



IN DECEMBER, Australians will have been at war with the International Coalition Against Terrorism for ten years, making this our longest military operation.

We are now involved heavily in the outcome of the struggle in a way that we have avoided until recent years.

Australian forces are now important players within ISAF, with our troops operating in almost every corner of Uruzgan and conducting incursions into the Helmand, Kandahar and Daykundi Provinces.

The primary focus of the Australian mission is to prepare Uruzgan Province and its ten thousand Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police personnel to take over security and law enforcement responsibility in 2014.

For the bulk of Australian Diggers in Afghanistan this means working within the ADF's mentoring program which involves living close to and fighting beside Afghan troops at patrol bases in the Hindu Kush valleys.

As has been so recently and painfully demonstrated, mentoring is an extremely risky way of war fighting. Until recently it has been considered Special Forces territory.



An MTF3 2RAR mentor patrols Mirabad with 3/4ANA troops in Sept.

Australian mentors are now embedded within each of the ANA six Kandaks operating in Uruzgan, observing what are now semi independent company level operations and offering advice and providing role models for their Afghan counterparts.

This is a clever and strategically sound policy. But it is also an extremely complicated and stressful business for the Diggers involved with the mission in the back blocks of Uruzgan.

The ANA's 4th Brigade is one of the better Afghan Army manoeuvre elements but remains an unpredictable beast.

Each of its six Kandaks has distinct personalities and its own upsides and serious problems. The ADF has progressively assumed mentoring ops with each 4th Brigade Kandak since it embedded with 2/4 Kandak in 2009. Since that time Australian mentors have taken over the OMLTs at 3/4ANA from the Dutch and 1/4ANA from the French. The remaining Kandaks were mentored by the ADF from the time they arrived in Uruzgan from the ANA's Consolidated Fielding Centre.

Leadership remains a serious issue. Some ANA officers are very competent. Others have no mission focus. Friction between Australian mentors and their Afghan counterparts has grown since the ANA commenced the planning and conduct of its

operations with some ANA commanders resenting mentoring advice and ignoring ADF (and ISAF) operating procedures.

Still none of this helps explain or justify the random attacks by long serving ANA soldiers on ADF personnel in the last three months that have left four Australians dead and 14 wounded, many seriously. The traitor who murdered three Australians and wounded many more in Shah Wali Kot in October conducted an elaborate Islamic cleansing ritual prior to attacking our blokes so jihadist extremism had something to do with the attacks.

Australia is not alone in being targeted by Afghan National Security Forces. NATO estimates that three percent of all Coalition casualties (including more than 60 deaths) in Afghanistan are directly related to disaffected ANSF personnel.

In April, US Forces across Afghanistan suffered a series of rolling murders committed by ANSF personnel. The worst of the incidents occurred on April 27 when a senior ANA pilot attacked foreigners at Kabul Airport killing nine US personnel.

Two weeks earlier on April 16 a suicide bomber in ANA uniform detonated his device in a crowded pre-mission briefing at FOB Gamberi in Laghman killing six US Army mentors and four ANA personnel and wounding dozens more. A week before that an ANP Border Police officer shot dead two US soldiers at Faryab.

In short, our proxy Army in Afghanistan is infiltrated at a very low level and even committed ANA troops can be prone to religious epiphanies that lead them to attack Coalition forces.

But, as the Mentoring Task Force 3 headshed is keen to emphasise, for all its faults the ANA is not gun shy and engages the Taliban with little discipline but plenty of energy. ANA soldiers have been at the forefront of every contact between Australians and insurgents. They have also taken the bulk of casualties in our war against Islamic extremism.

It is also important to remember that the bulk of the insider attacks have been launched against ANSF personnel, who have endured too many similar incidents to list.

This used to be called the Careful War. Now I'd call it the Complicated War.

Stay safe.

John Hunter Farrell
Managing Editor