissance helicopters from Task Force Wolfpack, near Sorkh Lez.

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23 It should be noted that for certain missions section commanders were required to lead large and complex patrols—at times these could number over twenty members, with several specialisations to be understood and employed.

the enemy. This has been the experience through several generations of the Australian Army and is often mentioned as part of our legend, but it is interesting to note that soldiers from other nations quickly recognise this when they work closely with Australian soldiers today.

Fundamental to the conduct of dispersed operations was the availability of offensive support and other key enablers. The battle group was allocated joint fire teams on a scale of one per platoon. This enabled each platoon to operate independently from its combat team headquarters and still ensure access to offensive support. Some issues were encountered with this manning as there was no redundancy when platoons were conducting independent operations or in the smaller OMLT locations. This also required careful planning when the platoon was conducting dispersed section operations. They were able to use the high volume of passing coalition air to great effect when required, along with the Dutch 155mm artillery (when in range and available) and the attack aviation capabilities of the US Task Force Wolfpack (who were always keen to assist).



LAVs '0E' and '0D' overwatch a reconnaissance of Charmeston, September 2009.



It was of particular importance to be able to rely on our own organic assets in an emergency or when other coalition assets were tasked elsewhere. These included three sections of two 81mm mortars and four sniper pairs, as well as personnel trained to employ the .50 cal machine gun and 40mm automatic grenade launcher. Furthermore, we were well equipped with the Type I LAV with its 25mm cannon and extremely effective sensors. The mortars and LAVs proved their worth on election day when the Taliban conducted stand-off attacks with 107mm rockets—in three different locations these two weapon systems were engaged in rocket points of origin to remove the threat. During quieter periods, preserving the employment of mortars (including bedding-in and illumination missions) only for situations of clear and present threat minimised negative effects on the population and reinforced the Taliban's fear of their reach, lethality and responsiveness.



Lance Corporal Chris Freeman and Private Simon Harding fire their 81mm Mortar at a Taliban rocket point of origin near Sarab on election day, 20 August 2009.

Having snipers as an organic intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability who were also capable of surgical kills in the populated green zone was invaluable. They were employed extensively on patrols within the green zone to ‘satellite’ the supported patrol and remain offset from the main body to look for RC/CW IED ‘trigger men’. Snipers were specifically employed for counter-IED operations, and to contribute a layer of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance for major deliberate operations, such as Operation BAZ PANJE. The snipers developed a close relationship with their Dutch counterparts, allowing them to form several combined quads. These were of great utility on deliberate operations as quads were more sustainable and afforded better force protection.



Snipers Corporal Nathan Bick, Private Adam Fooks and Private Brian Siebert move into position near Sarab.

This range of specialist organic assets gave the battle group a degree of flexibility, lethality and range that it could not have achieved by relying on external assets alone.

Some of these ‘modifications’ are far from new, but are tried and proven techniques used by Australian soldiers in previous counterinsurgency

campaigns conducted in complex environments. In particular, the conduct of dispersed operations to make the most of our capabilities and commanders at section and platoon level were used when appropriate in Malaya, Vietnam, Somalia and East Timor. These modifications have better allowed us to seize the initiative in a ‘war amongst the people’ as we sought to enable the success of the ANA in their counterinsurgency.

## **Regrouping**

As we had experimented with these dispersed operational techniques in the Baluchi Valley in August and September, I was conscious of the fact that many vehicles were not well employed when their dismounts were spending longer periods in the green zone. Furthermore, in the situations where they tried to contribute through provision of overwatch, we were becoming predictable to the Taliban, and we had lost a considerable number of vehicles in July and August because of this. Finally, with the addition of an extra combat team and an extra OMLT to our order of battle, our armoured vehicle fleet had become close to 100, and needed to be managed carefully.

For these reasons, we regrouped<sup>24</sup> our armoured crews and vehicles (both LAV and Bushmaster) into what we called ‘F SQN’ under Captain Craig Malcolm from B SQN, 3/4 Cavalry Regt.<sup>25</sup> Patrols from this new sub-unit were tasked with providing mobility, screening, support by fire and resupply tasks. This resulted in far more efficient usage of vehicles, noting that only a portion of MRTF needed to be lifted at any one time (F SQN was still able to lift up to two thirds of the battle group simultaneously if necessary). This allowed mounted operations to be independent of the dismounted elements simultaneously operating in the green zone. However,

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24 This decision was taken after close consultation with the armoured corps officers and SNCOs.

25 With the assistance of experienced members of B SQN and 2 Cav Regt including Captain Rhys Ashton, Warrant Officer Class Two Glenn Armstrong, Sergeant Haydn Penola, Sergeant Beau St Leone, Sergeant Ben Horton and Sergeant Heath Clayton.



platoon groups could still be re-grouped with their original vehicles for roles such as battle group reserve, work site protection or convoy escort that required movement over longer distances.



Lance Corporal Aaron Hamden manoeuvres his Type I ASLAV on the outskirts of the Mirabad Valley.

## Counter-IED Operations

Our searchers fought an arduous CIED battle against rapidly evolving IED methods, and experimented with new technology. Given that this is our primary cause of casualties, it is incredibly important that these technologies continue to be developed and improved to create an edge against the threat for our operations. Significant inroads have been made in the procurement of enhanced technology for the detection of IEDs in the year since our deployment. This is an area we must continue to invest in. While the threat continues, it is also very important that sufficient combat engineers are included in the deployed force (be it MTF or SOTG) to enable rest and rotation cycles and avoid combat fatigue.



Bushmaster PMV moving to overwatch position on the edge of Baluchi Valley.

The techniques used to search for IEDs were amended throughout the deployment as the threat evolved and the battle group expanded into new areas. Insurgent IED TTPs were researched before deploying into new areas, and reviews of their evolving TTPs were conducted continually. If necessary, the combat engineers would amend their search techniques, and advise on amendments to mounted and dismounted patrol techniques to reduce the risk from IEDs. These modified techniques were coupled with the introduction of additional counter-IED equipment, obtained through rapid acquisition following submission of operational user requirements.



Combat engineers Lance Corporal Phil Grazier (with explosive detection dog ‘Jeb’) and Sapper Marc Plant moving as part of a dismounted CT-A patrol in the Baluchi Valley in July 2009.

## 2. Mentoring and Partnering

We followed the mentoring philosophy of respect first, establishment of rapport second, and then patience in pursuing the outcome. During our first two months as we prepared to support ANA election security, we conducted a review of the ISAF certification and training systems for the ANA. Headquarters OMLT-C quickly assessed that there was a significant gap between what was referred to as ‘CM 3’ (Capability Milestone 3 – kandak elements individually trained and deployed in their patrol bases) and our next goal of ‘CM 2’ (Capability Milestone 2 – independent kandak operations). They developed a system to certify intermediary steps or building blocks to move from CM 3 to CM 2.<sup>26</sup> This system was well regarded by the Dutch and French mentors, but more importantly by Commander ANA Brigade, and was therefore adopted across the 4th Brigade. It became very clear that the endstate of the mentoring mission must be ‘conditions based’.



Captain Jim Masters, Commander Team 2 OMLT-C, with Zabet Wasim of 2<sup>nd</sup> Coy 2<sup>nd</sup> Kdk, Mirabad, October 2009.

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26 Warrant Officer Class Two Mark Retallick (CSM OMLT-C) and OC OMLT-C (Major Brenton Russell) developed a four-stage approach which included platoon and company collective capability and kandak planning at all levels as pre-requisites to independent kandak operations.

During the tour, MRTF-2 expanded the Australian ‘mentoring footprint’ in Afghanistan. This included the commencement of mentoring the 4th Kandak, and the commencement of influence on Headquarters 4th Brigade. This allowed us to combine the bottom-up patrol planning in the kandaks with top-down direction of priorities and deliberate plans. We partnered successfully with 2nd Kandak for the election security operations in August and reinforced ANA primacy at both kandak and brigade level for that operation. We then supervised the commencement of 4th Kandak developing their specialist skills post election, and supported their command of a successful brigade resupply convoy to Kandahar under the mentorship of OMLT-D.<sup>27</sup> Elements of both kandaks (2 COY 2nd Kandak and ENGR COY 4th Kandak) partnered successfully with MRTF in the conduct of Operation BAZ PANJE between late September and December 2009 to clear the areas of Now Joy and Sorkh Lez in the Mirabad Valley and then



Sapper Glenn Memery Team 3 OMLT-D with an Askar of  
4th Kandak Engineer Company.

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27 Operation TOR GHAR 15–19 November 2009 – 4th and 5th Kandak/OMLT-D resupply convoy to Kandahar.

build Patrol Base Wali for 1 COY 3rd Kandak. This saw the ANA engineers involved in a major construction task at troop level for the first time.

I developed a strong relationship with Brigadier General Hamid, who was very appreciative of Australian operational and mentoring techniques and our support to his primacy within his area of operations. The conduct of Operation BAZ PANJE in accordance with his intent for the expansion of his brigade's area of operations was particularly appreciated. We developed an informal but influential mentoring connection with Headquarters 4th Brigade in preparation for the mentoring task force (MTF) to be formally tasked as their mentors. The OMLT-D headquarters was given this task and became closely involved with Headquarters 4th Brigade from September onwards.<sup>28</sup> They made some significant inroads in establishing operational planning and the employment of the ANA chain of command.

Two fundamental steps are required to advance the capability of the 4th Brigade to the level Australia seeks to deliver. The first of these is the consolidation of mentoring continuity throughout the brigade. This has commenced with the subordination of all mentoring tasks across the province to one headquarters—the mentoring task force. It should not be long before we start to see the benefits of being able to develop the command and logistics systems across the brigade (each of which have considerable obstacles to be negotiated) and the standardisation of training and SOPs within all units.

The second is the reorganisation of dispositions on the ground to enable a proper 'red-yellow-green' cycle.<sup>29</sup> Currently the 4th Brigade is too dispersed to achieve any effective concentration of force, with its troops spread thinly across too many patrol bases, conducting combat operations on a daily basis with little or no opportunity to train in between, and extremely limited opportunities to take leave. The 2nd Kandak was a good

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28 Major Gordon Wing, Captain Rob Newton, and Warrant Officer Class Two Adrian Hodges were instrumental in establishing these connections.

29 The concept by which some soldiers can be on leave (red), some in training (yellow) and some conducting operations (green) simultaneously.



example of this, with seven patrol bases for its three rifle companies. We fought hard to ‘rationalise’ the number of patrol bases by building larger ones which allowed greater concentration (such as Patrol Base Wali for a company plus) and seeking to hand over smaller or less effective ones to the ANP as they develop their capabilities. Unfortunately there were a number of significant obstacles to such change in 2009, but it appears that this concept has gradually gained momentum over the past twelve months. When the kandaks are able to work out of no more than three to four bases each, they will have a better structure for training, leave and operations. Of fundamental importance, they will be capable of concentrating their forces where they need to and developing freedom of manoeuvre where they choose to in the conduct of operations.



An Askar from 2nd Coy 2nd Kdk near Sorkh Lez, October 2009.

### 3. Influence

#### Human Dimension Analysis

We sought to achieve a far deeper level of understanding of the human dimension of our area of operations in order to achieve a greater influence over the counterinsurgency. This requirement started with the questions I asked of the S2<sup>30</sup> during an Afghanistan-focused ABCA (American, British, Canadian and Australian) exercise in Germany in 2008:<sup>31</sup> ‘who really holds the power at the local level?’, ‘how do we isolate the insurgents from the population?’, ‘which buttons do we need to press to get the right result?’ and ‘what are the second and third order effects of those actions?’ At the time we developed an information operations capability and a targeting cycle for use in Afghanistan (which continued to develop throughout the deployment). The requirement for greater knowledge of the human dimension led to the development of a human dimension analysis working group which met daily under the S2, but the team lacked the dedicated intelligence capability to focus on the problem. We therefore requested a DSTO operational analysis team from JTF 633 as we deployed into theatre, and later, a DIO analyst. This team set about trying to create a database of human dimension information for MRTF.

This initiative required feeding detailed information from the ground through patrol reports. This led to the production of the HAC (Human Atmospherics Card) by our PSYOPS Detachment.<sup>32</sup> This laminated palm

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30 Major Nerolie MacDonald from Headquarters 3 Brigade.

31 Exercise COOPERATIVE SPIRIT in Hohenfels saw the principal staff of MRTF assembled for the first time, in an ‘ANZAC battle group’ consisting of a company of 1 RAR soldiers and a company from 2/1st RNZIR. This was an important test bed for our counterinsurgency philosophy. We worked alongside Canadian, British and US forces, all of whom were destined to operate in Afghanistan. Sadly, the then CO of 2 RCR was killed in Afghanistan in early 2010. The new CO of the Welsh Guards (who assumed command after the ex) was also killed in Helmand during our tour.

32 The HAC was designed by Warrant Officer Class Two Gary Hopper, who operated for a long time in the Mirabad Valley as part of an information operations team, where he tested and adjusted his product.

card which had eight standard questions, each of which had three possible answers, to be completed by every patrol regardless of its size. These relatively simple responses resulted in a score that roughly indicated the population's support for ANA/MRTF presence, which would then be plotted by the intelligence analysts as red, yellow or green dots on a map to indicate levels of permissiveness or 'atmospherics'. This system was used for the first time in Operation BAZ PANJE in the Mirabad Valley, which had not seen a persistent Coalition presence before, making it an excellent opportunity to adapt our approach. We found that the analysis resulted in waves or concentrations of red and green alternating their way up the valley. This knowledge helped with the decision on where to put the patrol base and where to site platoon houses.



Lieutenant Travis Peet and Corporal Ben Byrne of 3 Platoon gauge the atmospherics with their interpreter in the Baluchi Valley, July 2009.





Major Julian Thirkill and an interpreter talking to a local during Operation TUFANI BABAR.

### Information Operations

Within MRTF-2 Headquarters, information operations were run by an infantry SO2<sup>33</sup> with previous operational experience in psychological operations (PSYOPS), who coordinated the public affairs and PSYOPS elements which were attached from JTF 633. The information operations contributed to the targeting process, enabling the generation of ‘non-kinetic targets’ such as leadership or powerbrokers to be engaged, or audiences to be specifically influenced. This then registered the influence effects amongst those of the other lines of operation in the commander’s top priorities to compete for time and resources. We considered manoeuvre and other kinetic actions in terms of their information operation (influence) effects, as well as their tactical value.

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33 Major Julian Thirkill.

Examples of this approach ranged from how a large *shura* was organised, messaged and run, through to impromptu ‘chai sessions’ with local villagers while soldiers were on patrol. The delivery of ‘night letters’ to population centres was occasionally employed to develop the perception amongst the population that the ANA and ISAF ‘owned the night’. These letters would counter insurgent propaganda and spread messages concerning local government initiatives and progress. This technique required immediate follow-up the next morning to reinforce the themes delivered through the night letters and assess any changes to atmospherics.



Members of Headquarters CT-A having chai with locals near Sarab, July 2009.

All planning and coordination measures aside, the most important aspect of influence is to ensure that it is well understood by our soldiers on the ground. I believe Australian soldiers are generally well attuned to this. When other nationalities talk about developing a ‘counterinsurgency based mindset’, our soldiers tend to have a more natural feel for what needs to be done. The Americans at JMRC (Joint Mission Readiness Centre – Hohenfels, Germany) commented on how good our (Australian and New Zealand) soldiers were at switching from a hearts and minds focus to killing



OC CT-B Major Damien Geary greets local elders and OC 2nd Coy 2nd KANDAK Major Muhammad Adin addresses a shura at Sorkh Lez during Operation BAZ PANJE, October 2009.

the enemy, and then switching back just as quickly to caring for the people. They asked how we had trained them to be like that, and I concluded it was our culture rather than any specific training.<sup>34</sup> Australian soldiers continue to be the best means of information operations that we have. On reflection we could refer to two different levels of information operations—the macro-level of messaging and coordination where the ADF still needs to develop considerably to catch up with our coalition partners, and the micro-level, where we tend to influence other people as individuals extremely well. This was seen time and again with our mentors relating to the ANA, our soldiers relating to the local population and our staff relating to coalition partners.

### **Coalition Relationships**

A fundamental component of influence was securing the support of other Coalition elements and convincing them of the need to pursue certain objectives. The 1 RAR battle group commenced the operation with the aim of every commander and staff member seeking out their equivalents in all

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34 The US Army now educates their soldiers to be ‘a sensor and ambassador’ specifically as part of a counterinsurgency mindset.



Medic Corporal Jacqui DeGelder treats local children near Chora during Operation Cram Ghar.

applicable coalition elements and making a strong effort to get to know them and get on with them in the first month. These relationships were then closely maintained throughout the tour. This effort requires additional staff capacity. The creation of an S5 position enabled the headquarters to engage and plan in far more detail rather than have the S3 distracted by these needs when he should be focused on current operations.

The dividends of this policy were substantial: we enjoyed an extremely close relationship with TF-U and forged close connections with 4th ANA Brigade. These two relationships were fundamental to our ability to make a significant contribution to the elections and the Mirabad clearance operation in accordance with Australia's national objectives. Influence through relationships is a critical enabler to success in a coalition environment.

## **Development Techniques**

Our engineers established programs to empower local communities to build small local works for themselves, and connected these back to the sponsorship of the Afghanistan government. Community mobilisation was



a concept developed by Recon Officer 16 CE SQN<sup>35</sup> to fill the capability gap between the efforts of the Netherlands provincial reconstruction team and the MRTF-2 works team. It was designed to target the development of employment, support micro-economies, facilitate skills transfer and invoke community pride by empowering local community leaders to shape their own development in non-permissive rural areas. This technique achieved excellent results on the influence line of operations, particularly in the southern Baluchi Valley and in the Mirabad Valley.



Captain Rod Davis talks to local leaders in the Mirabad Valley in search of community mobilisation prospects.

The Trade Training School<sup>36</sup> (TTS) trained local youth in various building trades, providing skilled labour for development. The local ministers for

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35 Captain Rod Davis, pictured above with elders from Sajawal in the Baluchi Valley.

36 Under the stewardship of Lance Corporal 'Spike' Milligan, who first performed this role as part of RTF-3 in 2008, who drove the expansion of the TTS sphere of influence.

Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) and Energy and Water (MEW)<sup>37</sup> are strong supporters of the school, attending graduation ceremonies and providing contracts to local firms who employed TTS graduates. The expansion of this progress to Chora in the second half of the tour, leaving locally trained instructors to continue work in Tarin Kowt, exemplifies the plan to further spread this effect as areas gradually become more permissive. Sorkh Morghab and the Miribad Valley are future targets for exported TTS courses. This is an extremely important effect in the engagement of the local community to win their support in the counterinsurgency.



Corporal Luke 'Spike' Miligan addresses trainees graduating from the Trade Training School in Tarin Kowt.

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37 Engineers Hashim and Kabir.

## Headquarters Coordination

A number of techniques employed by Headquarters MRTF-2<sup>38</sup> in the synchronisation of operations at battle group level were particularly beneficial from a commander's point of view. Having a separate S5 to devote his time to planning future operations, but more importantly to influencing the coalition, while the S3 was free to focus on the current battle, was particularly useful in a high-threat operation conducted in a coalition environment. Similarly, subordinating influence based effects under the SO2 Information Operations made it easier to coordinate and to synchronise the 'soft' effects.

The targeting (or 'effects') cycle was developed throughout the tour to prioritise resources to achieve all effects in alignment with the commander's intent. It assisted in maintaining direction and linking lines of operation that were very different in nature, and helped to ensure that the effects produced were indeed the ones of greatest importance, preferably without unintended consequences. The targeting cycle started with a scoping group involving the S2, IO, S3 and S5, and various subordinate specialists under the supervision of the executive officer (XO) or battery commander (BC). This group reviewed existing targets for changes in viability or priority, and sought new targets in accordance with the commander's priorities. Functional areas within the headquarters were then tasked to develop further detail on the higher priority/most achievable targets. They then reconvened after several days to grade these targets and produce a proposed target list that was presented to the CO in the targeting board. With the CO's approval/modifications to the required tasks, a fragmentary order was issued tasking subordinate elements, and deliberate planning cycles were commenced for any major deliberate operations. Some targets generated

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38 The principal headquarters staff included: Battle Group XO – Major Anthony Swinsburg; S2 (Intelligence Officer) – Major Nerolie MacDonald; S3 (Operations Officer) – Major J Brad Smith; S5 (Plans Officer) – Major Roger McMurray; Information Operations Officer – Major Julian Thirkill; and RSM – Warrant Officer Class One Darren Murch.



by the targeting cycle were clearly unachievable by the battle group due to scope or time frame. These targets were passed to TF-U or Regional Command South for action and constantly monitored by the targeting cycle. Such synchronisation is particularly important in a counterinsurgency operation.

This system of coordination was supported by a system of review. Members of the battle group were encouraged to continually review the conduct of activities and the usefulness of TTPs and standard operating procedures (SOPs). This feedback was channelled through the SNCOs to the RSM, who was responsible for collating lessons learned, updating and promulgating revised MRTF SOPs. Battle group after action reviews were conducted after major operations by the XO and the S3.

Having the facility of a CO's TAC was essential to command in a dispersed high-threat area of operations with many small teams operating in comparative isolation. The TAC, as designed by CO MRTF-1, had sufficient firepower, mobility and communications to enable the CO to command from the field. We added an engineer section and occasionally augmented the TAC with an infantry section. This was excellent for battlefield circulation—to visit OMLTs and platoons in isolated locations and participate in activities with them, and fully understand their challenges. Some minor augmentation on top of the crews, CO's Sig party and Battery Commander's Party for the provision of a control function was required for deliberate operations. This augmentation could be an SO3 from the S3 cell and an SNCO from the S2 cell, or it may be one of the principal staff officers, depending on the context and requirements. With lengthy deliberate operations, consideration does need to be given, however, to the balance between being well informed of the main effort and the conditions on the ground, and gradually becoming dislocated from the main headquarters (in particular 'high side' intelligence). Ten days was usually the maximum before links with main headquarters became an issue, but this judgement depends on the situation. When not being employed by the commander,



CO's TAC operating as a command node near Nayak during Operation BAZ PANJE, and battle group S33 Captain Mitch Stemp maintains situational awareness across Operations BOX OSCAR during the insertion.

the TAC troop was capable of taking on other tasks, including that of reserve. The grouping was commanded by a cavalry troop commander.<sup>39</sup>

## 4. Health

On the re-deployment of most of its members from three simultaneous operational deployments in late 2007<sup>40</sup> after two years of short-notice deployments, 1 RAR gave considerable focus to the health and wellbeing of soldiers post deployment, whilst also rebuilding the unit and its individual and collective warfighting skills, and maintaining a high level of readiness as the 'Ready Battalion Group'.<sup>41</sup> During 2008 we developed a multi-layered approach to preparing soldiers and medical staff for the deployment to Afghanistan, maintaining them during it and then bringing them home.

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39 Lieutenant Andrew Hastie, who was well supported by Corporal Nick O'Halloran (LAV Crew Commander), Corporal John Wilson (Lead PMV Commander), Lance Corporal Chris Cohen (CO's Vehicle Commander) and Corporal Dean Lee (CE Section Commander)

40 A Coy in Iraq, D Coy in Afghanistan and the remainder in Timor Leste.

41 This was made all the more challenging by 1 RAR's 'online' status, which was reduced to a very short notice to move for several months that year as the result of operational contingencies.

These layers were built through nine steps, which sought to build resilience, confidence and capacity. When treating individuals for any nature of injury, the overriding principle was to keep the soldier as close as possible to his or her team for as long as possible.

**i. Rehabilitation within the unit.** The consolidation of a robust rehabilitation organisation within the unit was of fundamental importance as the first step in re-building 1 RAR post deployment in 2008. By creating a chain of command structure for injured soldiers to report to (which we referred to as 'D COY'), they were given a place where they still belonged in the unit, and the unit had the ability to advocate for them and track their rehabilitation more closely. This was not easy as it was resourced internally, but proved to be worth the effort as the year progressed and a significant number of injured soldiers were rehabilitated.<sup>42</sup> Specialist medical resources are evidently becoming quite scarce, and will most likely need to be organised at a brigade level in order to meet the greater need. Nevertheless, for their optimum management it will remain important that the soldiers are still grouped and administered within their parent unit. Such an approach has been recognised as necessary by more recent unit establishment reviews.

**ii. Combat First Aid Training.** We attempted to have two combat first aiders qualified in every section/ small team, starting with training in 2008. The regimental medical officer (RMO)<sup>43</sup> developed methods for training all soldiers in combat first aid, and enhancing the skill sets of combat first aiders and medics with a particular emphasis on trauma management. This was enhanced by the Care Under Fire training package that trained combat first aiders, medics, nursing officers and the RMO to treat complex battlefield casualties under simulated battlefield conditions. Clinical rotations for medical staff were organised at the Townsville Hospital emergency room,

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42 I note that we were at the same time extremely fortunate with our medical resources in 2008. The one area in which we were under resourced (and was problematic in a post-operational period) was psychologists. A paucity of psychologists and psychiatrists continues to be a problem in both Darwin and Townsville.

43 Captain Andy Challen.

Queensland Ambulance and the day surgery unit, which provided critical clinical experience on live patients. Not only did this training save lives in 2009, but it has become the basis for training packages now being used across the ADF.



Regimental Medical  
Officer 1 RAR and  
MRTF-2, Captain  
Andy Challen

**iii. Training of health and counselling professionals in operational mental health.**

The RMO, the chaplain<sup>44</sup> and two advanced medics attended a course on Acute Mental Health on Operations (AMHOO) to refine the skills of those in health and pastoral positions to apply uniform assessment in relation to mental health issues. These skills became extremely valuable before and during the deployment. This knowledge enabled key specialist staff to develop training packages that promoted better understanding of mental health issues throughout the unit, and later on in the battle group.



Chaplain Charles Vesely addresses the ceremony for Remembrance Day 2009 at Camp Holland, Tarin Kowt. CDF (Air Marshall Angus Houston), COMISAF (Lieutenant General Stan McCrystal) and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd are seated behind him

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44 Chaplain Charles Vesely.

**iv. Training of all members of MRTF in resilience and combat stress.** The padre and RMO were tasked in early 2008 to develop a ‘resilience package’, leveraging off their AMHOO training and their personal experience from previous operations. The aim of the course was to educate soldiers on the effects of combat stress, to recognise these effects in each other, and to infuse the philosophy that it was a good to ask for help or to seek help for a mate. The rationale behind this was that soldiers’ resilience would be heightened by taking into consideration their whole being and not just their military preparation. This training included other important aspects of maintaining health on operations, such as nutrition and sleep hygiene.

**v. Physical endurance training.** 1 RAR, and later MRTF-2, adopted a combat fitness regime (including a battle fitness test, consisting of a 2-kilometre run and rope climbing in combat equipment, and a 40-kilometre route march) to prepare soldiers for the toughness of the environment. This program was designed to develop psychological toughness through giving soldiers physical challenges that could (with considerable effort) be overcome. Such mechanisms of resolve and resilience can then be drawn on when they are confronted by greater challenges on operations. The requirement to participate in these activities was promulgated in November 2008 in an effort to get people training, as there was insufficient time to establish these levels of fitness between concentration and mission rehearsal.

**vi. Mission specific training.** Additional training conducted during mission specific training complemented the combat first aid and trauma training prior to concentration. This was further enhanced by an excellent combat first aid program during ROS&I<sup>45</sup> conducted at Camp Beuhring in Kuwait.<sup>46</sup> The overall effect of our approach to first aid was that it enhanced everyone’s confidence in the capacity to preserve life across the battle group.

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45 Reception, Onward movement, Staging and Integration.

46 Including an excellent interactive facility for training in the application of tourniquets, which has since been replicated by the Australian ROS&I facility in the Middle East area of operations.



Private Michael Rodwell of 1 Platoon moving in to search a *q'ala* for an IED facilitator near Barakzai on Operation TUFANI BABAR, July 2009. At this point the combat team had conducted ten days of dismounted clearance patrols in temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius.

**vii. Health management on deployment.** Once deployed we managed cases with the potential to involve mental health extremely closely with a multi-disciplinary team consisting of the RMO, the padre and a psychiatrist, with oversight from the CO. This management was closely supported by a strong awareness of mental health needs throughout the chain of command and across the group. We concluded that this approach was very useful, but could be improved by having a dedicated psychiatrist<sup>47</sup> forward with the

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47 After two months we secured the support of one of the force support unit psychologists for two weeks per month.

battle group, along with a physiotherapist and a physical training instructor. This would allow for the treatment of minor cases early and in proximity to their team, with the aim of preventing them from deteriorating to the point where they have to be returned to Australia (where their care may be less individualised, and they could lose their team identity).

**viii. Decompression.** We sought a decompression program for members of the battle group prior to redeployment to Australia (starting in June 2008), and appreciated the support from JTF 633 in making this happen. The proposal was designed to allow soldiers to wind down and de-brief with the small team they had been deployed with, in a relaxed, non-threat environment, while still overseas, before being reunited with friends and family at home. This was based on the concept of taking more than a week to get home by ship from Vietnam on the HMAS Sydney. As was also noted from the Vietnam experience, those who transitioned too quickly often had greater difficulty adjusting to ‘normal life’ at home, and we sought to avoid repeating this effect. It is evident that other nations in the Coalition have had decompression programs for some time, and have found it beneficial for their soldiers’ readjustment to life at home.<sup>48</sup> Such a program is no doubt costly, and its effect is difficult to quantify, but I am confident this upfront cost is small compared to the latent cost it could mitigate.

**ix. Rebuild.** Finally, on return to home locations from deployment, units once more enter the process of monitoring and rebuilding, using a rehabilitation system and philosophy similar to that which was used in 2008, but hopefully with increased resources from outside the unit. Now that we are in an era where units must regularly rebuild themselves and their people,

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48 The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada each use a third country location on the way home from operations in Afghanistan for a program of between one and three days. My original proposal (starting with a preliminary recon report in June 2008) was to use a third country such as the Maldives (given that our transport was stopping there at the time). The solution derived by JTF 633 was cheaper and achieved the objective by giving the soldiers free time and beers at night over several days during the process of extraction from the Middle East area of operations.



it is extremely important they receive the time and the resources to do so effectively. This has become the intent of the 'reset' phase of Army's Force Generation cycle. My successor and his staff have put an immense effort into making this as successful an experience for the soldiers of 1 RAR as possible. Like 2008, it has required the focus of resources and effort on the individual needs of the physically and mentally wounded, while seeking to regenerate fundamental warfighting skills and capability.

All of these measures contributed to our capacity to deal with trauma and combat stress, both as individuals and as a group, particularly in the summer months when our rate of incidents and casualties was reasonably high.

An aspect of the environment that made the establishment of persistent dismounted patrols particularly difficult was the heat (and later the cold) combined with the weight of our current equipment. The combat body armour, referred to as MCBAS (Modular Combat Body Armour System), was designed for soldiers on static or mounted tasks in Iraq, and was not designed for close combat or dismounted patrolling. It is too heavy and caused many soft tissue injuries.<sup>49</sup> A soldier fully loaded with his patrol order, including sufficient water and ammunition, in the middle of the summer would often be carrying his own body weight. This is far from ideal. These issues were consistently represented, starting twelve months before our deployment, and appear to have gained sufficient traction in the past year to give soldiers more suitable equipment in 2011. Developments not only in lighter body armour but in technology to reduce the usage and weight of batteries for navigation, night fighting and CIED equipment are essential. Water purification technology is another area needing further research.

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49 A set of MCBAS without protective attachments (for neck, shoulders, groin, etc) weighed approximately 13 kilograms.



Private Chaka Dau of 3 Platoon, and OC CT-A Major Dave Trotter return from a patrol in the Baluchi Valley in 45-degree heat, July 2009.



Corporal Andrew Grant struggles to stay upright in the extremely cold and fast-flowing Tiri Rudd, October 2009.

## 5. Mission Specific Training

I noted earlier that the timing and resourcing of the battle group's preparation were restricted, largely due to the circumstances of our deployment. In addition it should be noted that some specialist elements did not concentrate with the battle group until the mission rehearsal exercise, which is far too late. It is likely there will always be specialist elements that still require training while the mission specific training for a battle group is progressing. One way of mitigating this tension of time required for collective training against time required for individual specialisation is an enhancement of simulation.

A method for allowing physically displaced elements of a grouping in preparation to gain experience operating together as combined arms and services in a dangerous and complex operating environment would be to have an initial concentration exercise, followed by a return to parent locations for a period of being connected by virtually simulated activities, prior to final concentration (including combined arms live fires and mission rehearsal). This would allow practice of command and control, the synchronisation of specialised combined arms and joint assets, as well as the confirmation and practice of TTPs and SOPs. By making the simulated activities between initial and final concentrations regular, many drills and SOPs could become far better understood than in the experience of a shorter concentration period. In turn this would enhance the confidence of the soldiers, leaving them better prepared for that difficult period of the first few weeks of a deployment. Furthermore, such an approach would enable soldiers to stay at their parent location (and therefore close to their families) longer before a lengthy deployment, thus reducing the exhaustion of what can at times be seen as a 'deployment before a deployment'.

This concept would most likely require integrated simulators in five principal locations (Darwin, Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney and Perth) depending on the future plans for Army's infrastructure. The manoeuvre brigades would require a facility not dissimilar to battle group trainers, which already exist in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. A very

modest capability is already available for platoon and combat team training in brigade simulation centres. Such an employment of simulation is in keeping with the direction of Defence White Paper 2009<sup>50</sup> and should be supported by the simulation ‘back-bone’ to be established by Joint Project 3028-1.<sup>51</sup> A significant increase in priority and funding would be required to produce a simulation system effective enough to support mission specific training for operations, but it is a goal of fundamental importance for the ADF.

## 6. Whole-of-Government Cooperation

This paper has described the development of several techniques to increase military effectiveness in the context of a counterinsurgency campaign. Despite the diversity of effects that a military organisation can deliver, it is essential that such efforts are supported by (and at a point where security is sufficiently restored, subordinated to) other organisations. These government and non-government organisations produce a wide range of additional effects, including those loosely described as diplomatic, informational and economic.

The means to generate whole-of-government effects were only just germinating in Uruzgan, with AusAID already involved on a small scale, and the Australian Federal Police and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade arriving during the course of 2009. In November we commenced a whole-of-government working group for representatives of those elements in Tarin Kowt. It would be very useful to have a strategy from Canberra to synchronise and prioritise whole-of-government efforts in delivering nation building effects, but no such strategy is apparent at this stage. Australia has the capacity to marshal resources on an appropriate scale to achieve

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50 *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 Defence White Paper 2009*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2009, para 8.66.

51 The Defence Simulation Program.

results in Uruzgan, but there needs to be sufficient appetite in government, a matured whole-of-government apparatus, and cohesive national direction to realise a meaningful outcome.

In the short term we proposed the selection of a small scale, relatively self-contained area, where Australian forces have good influence and security, in which to experiment with our first whole-of-government project. This would allow us to establish operating procedures to effectively combine our efforts and generate complementary effects in an environment where we were best able to succeed and to control the outcomes. Chora is one of the better locations for this vital first step, largely because it is one of the more stable and prosperous towns, and 2nd Kandak has considerable influence there along with the Australian OMLT Headquarters, which has established relationships with the local elders, the District Chief and Chief of Police. Given that Patrol Base Mirwais is within 400 metres of the district centre, government agencies could have regular access to their counterparts in governance, development, justice and policing inside the walls of the patrol base.<sup>52</sup>

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52 This concept was briefed to representatives from DFAT, PM&C and AusAID who visited on 10 October 2009.

# Observations

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The successful conduct of counterinsurgency operations requires a careful balance between the ability to influence and win the support of the people, and a finely honed close combat ability that can rapidly crush the enemy with precision whenever and wherever the opportunity arises.

In Afghanistan the green zones are where the population and the threat are concentrated. Within these areas the counterinsurgent must focus on protecting and influencing the population, while simultaneously isolating the threat from the population and reducing their freedom of action. This ‘war amongst the people’ calls for persistent and pervasive dismounted patrolling to dominate the green zone with our Afghan counterparts. This presence develops the confidence and capacity of the ANA, generates trust among the local population in their security forces and their government, and deprives the enemy of the initiative and their support base.

The forces conducting these operations must take calculated risks in order to succeed. In order to remove the enemy’s freedom of action and bring them above the ‘detection threshold’, these operations require relatively small dismounted patrols to saturate the area, often moving large distances on foot in a single day and using difficult routes, to maintain the initiative and maximise their own protection. The size and composition of these patrols will vary depending on the current level of threat in that particular area, and the situation needs to be carefully monitored. If the enemy is manoeuvring in large groupings, they must be dealt with and reduced using concentration of force at the optimum time and place before dispersed operations can be viable.

Such patrols need to be supported by the full combined arms package in order to prevail and overmatch the enemy when they do rise above the detection threshold. This overmatch can often only be provided by



offensive support or direct fire support from a distance. For this reason it is critical that any unit operating in this environment should have organic means to deliver direct and indirect fires, such as the ASLAV Type I, mortars and snipers. Given the constraints placed on offensive support at present, preference will be given to precision guided weapons to minimise collateral damage, but if these are not available, normal indirect fire must be available. While All Arms Call For Fire is less likely to be used, it still needs to be available for the last line of force protection. The requirement to generate precision target locations for precision munitions drives an increased demand for joint fires observers at lower levels.

Force protection against an adaptive IED threat requires continual modification of techniques coupled with the introduction of new counter-IED technology through either rapid acquisition or purchase of commercial-off-the-shelf equipment in response to operational user requirements. The combination of a continual review of TTPs with adaptive procurement is critical in order to stay ahead of an evolving adversary.

These requirements for successful dispersed operations in a high threat environment rely heavily on the high calibre of our junior commanders and soldiers. Their flexibility, independence and toughness are the backbone of operational capability, particularly in dispersed operations. Our junior commanders are readily and confidently dealing with substantial risk on a daily basis, and this experience will continue to shape their approach to command and risk management throughout their careers. This experience will strengthen Army in the coming decades.

Operations to influence the people and dominate the threat in the Afghan green zone generally cannot be conducted from vehicles, both because of the canalisation of the terrain and the effects that need to be generated in the populated areas. However, the dismounted element requires the support of vehicles (or aviation which is harder to attain) for insertion, resupply and extraction. This need is further increased by the extremes of heat in summer and cold in winter. At the same time, activities such as

reconnaissance, convoy movement, reserve tasks and direct fire support from the *dasht* will always be heavily dependent on vehicles.

Mentoring requires respect, rapport and patience. The generation of confidence and credibility through tactical success is key to establishing a capable new force in a combat environment, and successful partnering is fundamental to achieving these objectives. Development of Afghan army capability will be more effective if there is a concentration of the ANA above sub-unit level, allowing the generation of a workable red-yellow-green cycle. This may require the handing over of smaller patrol bases to the ANP as they become better established. The achievement of sufficient capability to enable independent indigenous operations is best not considered on a timeline. Mentoring in a counterinsurgency requires a conditions-based approach, endurance and resolve.

Without a detailed knowledge of the local population—including all of its tribal allegiances and cultural complexities—and a sensitivity to dealing with them, a counterinsurgency force is more likely to turn the local population to the cause of the insurgent. It is therefore extremely important that the force focus its influence and engagement through a well planned, properly resourced strategy which is informed by human dimension analysis drawn from a reliable database, with regular input from all methods of collection, including patrols, human intelligence and signals intelligence.

The conduct of influence operations can be viewed on two levels—macro (organisational) and micro (personal). It is important that in our quest to solve the issues at the macro level, we do not forget how fundamentally important the micro level is to the achievement of influence, and that our soldiers are generally pretty good at it.

The prioritisation and synchronisation of resources to achieve specific effects on extremely different lines of operation can be achieved through a ‘targeting’ process that considers all resources and all effects (both soft and kinetic) required to meet the commander’s intent at the same time. This is particularly helpful for the conduct of counterinsurgency.

If an army loses its capacity to kill, and to win the close fight, it will be unable to exert influence. Our 'soft' capabilities to win the support of the people in a counterinsurgency environment (to influence, engage, develop and minimise collateral damage) rapidly become irrelevant in an environment such as Afghanistan if they are not underwritten by a tough and agile close combat capability. This requires an extremely flexible mindset amongst all of our soldiers, and the appropriate type of combat power at their disposal when they require it. This combat power needs to be precise and responsive.

The effect of this kind of combat on soldiers requires that we better prepare them both physically and mentally, that we develop systems to better monitor and care for them while deployed, and that we give them the opportunity to decompress with their team mates in a third country before returning home, where we need to be resourced to rebuild and rehabilitate.

Preparation for such a complex environment demands a significant period of combined arms mission specific training. The time and complexity



Sergeant Giles Blackman and Corporal Gav Henry of 3 Platoon returning from a patrol in the Baluchi Valley during Operation TUFANI BABAR, July 2009.

of this training can be supported by an advanced application of simulation technology to link elements of a de-centralised battle group.

Participation in a whole-of-government effort requires a coordinated strategy between departments and agencies for training, planning and conducting operations to achieve effects in the national interest. Such a strategy requires a unified approach from all assets on the ground in response to cohesive national direction.



MRTF-2 (less mentors deployed on the ground) in September 2009,  
immediately prior to Operation BAZ PANJE.

# Conclusion

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MRTF-2 experienced a challenging and successful tour in Uruzgan. This was because of the quality of its people—they were tough, focused, resolute and adaptive. Offering an engaging and population-focused approach to counterinsurgency but always maintaining the agility to rapidly switch to aggressive close combat achieved positive results. Through the review of procedures at all levels of the organisation, the battle group developed increasingly successful techniques. The best results were achieved when relatively small dismounted Afghan and Australian elements were fully enabled and empowered to operate amongst the people and dominate the enemy in the green zone. This brought about the success and positive examples required to achieve the optimum mentoring effect. The Australian mentoring mission to build the capacity of the 4th Brigade to a point where it can successfully conduct independent counterinsurgency operations against the Taliban has shown very encouraging developments to date. However, it has a long way to go before it is complete. This will require considerable endurance, sacrifice and resolve from the Australian Defence Force along with understanding and support from the Australian people. It is important to acknowledge the significant achievements which have been made, and that despite the sacrifice, this is an end worth pursuing.





# Land Warfare Studies Centre

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