

**Review of Special Operations
Command
Australian Army**

15 June 2020

David Irvine AO

Introduction

On 14 December 2016 the Chief of the Defence Force directed the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) to inquire into possible breaches of the Law of Armed Conflict by members of the Australian Defence Force in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016, with a focus primarily on elements of the Special Operations Task Group. That inquiry is being conducted by Major General Paul Brereton AM RFD, a serving officer of the Australian Army Reserve and a Judge of the New South Wales Court of Appeal. At the time of writing this Report, the Inquiry remains ongoing.

Well prior to the initiation of the IGADF Inquiry, the then-Commander of the Australian Army's Special Operations Command (SOCOMD), Major General Jeff Sengelman DSC AM CSC, had initiated a concerted reform and modernisation programme in SOCOMD. This followed the identification in 2015-16, and subsequently, of significant systemic issues in respect of command and control, compliance, accountability, discipline and culture across the Command and within its constituent units. These issues, summarised in my 2018 Report, had arisen in the course of fifteen years of continuous high intensity combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the focus of the Command was overwhelmingly on successful operational outcomes.

The reform and modernisation programme in SOCOMD was further developed and expanded under Major General Sengelman's successor, the current Commander of Special Forces (SOCAUST), Major General Adam Findlay AM.

I was asked in March 2018 by the then Deputy Chief of Army to conduct a review of the cultural and governance reforms being undertaken in SOCOMD. My report of August 2018 provided an assessment of SOCOMD's reform and modernisation programme, together with fourteen recommendations on matters requiring further attention and action. I was subsequently advised that my recommendations had been accepted and were being implemented.

In my review of August 2018, I assessed progress in the reform programme since 2015-16 under five broad themes: Governance, Accountability, Values, Integration and Perceptions of SOCOMD. While I was of course aware of allegations of misbehaviour during special operations activities overseas, I regarded these as the subject of the stand-alone IGADF inquiry into events which had occurred at fixed points in the past; my focus was on the present and the future.

Overall, I concluded in 2018 considerable progress had been made in the previous three years in each of the five themes of my review. The Command was effectively being reset. Nevertheless, enduring strong leadership at all levels was necessary to embed the reforms and modernisations into the culture and ethos of the Command, its constituent units and its individual members. This was critical given the continuing importance of Special Operations as an essential component of Australia's national defence capability.

In March 2020 the Chief of Army requested me to undertake a further body of work on the current state of SOCOMD and the progress being made on the implementation of the recommendations of my 2018 report, together with any other recommendations I thought appropriate.

It is pleasing to report that the thrust of my 2018 recommendations have been seriously taken up and have been, or are in the process of being, implemented.

While I have sought to maintain focus on the five themes of my first report (Governance, Accountability and Values, Perceptions and Integration), this second report encompasses the way in which the Command has continued to address not only the concerns of the past but also the way it is setting itself up to address the challenges of the future.

Overall, from the evidence available to me, SOCOMD is undergoing a period of major renewal and regeneration and appears to be on target to meet, or is meeting, the objectives set for it by the Chief of Army, the Chief of Joint Operations and the Chief of the Defence Force. That said, SOCOMD's challenge remains substantial: managing the complex dynamics of a professional military organisation, while having to maintain high states of preparedness across a range of specialist military capabilities – and all this in an environment of major strategic and technological change.

The process of reform and modernisation must be ongoing. The biggest risk is that the reform process loses momentum or, worse, leadership failures lead to serious back-sliding or misdirection.

In preparing this assessment, my starting point has been to maintain focus on the five themes of my first report – Governance, Accountability and Values, Perceptions and Integration. I was able to examine orders and directives documenting the reform programme since 2018. I also conducted a series of dialogues with members at all levels of the Command to test not just compliance but the culture, attitudes and values which ultimately determine the continuity and success of reform. Finally, I interviewed a selection of key external stakeholders in the Australian Defence Force, the Department of Defence, law enforcement and other government departments and agencies.

My interlocutors were frank and forthcoming, for which I thank them.

David Irvine

Canberra

15 June 2020

Executive Summary

Despite a decade and a half of outstanding military successes, Special Operations Command in 2014-15 was at an organisational low point. Its culture and values were adrift. There were allegations of serious misbehaviour overseas, departures from accepted military standards and ethics, and lapses in accountability and compliance. The Command was in a poor position to address the challenges of the post-Afghanistan strategic environment.

In 2014-15, Special Operations Command initiated a process of reform, rejuvenation and modernisation which continues to this present time. This process, which has touched all aspects of the business of special operations, has made good progress.

The Command is now in a strong position to address current requirements for special operations and is adjusting its organisation and capabilities to meet future requirements. It is integrating better with Army and the ADF, as well as Law Enforcement. The culture of the Command and its units has been strengthened with an emphasis on Army values and ethical behaviour.

The reform and modernisation process has not finished – if it ever will be. Much remains to be done. However, while guarantees against a recurrence of previous concerns can never be absolute, the Command should be trusted to undertake special operations on behalf of the ADF, the Government and the people of Australia.

1. In the course of 2014-15, after 16 years of continuous high intensity military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Australian Army's Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) was facing not only fatigue and burnout but serious breakdowns in governance, compliance, accountability, discipline and culture. An inquiry by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) was launched in 2016 into rumours and allegations of possible infringements of the Laws of Armed Conflict by Special Forces (SF) personnel in Afghanistan. That Inquiry is ongoing.

2. Since 2014-15, recognising the state of the Command, SOCOMD embarked on a journey of reform and modernisation initiated by the Chief of Army and the Special Operations Commander of the day, Major General Sengelman. The process has been carried forward since 2017 by the present Commander, Major General Findlay, with strong support of the ADF leadership.

Reform and Modernisation

3. The reform process has three principal objectives:

- to remediate the areas of immediate serious concern arising from the Afghanistan deployments,
- to reset the Command to meet current post-Afghanistan requirements for special operations capabilities, and
- to prepare the Command for the changing strategic environment of the 2020s and beyond.

4. The process has involved wholesale reform to the structure and the governance and accountability mechanisms of the Command. There has been a concerted effort to shift the culture of the Command and its various units back into line with Army values; a strong emphasis on the enforcement of discipline and appropriate behaviour; and a nesting of the Command and its previously semi-independent units back into Army. The Headquarters had been augmented to provide more effective command and control from the centre. The Command has made a big effort to re-establish trust in it amongst its key stakeholders, from the Government and the CDF down.

5. At the same time as these reforms are being undertaken, the Command has had to refresh and sustain its special operations capabilities, while maintaining a state of readiness enabling it to respond at very short notice to whatever exigency requires the services of Special Forces.

6. By the second half of 2018, good progress had been achieved. The Command had undergone a basic reset. Known behavioural and discipline issues were being addressed. Acceptable standards of accountability had been established and were being enforced. In short, SOCOMD was returning to being fit for purpose. But further work was required across most aspects of the Command's functions and systems, and its culture, to give the ADF leadership added confidence SOCOMD could meet future requirements laid upon it by Government.

7. That work has carried on to the present day. There has been further strengthening of the role of Headquarters in directing the business of SOCOMD and the creation of a new central enterprise management framework covering the spectrum of activities and processes in the Command. These changes have enhanced the concept of a united Command rather than the old federation of semi-independent operating units. SOCOMD is now meeting most accountability and compliance standards – at least as well as the rest of Army.

8. A feature of the new-look SOCOMD has been the clarity of the Command Plans and Directives used to communicate the mission statement for the Command; its priorities and goals, the context in which Special Forces may be required to operate, the role they can be expected to play, the capabilities they will need to bring to bear and where those capabilities should reside in the Command.

9. Today, 80% of the Command has not seen service Afghanistan; there has been significant renewal across all the units.

10. Funded by the Government, an innovative technology program is being rolled out. Order and accountability has been brought to previously tenuous procurement systems. There has been a concerted effort to centralise selection and training and to embed a Command-wide culture of excellence.

Culture and Ethics

11. While it is difficult to measure changes in organisational culture over a short time frame, the collective culture of SOCOMD and its constituent units is undergoing rejuvenation from the low point of 2015 and the years immediately preceding. Alignment with Army values is at the core of the cultural renewal. Of particular significance is the decision in 2019 to include the Ethics of Armed Conflict (and not just the Law of Armed Conflict) in selection and training processes throughout the Command. This includes practical and situational training as well as more formal lectures and discussions.

Force Families and Veterans

12. The particularly intense nature of service in Australia's Special Forces, with constant high tempo training, high risk and high stress levels, places an added responsibility on SOCOMD to provide a network of support for members and their families and for SF veterans. SOCOMD has introduced arrangements to harness and integrate support mechanisms available through the Command, Army, the Government and community (veterans) organisations.

Oversight

13. In 2019 the Chief of Army appointed an experienced retired Major General (not with a Special Forces background) to provide him with independent advice on the state of the Command, as well as to advise and mentor commanders within SOCOMD. With a wide brief that includes SOCOMD's relationships with its stakeholders and the conduct of SOCOMD operations, the Advisor can also be directed by the Chief of Army to undertake formal inquiries or audits under Defence (Inquiry) Regulations. This appointment should give greater confidence that the necessarily non-transparent Special Operations Command is operating appropriately and in accordance with Australian values.

Trust and Perceptions

14. Within senior levels of Army and the ADF there is recognition of the continuing requirement for the unique capabilities only SOCOMD can contribute to the nation's defence. There is genuine appreciation for the Command's efforts to pull itself up from its low state of six years ago and for the fact it is integrating more effectively with Army and with Joint Operations, particularly through continuing deployments (including within Australia during the recent bushfire crisis), through the continuing provision of ready-to-use military capability and more meaningful participation in Army and ADF exercises.

15. The perceptions of SOCOMD amongst most external stakeholders is similarly positive, especially from law enforcement which collaborates closely with Special Forces in the counter terrorism area.

16. The perception of SOCOMD is more variable at lower levels of the ADF, in part because the Command operates out of view of many members in the services. Increased engagement with Army, the ADF and government departments and agencies is helping to address that problem of perception. This is a much-improved situation to that of two years ago, but still requires continuing effort in the Command's outreach activities.

Inter-Unit Issues

17. The emphasis on a united Command and a common culture appears to have had a positive impact on two issues which have long been of concern within SOCOMD.

- The animosity between the Commando and SASR, which was proving so counter-productive a few years ago, seems to have abated somewhat. But it needs active leadership to avoid any future flare up, particularly at the NCO and senior NCO levels.
- Special Operations Support Staff, who include necessary trades such as logistics, signallers, medics and engineers and who might be categorised as essential ‘enablers’, report feeling greater acceptance in the Command as members of operational teams and as contributors in their own right. This is an encouraging trend in comparison with support staff concerns of two years ago.

Each of these trends need to be sustained though active leadership and example-setting across the Command. Both officers and senior NCOs in the units bear a special responsibility in this regard.

SOCOMD in 2020

18. Special Operations Command now has a very different and more positive feel by comparison with the low point of 2014-15. It has a clear purpose and mission. Its governance is sound and its operating culture is developing in the right directions.

19. In short, the 5-year reform and rejuvenation program is transforming the Command, thanks to strong central leadership and good support from Army and other elements of the ADF.

Further Work

20. From the urgent remedial action of 2015-17, through the resetting and restructuring of the Command in the last two years, SOCOMD has now entered a new phase: providing business-as-usual special operations services to the ADF and Government, while at the same time positioning itself organisationally and technologically to address the changing strategic context through the 2020s and beyond.

21. SOCOMD’s long-standing capabilities for Special Warfare, Strategic Strike and Special Reconnaissance will remain essential tools for use in an armed conflict situation and in countering terrorism. But along with the rest of the ADF, SOCOMD must prepare for new forms of conflict: whereby States pursue strategic ends through grey zone or hybrid warfare sitting just below the threshold of armed conflict.

“Special Forces are recovering from a journey focused on one theatre of operations and, essentially one domain of activity. Now we are having to face multiple theatres, multiple domains and very different tasks.”

22. SOCOMD’s workforce will need to adapt to meet these new challenges. The composition of operational teams may become more diverse as Special Forces are required to operate in situations very different to those encountered in Afghanistan. There is likely to be a greater emphasis on cognitive, technical and cyber skills, and a need for greater diversity in the workforce. Traditionally recruiting from already-serving Army or ADF personnel, future requirements should see the need for greater direct recruitment into SOCOMD units.

23. The way in which SOCOMD recruits and trains its new generations of operators and enablers will need to be modified, in part to create greater efficiency but also to use selection and early training to instil a strong sense of the Command

culture and ethos (including ethics) into the new recruits. The first steps towards a common Command-wide selection and basic training regime have already been taken, but more needs to be done.

24. In order to achieve greater workforce flexibility and mobility, including widening the experience of career Special Forces personnel, changes will be required to the current rigidities of the Army job classification and remuneration systems. There should, for example, be a common Basic Special Operations Proficiency classification for all operators within the Command, Commandos and SAS alike.

25. Over time, too, consideration may need to be given to the configuration of the constituent units within the Command, and the way in which current and new capabilities are distributed within them – in part better to manage the problems of geography with one set of capabilities residing in the West far from Headquarters, but also to create greater versatility in confronting the challenges of 21st century kinetic and hybrid warfare.

26. More immediately, SOCOMD leaders will need to manage the impact on morale and commitment of any adverse findings by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force in respect of allegations of serious misbehaviour in Afghanistan. The issues raised cannot be swept under the carpet, but must be confronted transparently within the Command. The attention paid over the past few years to cultural renewal, ethical behaviour, integrity, accountability and Army values, together with the appointment of an Advisor Special Forces, should be a solid foundation for dealing with the serious issues covered by the IGADF inquiry – and for helping to prevent a recurrence.

1. Special Operations Command

Role of Special Operations Command

1.1 The Australian Army's Special Operation Command (SOCOMD) is configured to contribute three core activities to the overall national military defence capability:

Special Reconnaissance (SR)

Strategic Strike (SS)

Special Warfare (SW)

Through these core activities and with enabling capabilities SOCOMD can provide a greater range of options for Government to defend Australia and its national interests.

1.2 A useful description of the Command's purpose and obligations can be found in the Chief of Army's April 2019 'Charter Letter' to SOCAUST:

"Your role as Special Operations Commander includes responsibilities to generate resilient, unorthodox and networked special operations forces, integrated with the joint force, and engaged with interagency and global partners. You are entrusted with Australia's most sensitive Defence activities across the spectrum of cooperation, competition and conflict. By so doing, you expand strategic options available to government and assist in mitigating the security risk to the national interest."

1.3 The efficacy of SOCOMD's contribution depends on high states of military professionalism and expertise in unique military capabilities, on seamless operational integration with other elements of Australia's Joint Force and on a military culture that values agility, creativity, collaboration and intellectual, moral and ethical discipline.

1.4 The Command must embrace the selection of people with the appropriate array of very particular personal, intellectual and physical attributes proven to be necessary for the complex tasks and intensity of special operations work. It must maintain perpetually high states of readiness and be organised to deliver its various capabilities at very short notice in whatever configuration is needed at the time. And it must be able to integrate those capabilities into the wider national effort, into Joint Force operations or other Defence or Government-sponsored activities requiring its unique military skill sets. It must have the ability to operate with both allied and regional partner organisations. It must remain at the cutting edge of technology and operational doctrine and practices, and be able to operate across all domains of warfare, including the cyber domain.

1.5 At the same time, it is a Command of the Australian Army, nested within Army and required to uphold Army values and Army standards of behaviour.

Structure of Special Operations Command

1.6 SOCOMD currently employs 2,755 people, 2,700 uniformed personnel and 55 civilians. It is headed by Special Operations Commander Australia (SOCAUST), a two-star appointment.

The work of the Command is managed by three one-star appointments grouped by function into:

- the raising, training and sustaining of requisite special operations capabilities (Force Generation),
- the provision of special operations capabilities for the conduct of operations to the Joint Force or the CDF (Operational Generation), and
- the procurement of equipment and technology for current and future needs (Special Operations Modernisation)

1.7 The principal elements for delivering special operations capability (Force Generation) reside in units under the management of Commander of the Special Forces Group. Although there is some overlap between them, each element is the “capability lead” for a separate core capability or function. These units are:

Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) – Strategic Reconnaissance

1st Commando Regiment (1 Cdo Regt) – Special Warfare

2nd Commando (2 Cdo Regt) – Strategic Strike

Special Operations Engineer Regiment (SOER) – Specialist Engineering

Special Operations Logistic Support Squadron (SOLS) – Logistics

Defence Special Operations Training and Education Centre (DSOTEC)

ADF School of Special Operations (ADFSSO)

ADF Parachuting School (ADFPS)

In addition, the 6th Aviation Regiment (6 AVN Regt) of the Australian Army Aviation Corps supports SOCOMD through the provision of air mobility.

The Reform and Modernisation Programme in SOCOMD

1.8 Although still extremely busy, the respite from the high tempo operations of the Afghanistan years has given SOCOMD the opportunity for a major reset. Since 2015-16, SOCOMD has been on a journey of reform, restructuring and modernisation to adjust to the requirements of current Australian defence policy after the years of intense engagement in Afghanistan. This journey or continuum might be described in terms of four overlapping phases:

Phase 1: **Identification of Issues** requiring attention after years of continuous deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq

Phase II: **Immediate Action** to address deficiencies in command and control, governance, accountability, behaviour and culture in the Command

Phase III: **Resetting and Restructuring** the Command to meet the current requirements for provision of capability to the Chief of

Army, Commander Joint Operations Command and the Chief of the Defence Force

Phase IV: **Transformation and Modernisation** of the Command to meet the challenges of changing threats and operating environments through the 2020s and beyond

1.9 In order to maintain in the post-Afghanistan environment an always-ready, state-of-the-art capability able to deliver special operations effects at short notice, SOCOMD has systematically reorganised and restructured itself within a clearly defined framework.

1.10 Command Guidance and forward-looking Command Plans, as well as a host of single-issue directives, set out the Command's mission, its objectives and the measures it is putting in place to meet those objectives. The intention has been to:

- Ensure current ADF needs are met while preparing for future needs;
- Enhance professionalism and technical and military capability;
- Enable the Command to operate as a coherent, coordinated and united Command, under an effective Command Headquarters; and
- Uphold Army values, discipline and appropriate ethical standards (the Army's *Good Soldiering* concept).

The Changing Strategic Context: 2020 and Beyond

1.11 The Australian Special Forces experience since the turn of the century has predominantly been participation in armed conflict involving kinetic action. That experience is likely to change. While Australia must continue to be prepared to defend itself in armed conflict, the decade of the twenties is expected to be characterised by different forms of conflict, in which states use a variety of methods, some short of kinetic clashes, to disrupt or disable an opponent's war-fighting capability and will.

What is clear now, is that the character of warfare is changing, with more options for pursuing strategic ends just below the threshold of traditional armed conflict – what some experts like to call grey-zone tactics or hybrid warfare.¹

Strategically we have entered a situation of competition between nation states, with a grey zone made more complicated by the activities of non-State actors pursuing their own ideologies by both violent and non-violent means. This is occurring at a time when technology is constantly revolutionising the means to conduct warfare in all its manifestations.

1.12 From 1999, Australia's Special Forces (SF) were almost continuously involved in strike operations in the Middle East – with recognised distinction. The winding down of those operations has provided an opportunity to consider and prepare for the role special operations will play in the future - not only in open armed conflict (for which we must always retain a special operations capability),

¹ Senator Linda Reynolds, Minister for Defence June 2019

but also in an era of contestation and competition short of armed conflict – an era of the grey zone, with all of its uncertainty, volatility and ambiguity.

“Special Forces are recovering from a journey focused on one theatre of operations and, essentially one domain of activity. Now we are having to face multiple theatres, multiple domains and very different tasks.”²

1.13 The task for SOCOMD is to adapt its capabilities, or develop new ones, to enable it to continue to contribute special effects in the defence of Australia in those multiple theatres and multiple domains.

1.14 The changing threat and operating environments inform the transformation and modernisation of existing defence capabilities and the acquisition of new capabilities. In the case of special operations, it has involved strengthening the concept of a united and integrated Special Operations Command and, where necessary, reorganisation and restructuring to achieve the most efficient delivery of state-of-the-art special operations effects in a new age.

1.15 In addressing those issues, a key question will be whether the reform and modernisation process will enable Australia’s Special Forces to maintain the high standards of skills, professionalism, ethics and culture expected of them by the Australian Government and public, over long periods of sustained conflict, without a recurrence of the negative issues that arose from sustained involvement in the Afghanistan.

1.16 This Review looks at how SOCOMD is currently managing its continuum of transformation.

² A senior SOCOMD NCO

2. SOCOMD – Reform and Modernisation

2.1. In my 2018 Report I noted the drive to bring together the hitherto disparate, semi-autonomous elements of Special Operations Command, each carrying out its own mission sets, into a more coherent unified Command structure.

2.2. While SOCOMD may play a somewhat different future role to that which it played in Afghanistan and Iraq, its special operations capabilities will remain important instruments at the disposal of the ADF's Joint Operations Command in a period of heightened strategic competition and grey zone warfare. The current and future strategic environment for special operations requires a well-integrated SOCOMD and a SOCOMD fully integrated with Army and the Joint Force.

2.3. SOCOMD in the years immediately prior to 2015 has been described as “a federation of several largely independent fiefdoms rather than a united command.”³ The journey since 2015 has been to establish that united command better to ensure the nation's special operations requirements are met, now and into the future.

2.4. Throughout the documentation and in conversations for this review, the terms “united command” “unified command”, “integrated command” or “pan-Command” seemed to be used interchangeably. I have opted for the term “united command”. This refers to the concept whereby the overall policy decision-making and coordination takes place at the centre. The centre exercises command and control over the constituent units. In SOCOMD, under the mission command system, the individual units and their constituent parts have authority to exercise their own situational decision-making in accordance with the central commander's intent. The centre sets priorities and standards, allocates resources and, in the case of SOCOMD, draws from the constituent elements to produce a military construct for use by the Joint Force, the CDF or the Government more generally. It is answerable to the Chief of Army, to the Commander of the Joint Force and to the CDF.

2.5. The primary output or unit of action of SOCOMD has been established as the Special Operations Task Force (SOTF). The SOTF is a multi-disciplinary team configured for a particular purpose from the various capabilities resident in units across the Command, rather than from just one regiment. This integration of capabilities is best achieved under a united Command structure.

2.6. If the development and deployment of a SOTF is facilitated by an effective centrally directed system of management, strong central management also allows for better prioritisation and allocation of resources and better mechanisms to manage risk; it promotes more consistent and efficient common administration and governance, including the enforcement of accountability through a Command-wide compliance framework. Importantly, it enables the exercise of more effective leadership over the culture, values and ethical standards of the Command as a whole.

2.7. In 2018 I assessed good progress in the journey towards a fully integrated or united SOCOMD fitting itself for the purposes of the 2020s. As with all dynamic institutions in a dynamic environment, however, it was a continuing work in progress.

³ Review of Special Operations Command, August 2018

2.8. In 2020, I can report the work in progress has continued apace – with good results. SOCOMD looks and feels more like a united Command than ever before – symbolised by the fact members of command now wear the SOCOMD arm patch, rather than the arm patches of the individual units.

2.9. There is nevertheless always scope for further development within the Command – a process of continuous adaptation and improvement to meet an ever-changing operating environment through the most effective use of people and resources.

Recipe for Reform

2.10. SOCOMD leadership has employed a range of standard ‘big organisation’ management techniques to transform and integrate the Command:

- strengthened **Headquarters** function, necessary for the implementation of the integrated or united Command concept;
- application of an **Enterprise Management Framework** encompassing the whole Command;
- a systematic **Business Plan** for an integrated Command, aligning management, performance, strategic direction and resources, and in conformity with Army’s systems and processes;
- adoption of a SOCOMD-specific **Operating System** to support and coordinate the force generation, operations and modernisation functions of the Command;
- coherent, forward-looking **Command Plans** issued by SOCAUST, clearly enunciating key SOCOMD functions, tasks, characteristics and values into the future;
- improved **Governance** mechanisms; including a system of committees designed to enhance coordination and accountability;
- Headquarters management of the configuration and formation of Special Operation Task Forces for deployment with the Joint Force;
- progress towards a **common selection and training cycle**; and
- centralised **procurement and technical modernisation** processes

SOCOMD Headquarters

2.11. An important early step in resetting and integrating the Command was the expansion, initiated by Major General Sengelman and carried forward by Major General Findlay, of the role and size of the Command headquarters.

- Three one-star positions have been established to manage centrally the Raise, Train and Sustain, the Operations and Counter Terrorism and the Technical Modernisation and Procurement functions over the entire command.
- The Headquarters has been augmented by expert specialists from conventional Army and from the Navy and Air Force. Personnel have been posted into the Headquarters from SOCOMD’s constituent units. This brings not only practical special operations expertise into Headquarters but exposes SF unit personnel to the broader picture of a

command, of which their unit is but one part of a wider integrated Army and ADF picture. In 2014, SOCOMD Headquarters had an establishment of 192 personnel. Today its notional establishment is 333, an increase of 73%.

- A Chief of Staff Directorate has been established in the Headquarters to provide management support functions in respect of assurance, governance, finance, legal, public affairs and executive support.
- In 2019, a civilian Director of Special Operations Assurance was appointed in Headquarters with a dedicated Governance Cell to oversight conformity with governance requirements across the Command.

2.12. One criticism I heard was that Headquarters staff do not all have a thorough understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the units. Common induction training across the Command should help address that problem. If it remains a problem, it might be remedied with the units themselves ensuring they free up their own people to rotate through Headquarters.

- *SOCOMD Headquarters in 2020 appears to be functioning properly, exercising active command and control over an increasingly united and integrated Command. It has provided generally clear direction and guidance, while enabling significantly improved governance.*
- *The unifying and managerial role of SOCOMD Headquarters will be further enhanced by ensuring a steady rotation of postings through SOCOMD Headquarters of both conventional Army and other experts, together with the regular rotation of personnel from the various special operations units.*

SOCOMD Enterprise Management Framework

2.13. The enhanced Headquarters is more able proactively and decisively to manage and direct the Command. SOCOMD has developed its own Enterprise Management Framework covering the spectrum of activities and processes within the united Command. Implemented over the past three years, the framework divides the Command roles and responsibilities into four overlapping quadrants, each managed centrally from Headquarters.

Command and Control: led by SOCAUST and managed by Headquarters.

SOF Generation (SOFGEN): managing the raising, training and sustaining of special operations capabilities (maintaining the state of readiness).

SOF Operations (SOFOPS): managing the contribution of special operations capabilities to joint, combined and inter-agency operations.

SOF Modernisation (SO-MOD): managing SOCOMD's "Future Ready" responsibilities, including the Command's investment in current and new equipment, property and information systems.

2.14. At the apex of the Enterprise Management Framework is SOCAUST himself, supported by a series of boards and steering committees covering the gamut of the Command's functions and capabilities.

2.15. **Governance:** At the Command level, governance and assurance are managed through a system of high level committees, which draw in reporting from the units and which provides direction and feedback.

- **SOCOMD Board:** The Board meets three times a year to set high-level organisational goals and ensure SOCOMD's commitments to Army, the Joint Force, Defence and Government are fulfilled. It is chaired by SOCAUST and composed of all senior Headquarters functional commanders and directors, including the Command Sergeant Major as the senior enlisted advisor.
- **SOCOMD Commander's Council:** The Commander's Council is a high-level command and control mechanism. It also serves as an advisory forum to assist SOCAUST and his senior team manage the current and future business of the Command. It is chaired alternately by SOCAUST and Commander SFG. It includes the Deputy Commander SFG, the Command RSM and the Commanding Officers and Regimental Sergeant Majors of the SOCOMD units. Other senior headquarters staff are permanently invited guests.
- **Special Operations Program Steering Group:** Chaired by the one-star Director-General of Special Operations and Counter Terrorism, it manages the provision of special operations forces for employment by Army, Joint Forces and Defence and Government more widely.
- **Special Operations Governance Steering Group:** Chaired by the SOCOMD Chief of Staff, it is responsible for ensuring the effective administration of SOCOMD, its business plan and budget, aligning SOCOMD to Army and Defence administrative, governance, accountability and WH&S frameworks.

2.16. Participants have advised me that, as a governance and accountability mechanism, the Enterprise Management Framework and the SOCOMD committee system are proving a sound organisational basis for managing the Command as a whole, noting the Committee structure is effective in drawing unit managers into the united command environment.

- *The Enterprise Management Framework is an appropriate over-arching mechanism for managing the Command as a single entity. It appears to be working well to provide a common centralised framework for managing the day-to-day business of the Command, as well as its reform and modernisation.*

Accountability

2.17. Over the past five years, the leadership of SOCOMD has put considerable effort into the development of reliable governance and compliance with Army standards.

2.18. Metrics are one way of assessing accountability. Army metrics indicate SOCOMD is now performing as well or better than the Army average in most categories. The latest Army Compliance and Assurance Test (April 2020) gave SOCOMD an average compliance rating in 2019 of around 90% (compared with an overall Army average around 82%). Its average audit mark was 95%. It had a lower rate of explosive ordnance incidents *vis-à-vis* the rest of Army.

2.19. In 2014-15 the Command assessed it had problems with both internal and external accountability. Apart from worrying trends relating to management of materiel, there were other significant behavioural and administrative causes for concern. These included incorrect or deliberately wrong post-action reporting; infringements of discipline on overseas assignments, disciplinary issues being kept at unit level and units being prepared to risk poor behaviour rather than risk losing capability. Repeated instances of indiscipline and failure to follow established rules and processes give rise to the ‘normalisation of deviation’ of the sort brought to light by Major General Sengelman.

2.20. SOCOMD’s leadership has sought to address the concerns of five years ago about accountability and discipline by paying greater attention to the management of disciplinary issues and stricter enforcement of discipline at all levels across the Command. In terms of reportable offences against discipline, SOCOMD members appear now to be reporting and managing incidents of inappropriate behaviour in accordance with Army policy. There has been a steady rate of incident reporting across the past few years. This is a sign perhaps of the seriousness with which both the leadership and members now place on the acceptance of responsibility for personal actions. Acceptance of discipline and responsibility for personal behaviour was stressed, unprompted, in several of the lower rank focus groups with whom I met.

2.21. The Command has implemented a centrally coordinated system to manage individuals failing to meet standards. I was assured each of the units in the Command was now enforcing discipline in accordance with Army standards and all incidents were reported upwards. Reports registered in the Army Incident Management System (AIMS) did not suggest SOCOMD was out of step with other areas of Army.

- *The Command must continue to insist on the enforcement of firm but fair discipline and the reporting of infringements.*

Advisor Special Forces

2.22. My 2018 Report’s recommendation an advisor be appointed to assist in the oversight of SOCOMD has been accepted. In December 2019 the Chief of Army appointed retired Major General Shane Caughey AM CSC as Advisor Special Forces to provide him with independent and informed advice on issues within SOCOMD. The Advisor’s remit is comprehensive. He is to:

- provide an advisory and mentoring role to commanders within SOCOMD;
- assist SOCAUST with the development of a governance framework and monitoring and advising on compliance and accountability across SOCOMD;
- monitor and advise on the level and effectiveness of integration and interaction between SOCOMD units and with the Army and the ADF;
- assess the manner in which SOCOMD interacts with wider Defence and other government and international agencies;
- monitor and advise on the conduct of SOCOMD operations;

- monitor and advise on perceptions of SOCOMD culture internally with SOCOMD, across Army, the ADF, Defence and other government and international agencies; and
- under the powers of the Defence (Inquiry) Regulations 2018, provide an inquiry or audit function if directed by the Chief of Army.

2.23. The Advisor is supported by a retired RSM of the Army, Warrant Officer David Ashley AM.

2.24. Feedback across the Command about the Advisor's appointment has been positive, including in respect of Major General Caughey's early interaction with elements of the Command.

- *SOCAUST's active endorsement of the Advisor Special Forces role has been crucial for building confidence in the role throughout the Command.*
- *At a time when there remains public questioning about the past state and behaviour of Australia's Special Forces, the appointment of an experienced but independent advisor should give the public confidence in Army's commitment to proper governance and oversight of this necessarily non-transparent element of the Australian Defence Force.*

Clear Guidance for a United Command

2.25. The rationale for Special Forces, their future direction and the intent of the reform and transformation process need to be understood clearly within SOCOMD, and in wider Army and the ADF more generally. In my 2018 Report I made two recommendations suggesting the Army leadership issue plain language guidance and SOCOMD conduct outreach activities on the role and responsibilities of the Command.

2.26. In April 2019, the Chief of Army wrote a "**Charter Letter**" to SOCAUST setting out his expectations of the Command: the operational roles of Australia's Special Operations Force, its linkage to the Army Strategy, its cooperation with other government departments and agencies and with international partners. The charter letter detailed SOCAUST's responsibilities for the development and transformation of SOCOMD to meet the changing operating environment. That letter was circulated amongst the Command's senior leadership.

2.27. **Special Operations Command Plan:** Internally, SOCAUST's guidance on the purpose and directions of SOCOMD has been set out in a Special Operations Command Plan. A rolling plan, looking forward over three years but updated as required, it describes the mission statement for a united Command, the strategic context in which Special Forces may be required to operate, the role they can be expected to play and the capabilities they will need to bring to bear.

2.28. The Plan stresses the Command's alignment with the CDF's Directions, the Joint Force and Army's plans and values. The Plan is intended to provide clarity on the core special operations capabilities resident in the Command and, importantly, which operational unit is the lead or "steward" of that capability. This clear delineation of responsibility for specific capabilities should enable operator units to focus on their core roles. There has been some criticism that Command Plans to date have not provided sufficient clarity on the division of unit responsibilities. This will be addressed in the 2023-2028 Command Plan, due to be released in mid-2020. Precise clarification of roles and responsibilities of units

should help resolve one source of tension within the Command: between operator units in the East and in the West.

2.29. SOCAUST uses the Command Plan to communicate his expectations of the qualities members of the Command need to be successful and the core values embodied within the Command (agility, collaborative, informed, disciplined and humble). In this sense the Command Plan is a form of Code of Conduct for SOCOMD as a whole. The Plan stresses the need for SOCOMD members to gain the trust of, and to prove their value to, the Joint Force and other stakeholders. It sets the priorities and goals for the forward years. The overall impact is to reinforce the integrated nature of SOCOMD and the interlinked or interdependent nature of its component capabilities which must be brought together to meet the requirements levied on the Command by Army, the ADF, Defence and Government more broadly.

2.30. In focus sessions with members of the Command, compared with two years ago, I found at middle to senior levels – although still not universally - a clearer understanding of the tasks and challenges facing SOCOMD, and of the nature of an integrated or united Special Operations Command. The responses indicated a good degree of commitment to the reform process and an appreciation of why it was necessary.

2.31. Understanding of the united or pan-Command concept was patchier at more junior NCO and enlisted levels. There was a palpable sense that the Command was undergoing a transformation but some more junior SF members complained there was no single, simple, clear explanation of the concept. There continues to be some misapprehension that “pan-Command” somehow means the standardisation of all SF skills down to a lowest common denominator level, at a time when specialisations will become even more important in future operating environments.⁴

2.32. This patchiness of understanding is not unusual in an organisation undergoing a major transformation, but it demonstrates the importance of consistent and clear messaging throughout the Command about the vision and the ways and means to achieve it.

2.33. There also remain small pockets of wariness or resistance about the united Command concept and its impact on the equities of the operator units – less an issue of understanding and more an issue of willingness or otherwise to embrace the challenge of change. I picked up suggestions of this concern mainly at the Sergeant/Warrant Officer level.

2.34. In 2017, the officer then commanding the SASR issued an inspirational regimental plan setting out clearly the role and functions of SASR, the qualities it required of its members (a culture of professionalism, excellence, discipline and humility) and the way in which it fitted into SOCOMD, Army and the Joint Force. This could be a useful model for other units in the Command. Even more important at the unit level, however, is consistent on-message guidance and leadership to increase understanding of and commitment to the united-Command model – and the unit’s part in that model.

- *Considerable effort has been put into clear messaging to help SF members understand the nature and challenges of the transformational enterprise upon which SOCOMD has embarked.*

⁴ “When we have one size fits all, we have no size at all.” (Focus Group)

- *Formal Directives are a necessary part of the command and control mechanism, but plain language messaging setting out the narratives of SOCOMD and its individual units remains a particularly effective tool for uniting the Command around its common purpose, its core mission and its values.*
- *Consistent positive messaging about the role and nature of SOCOMD should remain a priority for units across the Command.*

Procurement and Technical Modernisation

2.35. One of the concerns about SOCOMD during the Afghanistan years was the tendency for its units to manage much of their own equipment procurement, outside of established Army guidelines and, it was claimed, without the exhaustive testing regime Army normally employs.

2.36. I believe SOCOMD should be pushing the boundaries on the acquisition of state-of-the-art technology and equipment necessity for coping with changing threat environments. SOCOMD can serve as a useful test bed for equipment and battlefield techniques that subsequently might be taken up by Army or Defence more generally. However, this process should be managed on a systematic whole-of-Command basis, in alignment with Army and wider Defence procurements guidelines and processes.

2.37. While some unilateral procurement still occurs (but with Headquarters approval), a more systematic united Command procurement process, aligned with broader Army and Defence systems and doctrine, has now replaced the extensive unilateral procurement practices of the past.

2.38. A new emphasis on the Special Operations Logistic Squadron as the single point of entry for goods and services into the Command has enhanced the orderliness and accountability of day-to-day procurement and logistic support.

2.39. **SO MOD:** The establishment in 2018 of the Directorate-General for Special Operations Modernisation (SO MOD) under a one-star officer was designed to put the Command's development and procurement of equipment on a sounder footing - and in alignment with Army and Defence guidelines. The Directorate-General's responsibilities also include anticipating and preparing the Command for rapid changes in the technology of warfare.

- SO MOD manages the **Special Operations Program Capability Assurance Framework** (SOPCAF), which governs procurement and sustainment of new capabilities relevant to SOCOMD's core missions.
- It incorporates the **Special Operations Capability Enhancement and Continuous Development Program**, involving futuristic research, testing and acquisition of new technology both by units within SOCOMD and through Army's testing framework. It involves cooperation with Australian Industry.

2.40. The **Special Operations Program Capability Assurance Framework** (SOPCAF) represents a major advance in the governance of SOCOMD's capability procurement. The framework provides appropriate Defence oversight of SOCOMD procurement activity and enables SOCOMD to be more responsive to technology changes.

2.41. First announced in the 2016 Defence White paper, the Government's Project GREYFIN is a long-term program to maintain Australia at the cutting edge of

special forces technology. A distinguishing feature of this project is it allows for rolling investment as technology changes, rather than a one-off. Under the program, \$3 billion will be allocated over 20 years to upgrade special forces equipment. The first tranche of funding, \$499 million, was approved in 2019. The program will be managed by SOCOMD, in itself recognition of a more mature approach to the management of modernisation in SOCOMD. SO-MOD will of course work in close cooperation with the wider Defence Innovation Hub and the Defence Science and Technology Group. The Government's announcement of the funding made special mention of the opportunities the modernisation of Special Forces would present for enterprises of all sizes in Australia's defence industries.

- *SOCOMD should continue to be a test bed for new equipment and new techniques of warfare, drawing upon Australian industry where possible.*
- *Implementation of the Special Operations Program Capability Assurance Framework for the development and modernisation of technology and equipment for special operations, aligned with Army standards and processes, has put the Command's forward-looking procurement and technology development on a sound footing.*

SOCOMD Selection, Education and Training

2.42. As the Command confronts changes to the threat and operating environment throughout the 2020's, its need for specific types of capability will change – not always slowly. In this transformational phase out beyond the decade, the focus will be on workforce and technology modernisation and revamped training to address future warfare and different concepts of operations. Tasking, technology and relationships between operators and support personnel will need to change. SOCOMD's workforce is likely to need greater variety, flexibility and mobility – and different mixes of skills - than hitherto. This will require some modification of the selection attributes and training of SOCOMD personnel, both operators and support personnel, in order to meet the new challenges.

2.43. If the intention is to address future challenges as a united Command, centrally coordinated personnel selection, education and training in promoting the concept, cohesion, culture and values of a united Special Operations Command will play an important role. *“Common training helps deliver internal integration and cultural alignment across the Command.”* Common rather than separate selection processes for entry into the Command and ultimate allocation to individual operator units may also prove more efficient. It could provide operator units with a wider choice of more suitable candidates with more diverse skill sets. It could also promote greater management flexibility and skills mobility within the Command, increasing options for the next generation of purpose-designed teams or SOTFs.

2.44. **SOTEC:** In 2015-16, SOCOMD's selection and training arrangements were largely disaggregated - with the exception of the Parachute Training School. This reflected what one interlocutor described as the Command's focus on “Unit mission sets” as opposed to “Command mission sets”.

2.45. In the past, most selection and professional training (including hundreds of individual training courses) have been managed and conducted on a stand-alone basis by individual operator units. Thus, selection and training reinforced unit identity at the expense of Command identity. It also represented an inefficient use of effort at a time when core selection attributes and about 80% of special forces skill sets were held in common between the key operator units.

2.46. Over the last three years, the Command has been progressively developing a more centralised selection and training framework.

2.47. In 2017 the **Special Operations Training and Education Centre (SOTEC)** was established as a united Command centre for training and professional military education. It was also given a coordinating role in managing selection processes. The Centre was based originally on Commando training facilities and staff at Holsworthy Army base and still today has to struggle against the perception it is a Commando rather than a whole-of-command entity.

2.48. By mid-2018, SOTEC had made good progress in identifying whole-of-command training needs and in developing a comprehensive strategy for Professional Military Education (PME) in SOCOMD. The strategy is directed at three core objectives:

- **SOF technical and military mastery:** involving the use of unconventional or unorthodox methodologies to achieve results, the ability to work with other forces operating in the five domains of warfare.
- **SOF Character:** or the ability of SOF personnel “to master their body, mind and spirit: to think creatively, be culturally sensitive, exercise proper leadership and behave ethically.”
- **SOCOMD Organisational Culture:** a united Command culture nested within Army and Army values, with an ethos based on the pursuit of excellence, a classless organisation and self-disciplined people embodying humility, humour and the pursuit of professional knowledge.

2.49. SOTEC developed partnership arrangements with Australian academic institutions for the provision of training courses across a range of professionally relevant subjects - with the University of New South Wales, Canberra, with the Australian Graduate School of Management and Charles Sturt University.

2.50. **Defence Special Operations Training and Education Centre (DSOTEC):** In December 2019, a further significant step was taken towards a unified training system with the creation of the Defence Special Operations Training and Education Centre, not only as SOCOMD’s whole-of-Command training centre, but also as the special operations training centre for the ADF and Defence as a whole. Its aim was to “enable greater efficiencies, enhanced training and education, and ensure ongoing cultural optimisation programs” for a special operations capability seamlessly integrated with the rest of the ADF. As such its courses are already open to selected participants from outside SOCOMD. All SOCOMD units are represented in DSOTEC.

2.51. DSOTEC was a response to self-identified shortfalls in SOCOMD’s training systems over the previous decade. These shortfalls had been noted in my 2018 Report as an area for attention. It is the intent of SOCAUST that DSOTEC will eventually “lead on all individual SF/SOF training and be the single point of entry into SOCOMD of all SF/SOF candidates”.

2.52. DSOTEC brings together the old SOTEC training wing, renamed the **ADF School of Special Operations (ADFSSO)** and the old Parachute Training School, renamed the **ADF Parachute School (ADFPS)**. As a training establishment, DSOTEC has the same status as other Army training centres, such as at Kapooka (Army Recruit Training Centre) and Singleton (School of Infantry).

2.53. Under DSOTEC’s auspices, the School of Special Operations has this year introduced a common **Special Operations Common Induction Course (SOFIC)** for all new members coming into the Command and those returning to it. The

course represents a further step in the strategy to reinforce the concept of an integrated Command. It is designed to give inductees both a strategic and an operational perspective of special operations, how they are put together and how they serve the Joint Force concept, while at the same time imbuing both Army and SOCOMD attributes and values at the entry level.

2.54. **Professional Military Education (PME):** DSOTEC has management of SOCOMD's Professional Military Education Program, which draws on from Army's PME program. This program is designed to equip SOF personnel "to collectively understand, critically think, decide, communicate and act more effectively"⁵

2.55. Within the PME Program, ADFSSO conducts two whole-of-command courses tailored to special operations requirements:

- The Command Special Operations Basic Course caters mainly for junior officers and senior NCOs from the operator regiments, together with some support staff and participants from conventional Army.
- The Special Operations Advanced Course caters for senior regimental officers and Warrant Officers from the operational units together with some external participants from across the ADF.

2.56. **Human Performance Optimisation Program (HPO):** DSOTEC also manages the Command's Human Performance Optimisation Program (HPO), which is linked to Army's HPO program. This program aims to enhance the physical, psychological, social and technological aspects of members' personal performances both within their military careers and beyond.

Further Centralisation of Selection and Training:

2.57. It makes sense for all training in Special Forces Command to be conducted under the aegis of DSOTEC. Already DSOTEC is involved in most unit selection processes, even where these are still conducted on a single-unit basis. It currently manages the Selection, Force Generation and Reinforcement training cycles for 2 Commando and for the Special Operations Engineer Regiment (SOER) and will shortly assume management responsibilities for 1 Commando's Special Warfare training. This year, too, it will manage these processes for SOCOMD's specialist Signallers and Medics. The odd man out is SASR, which essentially conducts its own selection and training, but with the support of DSOTEC.

2.58. In the interests of efficiency and flexibility, further moves should be taken towards a centrally directed selection and training cycle for SOTEC as a united Command. As the threat and operating environments impose new demands, the pressure will increase for the testing and selection of a broader range of attributes across a wider range of capability requirements. The pools of both candidates and skills will need to be widened; it will be important to avoid the current risk of 'selection from the mirror'. Apart from obvious efficiencies, joint selection and training would help establish at an early age personal relationships spanning the current regimental divide in SOCOMD.

2.59. It is notable that in some other similar jurisdictions joint training is the norm for special operations units which share some capabilities.

⁵ SOCAUST Directive 26 June 2019

- In Canada, if there are capabilities that span two or more units, the requisite training is conducted by the Canadian Special Operations Command central school, which is staffed by instructors from all units.
- As early as the 1990s, the UK moved to a common selection and basic training regime for the Royal Navy's Special Boat Service and the Army's Special Air Services (but not the Army's Special Reconnaissance Regiment). This regime takes SAS and SBS candidates up to the award of the coveted special forces badge.

2.60. Those different models are worth considering in the Australian context, for the efficiencies, flexibility, mobility and other whole-of-command benefits they bring, while balanced against the discrete special requirements of the individual units.

2.61. Over the next few years, a major effort will be devoted to the development of the Australian Army's over-arching Workforce Model and its Training Transformation program – both to 2028. SOCOMD should not wait for this program to be completed before addressing the appropriateness of common selection and common training for units within the Command.

2.62. A new selection and basic training model for SF operators in 1 and 2 Commando, SASR and, possibly for SOER, is set out in the following box.

Model for Common Selection and Training Special Forces

Old Model: Officers and soldiers selected and trained in special operations by the individual units

New Model: Officers and soldiers selected and trained to a basic Special Operations Proficiency

- Identification of core skills or attributes of Special Forces 'operators' against the Command's core activities and mission sets
- Candidates apply for positions in Special Operations Command, not for a particular unit
- Common SOCOMD selection course conducted by DSOTEC for operators (and possibly some support staff)
- Selected candidates undertake 6-8 months basic training in core SF skills, (80% of basic SF skill proficiencies are common to both Commando and SAS core mission sets), at the end of which they achieve a new category of competency, Special Operations (Basic) Proficiency (e.g. Special Forces Operator Grade 1), to which would be attached an appropriate pay scale
- Those who attain the Basic Special Operations Proficiency qualification are then recommended to Commander SFG for appointment to the Command; COMD SFG allocates the appointee to a particular regiment based on the skills and attributes of the appointee demonstrated during the common selection and training
- Further specialist or regiment task-specific training is then conducted within the receiving regiment over the next twelve months

2.63. An important feature of this proposal is that it is the Commander of the Special Forces Group who should have the responsibility of determining who is suitable for service in the Command and for appointing personnel to a SOCOMD regiment or unit - and not the CO of the unit.

2.64. A model along these lines (there are many variations) should give the Command a better chance of developing the SF capabilities necessary to meet future demand, help imbue at the outset a common SOCOMD culture, yet still allow the core capabilities, culture and identity of the units to be preserved. Shared basic SF training before members are allocated to regiments should also help reduce the risk of a recurrence of toxicity in inter-regiment relations.

2.65. The challenge for SOCOMD will be in determining the right synthesis of common selection and training across the Command, in order to achieve unity, efficiency and operational flexibility, without detracting from the very specific training requirements of units with capabilities not shared by other elements of the Command. Responsibility for those higher end or advanced special operations skills may best be undertaken in the operator units, but under DSOTEC management.

2.66. A key question is the extent to which the geographically separate SASR can or should be brought more closely into the DSOTEC framework, thereby bringing SOCOMD's two principal force operator units into a stronger training relationship. SASR personnel already participate in a range of ADFSSO and ADFPS courses; geography should not be an obstacle to efficiency.

2.67. Opposition to common selection and training will include arguments about geography, expense, alleged unsuitability of common training for some core skills, different standards of proficiency required by the different units and an attachment to the independence and control unit management of its selection and training allows. None of these obstacles are insurmountable in the interests of a more efficient, effective and ethical Special Forces Command.

- *In a decade combining conflict, strategic competition and grey zone warfare, it is prudent to keep under constant review the selection and training practices within the Command.*
- *The development of a centralised selection and training regime is currently still a work in progress. A Command-wide consensus on the extent of centralisation of selection and training has not yet been achieved. SOCOMD should proceed to have DSOTEC take responsibility for all selection and training in the Command. Such a move would assist to modify further the separate unit mentality characteristic of the past two decades and achieve a range of operational efficiencies.*
- *In the interests of efficiency and flexibility, further moves towards a centrally directed selection and training cycle should include the introduction of a Basic Special Operations Proficiency qualification, which would be a prerequisite for appointment to the Command by COMD SFG and allocation by him to one of the operator units (SASR, 1 Cdo and 2 Cdo).*
- *If COMD SFG is indeed to be responsible for Force Generation, it should be that officer in practice and not just in principle who appoints people to the Command and allocates them to units.*

- *If DSOTEC is to become the lead body for selection and basic SF training as is envisaged, it will require a bigger complement of trainers and instructors from SASR. Senior positions within DSOTEC, including the command of the Centre, should be rotated between officers with SASR, Commando and, possibly, SOER backgrounds. At the same time, DSOTEC needs to be adequately represented in the West, in order to provide appropriate managerial oversight of SASR-specific training activities.*
- *SOCOMD should look to speed up work to identify future workforce attributes, with a view to developing common selection and training that promote efficiency, flexibility and cultural renewal in SOCOMD.*

SOCOMD Structure for the Future

2.68. As the Command assesses the threat and technical operating environments emerging through the decade and into the 2030s, it must constantly be looking at what special operations capabilities will be needed and how it will deliver them. Weaponry, technology and methods of manoeuvre will need to change and, consequently, the matrix of skill sets and attributes of the SOCOMD workforce will also need adjustment.

2.69. Some broadening of both SF operator and SF support selection criteria will be necessary to cover new capabilities to cope with strategic competition and grey zone warfare. This will require the Command to look not only at its selection and training practices, but also at the advantages of greater diversification of personnel, to include more women and people of diverse ethnic or indigenous backgrounds. It may be necessary to create different pathways for women into all units of the Special Forces. Greater use of direct entry selection for certain skill sets may also be warranted.

2.70. In terms of kinetic warfare in the future, there will be a continuing requirement for SOCOMD's three core activities and their associated capabilities. For the present, it makes sense for one operator unit or regiment to have the lead or stewardship for one of the SOCOMD core capabilities, as provided for in the current Command Plan. SASR in Perth is responsible for Strategic Reconnaissance, 2 Commando for Strategic Strike and 1 Commando for Special Warfare. The exception to that division of tasks is SASR and 2 Commando each sustaining a Tactical Assault Group to counter terrorism, one in the West and one in the East.

2.71. The core of SOCOMD's special operations capability currently lies within the 'Raise, Train and Sustain' function of the individual units, 1 Commando, 2 Commando and SASR. In several focus groups and individual interviews, interlocutors canvassed the idea of combining the three core SF capabilities into one unit, proposing a 'Beta' unit of company or regimental size based on the SOTF concept. The idea that SOCOMD's core capabilities should be shared between its three operator units is for the Army leadership to consider.

2.72. There are other ways to create greater efficiencies in the management and operation of SOCOMD, provide greater flexibility in the allocation of human and other resources and help mitigate the present problems of geography. Achieving the right balance between central control and coordination on the one hand and decentralised execution in the units and sub-units on the other will be crucial.

2.73. Any model for an integrated Command should factor in the commonality of most basic skill sets required for special operations. Indeed, a common Special Operations work category should be developed based on those shared skill sets. A central selection and training regime leading to the acquisition and accreditation of basic Special Operations skills could even be the basis for a new employment category (ECN), doing away with the current ECN 079 and ECN 353 - but not necessarily doing away with the regiments (or the berets) to which those ECN have traditionally been attached. The creation of an entirely new, common Special Operations Employment Category could have merit in helping address workforce rigidities inherent in the current ECN system and allow for greater mobility and task-sharing within the current division of responsibilities between the units of SOCOMD.

- *SOCOMD should be exploring new pathways for entry into the Command, including greater use of direct entry for designated categories of candidates and skill sets. Greater workforce diversity to include more women and people of indigenous and ethnic backgrounds will also need to be considered.*
- *In a changing operating environment, the organisation of SOCOMD, including its unit composition and workforce structure and job category labelling, should be reviewed regularly with a view to ensuring efficiency and flexibility. While SOCOMD is tethered to Army employment structures and remuneration, there is room for tailoring SOCOMD's employment structures and categories better to meet the different operating environments of the 2020s.*
- *Consideration of further structural change must strike a balance between the Force Generation role of the individual units, which are the custodians of SOCOMD's core capabilities, and the efficiencies of central control and coordination.*

3. Perceptions, People and Culture

The Culture of SOCOMD

3.1. The culture of an organisation determines how that organisation goes about the business of achieving its goals and realising its potential for future achievement. A unified culture is a key requisite for a unified command.

3.2. In 2015-16, it was recognised the culture within SOCOMD and the cultures of its constituent units needed serious attention. There was strong evidence the phenomenon of “normalisation of deviation” was taking regimental cultures down a negative path, away from the values of Army. Examples of deviant culture within the unit included not only the alleged committing of serious or criminal breaches of discipline and the law but the failure of fellow soldiers witnessing such breaches to report them to senior officers (sometimes for fear of ostracization - or worse - within the unit). And the failure to follow up effectively hints or rumours of alleged breaches was also indicative of a failing culture within the units. The nature and consequences of this deviation have been documented elsewhere, but they go to the fundamental question of the state of the unit cultures within which the alleged activities were allowed to occur.

3.3. The way the Command had been configured for operations in the Afghanistan years reinforced the strong cultures attached to individual units (principally 2Cdo and SASR), rather than to a culture identifying with the overall Command and with Army, of which they were officially a part. While healthy cultures and *esprit de corps* should be an asset to the unit mission, individual regimental cultures in SOCOMD still need to be aligned closely with the prevailing culture and norms required by the united Command – and by Army. A continuing focus on reinforcing the values leading to good corporate behaviour is particularly necessary in a Command where combat operations are usually conducted by small teams led by NCOs away from, and often out of sight of, the conventional army chain of command.

3.4. A particular responsibility for ensuring a positive culture in a unit lies with the Non-Commissioned Officers. Officers come and go; it is the senior corporals, sergeants and warrant officers, who are usually the longest serving members of a unit and the ultimate custodians of the unit culture. They are the ones who set the example for the soldiers who will eventually replace them.

3.5. My 2018 Report acknowledged important steps towards developing a more unified culture, based on the primacy of Army values as set out in numerous Army documents, such as *Good Soldiering* (relaunched in 2019). A positive organisational culture is not created overnight, but Army values already provide a solid basis for SOCOMD.

3.6. In 2018 I recommended SOCAUST consider issuing a statement of values and code of conduct for SOCOMD as a whole, emphasising whole-of-Command values and the expectation of leaders within the Command to exemplify, promote and strengthen observance of the Command's values. SASR has developed its own code of conduct, which directly addresses issues of concern which had arisen in the Regiment over the Afghanistan years. It is a model of its kind. HQ SOCOMD and other units in the Command do not have unit-specific codes of conduct but base their conduct on Army Values (*Good Soldiering*).

3.7. Over the past five years, the leadership of SOCAUST has demonstrated a clear commitment to restoring a positive and ethical special operations culture

across the organisation. This commitment is impressive. In addition to the required military qualities and expertise in arms, references to proper conduct, ethics and values are now peppered throughout SOCOMD documentation, including in the Command Plans. Army values and ethics are a regular feature of training programs. The programs focus on a range of qualities, described as SOCOMD core behaviours and attributes: respect for appropriate values, inspiring trust and confidence, ability to collaborate together and with partners, mental and operational agility, discipline, humility, ethical behaviour, mutual support for ‘mates’ – the list goes on. These dovetail with the Chief of Army’s nine core behaviours expected of all members of the Australian Army.⁶

3.8. This commitment to a positive culture was acknowledged in focus groups I met within the Command. Participants recognised elements of their unit cultures had indeed needed attention. This did not mean weakening the ethos of ability, agility and creativity, which has been the basis for so many of the past successes of the Command and its units. As one focus group member put it, “*An element of larrikinism and out-of-the-box thinking makes us what we are.*” Nor should closer alignment with the culture and values of Army detract, as some focus group members feared, from the necessarily distinctive characteristics of the Special Operations Forces.

3.9. Cultural regeneration takes time, particularly in the case of unit cultures that are so closely linked to very specific military functions and high intensity training for unique skill sets. There remain some pockets of resistance amongst old hands (“pockets of permafrost” was one expression used) but I am confident both Command and unit cultures are moving in a positive and converging direction.

- *Over the past three years, in its communications and behaviour, the leadership of SOCOMD has placed great stress on the common values they see as characterising the Command, values contributing to a positive culture across the Command – and which are reflected in the day-to-day conduct of its members.*
- *Available evidence suggests both Command and unit cultures are moving in a positive and converging direction – towards the values expressed in Good Soldiering. The risk is back-sliding.*
- *Distinct regimental cultures should be encouraged for the unit esprit and cohesion they invoke. Unit leaders are seeking to reinforce positive cultures. However, constant attention remains necessary to ensure individual unit cultures do not deviate from the culture of Army and become obstacles to the higher objective of achieving unity within the Command and its nesting within Army.*
- *Senior NCOs carry a particular responsibility for defining and upholding the positive culture of a unit, and of the Command to which the unit belongs.*

⁶ Expertise in Combat, Leadership, Physical Toughness, Mentally Prepared, Knowledge, Courage, Initiative, Teamwork and Compassion

Ethics

“Strength of character is reflected in our ability to make ethical and moral decisions and remain accountable. It safeguards us against unacceptable and poor behaviours. It is central to ensuring that our Army remains trusted as a national institution and promotes cohesion in our teams with our partners. This in turn enhances our capability as an Army in Motion.”⁷

3.10. In the past the Command was focused on training to achieve a defined military effect, and less on the ethical, moral and leadership dimensions of special operations. At most, I was told, ethics was more in the way of an optional bolt-on to a regular course and was left to unit commanders to determine. With hindsight, we are now aware the special operations experience in Afghanistan pointed to deficiencies in application of the Ethics of Armed Conflict (as opposed to the Laws of Armed Conflict). Ethical dilemmas will become even more complex as the Army and SOCOMD move further into the complications of a strategic environment combining conflict, competition and grey zone warfare

3.11. My 2018 Report recommended greater attention be paid to training in ethical decision-making across the Command. It is pleasing to see this recommendation has been taken up as a whole-of-Command initiative.

3.12. In May 2019, DSOTEC was directed to prepare ethics training modules for use across the Command. The training would draw upon Army and external academic support. Unit commanders remain responsible for tailoring the ethics package, including both theoretical and practical training, to their specific unit requirements.

3.13. A year later, ethics training has become embedded as an integral part of the Command's Professional Military Education curriculum. The program still includes ethics workshops delivered by external providers but, most important, ethical situational challenges are now included in almost all selection and training courses. The emphasis is on case work dealing with practical ethical problems rather than reliance on the occasional classroom lecture, as in the past.

3.14. Feedback from focus groups across the Command drew general approbation and understanding of the reasons for the increased attention now being given to ethical training. Some participants stressed ethics training should not be allowed to slip into a simple box-ticking exercise.

3.15. Pleasing as the progress is, further refinement of a Command-wide ethics training strategy is possible. The objective is to provide a common, centrally-directed ethics training programme, through collective and individual training courses, selection processes and training exercises delivered to all elements of SOCOMD. DSOTEC hopes to stand up an expert ethics team able to devise, coordinate and deliver training across the Command, perhaps in collaboration with the Commandant of RMC in her role of Director of Army Leadership. The team should be answerable to DSOTEC, not the individual units, and should generate a standard Command ethics package closely aligned with Army.

- *Ethics in Special Operations is now recognised as an integral element of training in SOCOMD. It should be a permanent element.*
- *The SOCOMD ethics strategy could be further strengthened with an expert group in DSOTEC managing a command-wide ethics training programme,*

⁷ Chief of Army, “Good Soldiering” 2019

aligned with Army, and covering selection processes and reinforcement training, as well other elements of the PME program.

Force, Family and Veteran Program

3.16. The stress placed on all members of the ADF and their families, both during service and after transition from the Force, is a major issue for Army and for Defence as whole. The particularly intense nature of service in Australia's Special Forces with constant high tempo training, high risk and high stress levels, places an added responsibility on SOCOMD to provide a network of support for members and their families and for SF veterans. SOCOMD, both the senior leadership and at the unit level, is taking this responsibility seriously. Psychological testing of individual members, both at the commencement and the conclusion of operational assignments is standard.

3.17. Over the years, individual SF units, together with Defence, other Government departments and community and Ex-Service organisations have provided social support and welfare for SOCOMD members, families and veterans.

3.18. In 2019 SOCAUST announced a Force, Family and Veteran support plan to operate across the Command. It seeks better to harness and integrate existing support mechanisms. It has a particular focus on Special Forces families and those transitioning out of the Command. Units will still deal directly with veterans through their own formal and informal support networks, but the Command through DSOTEC will have a strong leadership role in terms of policy and coordination. DSOTEC will provide training for SOCOMD staff involved in the FFV program. Within the units, the role of the padre in supporting soldier and family welfare has been invaluable.

3.19. The process of transition of members out of the Command can be traumatic. SOCOMD participated in a pilot program across Defence whereby Department of Veterans Affairs placed an officer in the Command specifically to fast track the recording in the DVA system of injuries sustained during service. The effect was to reduce the complications people leaving the Command faced in managing their retirement health and welfare issues with DVA. While that pilot program has been completed, there are now Veteran Support Officers at most bases across Australia.

- *SOCOMD takes seriously its obligations for the welfare of veterans. The Force, Family and Veteran Support Plan is a commendable initiative in exercising a duty of care towards SOCOMD members who have transitioned out of the Command, many with illnesses or injuries sustained during service in SOCOMD.*

Workforce Mobility

3.20. It is in the long-term interests of SOCOMD and the professional development of its members for there to be mobility within and through the Command. My 2018 Review identified at least three benefits in greater career mobility for individual SOCOMD members – and for the Command itself:

- Promoting the united Command concept; posting people out of their units to serve in Headquarters, SOTEC or elsewhere in the Command in order to “experience wider SOCOMD”;
- Enhancing career prospects of members by broadening their experience in wider Army;

- Transferring special operations combat skills for the benefit of the conventional Army

3.21. However, in a Command where individuals have been so closely identified with a single unit, movement both within SOCOMD and out into the conventional Army frequently encounters a range of obstacles - from unit operational requirements and long training windows (seven years to develop expertise in some subjects), no replacement stream to allow personnel to pursue external opportunities, personal and family preference, unwillingness to move locations, fear of losing professional currency and promotion prospects through periods outside the unit, and loss of allowances. As one senior NCO commented, “SASR soldiers rarely move anywhere until they are sergeants. We risk becoming in-bred into our regiments.”

3.22. The benefits of mobility can be realised through different training opportunities, postings to jobs outside the unit, either in the Command or with conventional Army, or even secondments into the private sector.

3.23. Of course, there is already some degree of mobility within the Command, but the leadership should be looking to manage mobility on a more systematic basis, particularly for NCOs. Service outside the Command should be a prerequisite for promotion to senior NCO levels; examples might include a corporal aspiring to be a sergeant or a sergeant aspiring to be a Warrant Officer or RSM being required to have one or two postings outside the regiment.

3.24. An effective career management program for SOCOMD remains a challenge only in part constrained by internal culture and operational requirements. Ideally the pay and allowance system determined by the Defence Forces Remuneration Tribunal should be made more flexible and less prescriptive to provide the means and incentives for more effective career management for SOCOMD members.

3.25. In my 2018 Report I recommended Army and SOCOMD work together to mitigate financial disincentives to SOCOMD members posting away from their parent units. DFRT consideration is not likely to occur before 2024, but the Command should be considering now the case it might put, along with Army, to give it the flexibility better to promote the career development and mobility of its members.

- *Resource and regulatory constraints, along with a strong unit culture, unduly limit the flexibility for career management support to its members. This is an Army and Defence-wide issue beyond the capacity of SOCOMD to solve alone.*
- *Where circumstances allow, SOCOMD leadership should be seeking to promote mobility and agility within the workforce through postings across and out of the Command, into other agencies or even into the private sector.*
- *A prerequisite for promotion to senior NCO levels within the Command should be the acquisition of broader experience outside the Command. Careers should be actively managed to achieve this.*

Unit Equities

3.26. Albeit based on anecdotal evidence only, I sensed two significant atmospheric changes within SOCOMD since my 2018 Review:

- an apparent improvement in relationships and perceptions between East and West, between 2 Commando and SASR; and
- a greater sense of inclusion and worth on the part of the Special Forces Support Staff (SFSS), especially in the Special Operations Engineer Regiment (SOER) and the Special Operations Logistics Squadron (SOLS).

3.27. **Inter-Unit Rivalry:** It is difficult to assess just how deep or permanent are positive changes in inter-unit relationships. Old prejudices die hard, particularly amongst those who have been in their units for a long time. Focus group members admitted frictions and competition still existed, particularly where there was a perception of an overlapping of functions. Differences in pay scales between the East and West remain an irritant, the justification for which needs to be re-examined.

3.28. A number of interlocutors saw the continuation of friction most evident at the senior NCO level, the very people who should have the most influence in reducing the impact and toxicity of inter-unit rivalry. Positive leadership by officers and NCO in the units remains important in controlling this issue.

3.29. Rivalry between units will always be an issue within the Command; the challenge is to ensure it does not again become destructive or an obstacle to the united Command objectives. One officer in a focus group observed that the clarification of the roles of the Commandos and SASR, as set out in the Command Plan, had reduced a significant source of negative competitive tension between the regiments. Another took the opposite view.

3.30. Overall, the language in most focus groups suggested inter-unit animosity was less of an issue than in the past. Inter-unit hangovers seem not to have been taken up by the influx of new members into the Command.

3.31. If sustained, this positive trend is encouraging for the realisation of a united Command and reflects the effort the leadership in both headquarters and units have been putting into promoting collegiate working relationships at all levels.

3.32. **Special Operations Support:** In the past, the ‘enablers’ - Special Forces Support Staff members (SFSS) - signallers, medics, etc. – have not always felt their skills were appreciated by the SF ‘operators’ – without the high level of special operations skills of the enablers. Although some SFSS members had served numerous times in the Command, most have parent units in the conventional Army, thus making them ‘different’. There remains a perception that not all support officers are suited to the particular demands of the operator units and careful attention needs to be paid to their selection.

3.33. The concept of an integrated Command, epitomised by the SOTF model for operations, emphasises the inter-dependency between operator and enabler, each of whom brings equally necessary specialist skills to the team. Enabler skills are essential to successful operational outcomes. This is being recognised by the SF operators. One SOER interlocutor said, “SOER is now seen as more of a part of SOCOMD as a distinct unit and not just an adjunct to the major units. We still have a way to go but we are no longer second-class citizens.” Another commented that the regular public recognition by the senior SOCOMD leadership of the value of the enablers in the SFSS had had a positive effect.

3.34. Some members of SOER face a different issue: alienation from their parent units in Army. The Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) is naturally inconvenienced having to release valuable skilled tradespeople to serve in SOCOMD. On the other hand, some specialise so much in SOCOMD they are reluctant to return to RAE. This an area which seems ripe for solution through the direct entry recruitment of skilled tradespersons into SOCOMD

3.35. **1 Commando:** 1 Commando is an integrated unit; one third full-time serving members and two thirds part-time reservists. Its mandate is Special Warfare, which covers capacity building for defence forces overseas and unconventional warfare. The unit is well aligned with the SOCOMD transformation program and works well with other SOCOMD units, with the ADF and other Government entities.

3.36. **2 Commando:** Created two decades ago as a precision strike and recovery unit, 2 Commando has seen distinguished service in over 28 operations. It has a major role in providing ADF support for counter terrorism operations. Its precision strike capability is likely always to be an ADF requirement. It currently faces two challenges:

- developing its strategy for adapting its core precision strike and counter terrorism capabilities to the changed operating environment of the 2020s, including a stocktake of existing and new skills required to meet those challenges; and
- reversing a temporary periodic hollowing out of its workforce (it is the biggest unit by numbers in the Command, about 700), while noting the Regiment continues to meet its preparedness and readiness requirements.

The officer commanding the Regiment is currently working on a strategy to address these issues.

3.37. **SASR:** With a 70-year history, the Special Air Service Regiment, despite the anonymity of its personnel and the secrecy of its capabilities, has the most public identity of the units of SOCOMD. Its distinguished history, distance from Headquarters, the way in which its members have operated overseas and the nature of its classified capabilities have combined to give the Regiment a strong sense of identity, cohesion and self-sufficiency. Like all units of SOCOMD, it prides itself on its professionalism.

3.38. Over the past four years, officers commanding the Regiment have devoted considerable effort to re-setting the Regiment after its Afghanistan experiences. The focus initially was on governance and compliance – and cultivating the positive elements of the regimental culture. That re-set is regarded as successful. With a clear mandate in the Command Plan as to its responsibilities, the Regiment's focus has now moved to evolving its capabilities to cope with the new operating environment of the 2020s.

3.39. Geography remains a big challenge. Many members and their families are reluctant to leave WA for other postings or assignments. The Regiment has so far seen advantage in selecting and training its own from its Perth base. How the SASR meets the challenges of geography and separateness will be one of the more decisive factors informing the development of a fully integrated Special Operations Command.

- *Each of the units in SOCOMD appears to be performing well in terms of the generation and delivery of special operations capabilities; their challenge is*

maintaining current capabilities while addressing new challenges possibly requiring new capabilities.

- *There will always be competitive rivalry between SOCOMD units, even in a united Command. The risk arises when, as has happened in the past, the rivalry becomes toxic or potentially counterproductive to operational outcomes. Senior NCOs bear a particular responsibility for ensuring a positive ethos and culture within a unit.*
- *Further clarification of the different roles assigned to each unit may help address inter-unit issues, but such issues will continue to need careful management by both SOCOMD and unit leaderships.*
- *A stronger sense of acceptance and worth amongst SFSS members is to be welcomed. Leadership recognition of the essential contribution of SOER and SOLS to the united Command remains important. There is a case for considering more direct entry recruitment into SOER for skilled tradespeople.*
- *2 Commando is currently working through a process of resetting to meet future exigencies and to address a temporary hollowness in its workforce.*
- *SASR has undergone a reset since 2015-16. Given issues of geography, the manner in which it will participate in the whole-of-Command processes, particularly in respect of selection and training, remains to be played out. How it is played out will be critical for the success of the united Command.*

Issues of Morale

3.40. Whatever the outcome of the IGADF inquiry, adverse press publicity about the alleged activities of some SF members could have an impact on morale across the Command, notwithstanding the fact 80% of current members of SOCOMD did not serve in the twenty Rotations of Special Forces through Afghanistan since 2001.

3.41. There are no excuses for proven criminal behaviour but there was understandable disappointment in the focus groups to whom I spoke that the hard-won operational successes on the battlefield were now being overshadowed by those allegations about behaviour on the part of some SF personnel. This was not to excuse such alleged behaviour; they saw it as unconscionable and totally repugnant to the values of Army.

3.42. The issues raised in the allegations cannot be swept under the carpet in SOCOMD. They must be confronted transparently and honestly within the Command. The attention paid over the past few years to cultural renewal, ethical behaviour, integrity, accountability and Army values is a solid foundation for dealing with whatever is the outcome of the IGADF inquiry.

External Perceptions of SOCOMD

3.43. In my 2018 Report, I recommended SOCAUST develop a comprehensive outreach program to increase understanding of the nature and role of SOCOMD within Army and the wider ADF. That outreach is bearing fruit, particularly at the more senior levels of the ADF.

3.44. **ADF:** Within senior ranks of the ADF, there is an expectation that in a period of heightened strategic competition SOCOMD will have an important role to play – but possibly a different role to the one it played in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Its special operations capabilities will be important instruments at the disposal of the ADF's Joint Operations Command. This role requires an integrated SOCOMD and a SOCOMD fully integrated with Army and Joint Operations Command.

3.45. There is satisfaction with the way SOCOMD is now integrating with Army and with Joint Operations Command. SOCOMD members are seen to be contributing more actively and creatively to joint planning than hitherto. SOCOMD participation in conventional training exercises is expanding and is appreciated. One senior interlocutor commented Special Forces were becoming more open and more collaborative within the military. (As an aside, Special Forces provided assistance in the 2020 bushfire crisis: "They went to remote locales and did a great job.")

3.46. Notwithstanding the hangover issues associated with the inquiry being conducted by the IGADF, there is a general appreciation amongst senior interlocutors of the progress SOCOMD has made in reconstituting itself over the past five or six years. The Command is valued for the special operations contribution it makes to Australia's defence posture. It is seen as fit for purpose, although the senior leaders agree the role of Special Forces is still evolving to meet the strategic requirements of the 2020s and beyond. "All the indicators are pointing in a positive direction."

3.47. Below the senior leadership, old perceptions of Special Forces linger (less so, it seems, in the RAN and RAAF). One interlocutor commented, "At the highest levels of Army leadership the interaction is very collegiate and emphasises SOCOMD is part of Army. But the lower you go in SOCOMD, the greater the tribalism and sense of separateness." Another commented, "the arrogance remains in SOCOMD, particularly SASR."

3.48. I gained the sense that such negative sentiments may be less intense than in past but they remain an issue with which SOCOMD will continue to have to deal. The response lies in ensuring SOCOMD continues to provide a thoroughly professional special forces contribution to the ADF and continues to pursue a positive culture that brings the virtues of agility, collaboration, knowledge discipline and humility into behaviour that is appreciated by and engenders trust in military colleagues across the ADF.

3.49. **External Stakeholders:** Perceptions of the Command on the part of external stakeholders are generally positive. Representatives of law enforcement were extremely complimentary about their collaboration with SOCOMD, particularly in the counter terrorism area, but also in the sharing of training facilities from time to time. Similarly positive responses were received from other government departments and agencies, although the Command (and Defence) continue to need to take special care to ensure SOCOMD's activities and aspirations are appropriately understood by and coordinated with other elements of Government.

- *Externally, amongst informed senior stakeholders, there is a far more positive view of SOCOMD than even two years ago. The crucial importance of its capabilities is acknowledged and it is seen as a substantive and valued contributor to ADF goals and capabilities.*
- *The leadership and members of the Command should continue their collaborative engagement with Army, the ADF and partner agencies and departments, ensuring that SOCOMD is seen as a trusted, ethical, reliable and skilled team player.*

4. SOCOMD: Into the Future

4.1 SOCOMD has regrouped and renewed in the five years since 2015. It has established a sound organisational and cultural basis to carry it forward through Phase IV of its current journey.

4.2 As it moves on the continuum of changing operating environments its challenges remain unchanged:

- Achieve and maintain a state-of-the-art special operations capability, by continuing to invest in people, training, systems and technology, including through its PME, HPO and GREYFIN programs;
- Ensure the most efficient use of human and financial resources across the command in a period of budgetary uncertainty, now made worse by COVID-19, including through centrally directed provision and rationalisation of services to the units;
- Continue to seek the optimum balance at any one time between Mission Command principles for delegated management of the SOCOMD units and the need for a strong central leadership to set the direction and policy of the Command, to provide pan-Command coordination and ensure proper integration with Army and the Joint Force, as well as cooperation with national and international partners; and
- Ensure the Command and its constituent units maintain a strong moral compass through ethical leadership and firm adherence to Army values, the values expected by the Australian public of its Special Forces.

4.3 The years before 2015 for Australia's Special Forces were marked by significant achievements on the battlefield but also, as we have learned, by failures in governance and accountability and allegations of serious misbehaviour, all of which pointed to critical weaknesses in leadership and culture. Have these concerns been addressed in the reform and modernisation process in SOCOMD since 2015-16? Or, in another situation of prolonged high tempo combat activity would we see deviation from Army values, rules and regulations again become the norm within elements of the Command? Would there again be lapses in discipline, bending the rules or, worse, instances of serious criminal activity?

4.4 The whole thrust of the reform process has been to address the deficiencies identified in 2014-15, both from the organisational, command and control and cultural points of view – and to get SOCOMD into shape to address the future. The emphasis on strong central supervision and oversight, including independent oversight through the Advisor Special Forces (in addition to standard Army oversight mechanisms), the enhanced attention being paid to inculcating Army values into the culture of the Command, the prominence now given to ethical decision-making at all levels in the Command, the proper enforcement of discipline and a leadership demonstrating adherence to a strong moral compass - all these factors give hope for a significantly reduced risk of any return to normalised deviation.

4.5 As always, the key to success will be the exercise of active leadership necessary to focus SOCOMD on its core tasks, while seeking to inoculate it against a recurrence of the sorts of cultural, behavioural and accountability concerns that arose during the Afghanistan years. In any well-run organisation there is a risk of back-sliding. SOCOMD has in place the management systems and culture to

identify instances of backsliding and to remedy them quickly. Maintaining those systems and culture is the task of leadership.

Recommendations

4.6 SOCOMD has undergone an extensive reform and modernisation process. That process is proving effective. I see no reason for major deviation from the course that has been set. That said, the Command should be prepared to countenance departures from the traditional approaches adopted in its units where these are justified to meet the changing operating environments of the 2020s.

4.7 Set out below are some suggestions and recommendations the Chief of Army and SOCOMD may wish to consider.

1. The Enterprise Management Framework is an appropriate over-arching mechanism for managing the Command as a single entity, provided it does not become too bureaucratic and cumbersome.
2. The unifying and managerial role of SOCOMD Headquarters will be further enhanced by ensuring a steady rotation of postings through SOCOMD headquarters of both conventional Army and other experts, together with the regular rotation of personnel from the constituent special operations units.
3. The Command should maintain the practice of clear plain language messaging to help SF members at all levels understand SOCOMD's mission, its values and the rationale for its transformational processes. Frequent visits to Perth by senior Headquarters staff is recommended.
4. SOCOMD should proceed to have DSOTEC take responsibility for all selection and training in the Command. In the interests of efficiency and flexibility, the Command should move to a centrally directed common selection and training cycle for SF operators before they are allocated to SOCOMD regiments.
5. A common training course leading to a Basic Special Operations Proficiency qualification should be introduced, replacing the initial training currently carried out in 2 Cdo and SASR. The Basic Special Operations Proficiency qualification would be a prerequisite for appointment of operators to the Command by COMDSFG and allocation by him to one of the operator units (SASR, 1 Cdo and 2 Cdo).
6. If DSOTEC is to become the lead body for selection and basic SF training as is envisaged, it will require a bigger complement of trainers and instructors from SASR. Senior positions within DSOTEC, including the command of the Centre, should be rotated between officers with SASR and Commando, backgrounds.
7. In a changing operating environment, the organisation of SOCOMD, including its unit composition, workforce structure and job category labelling, should be reviewed regularly. Consideration of further structural change needs to strike a balance between the Force Generation role of the

- individual units, which are the custodians of SOCOMD's core capabilities, and the efficiencies of central direction and coordination.
8. While SOCOMD is tethered to Army employment structures and remuneration, there is room for tailoring SOCOMD's employment structures to give improved efficiency, flexibility and mobility.
 9. SOCOMD should be exploring new pathways for entry into the Command, including greater use of direct entry for designated categories of candidates and skill sets.
 10. Greater workforce diversity to include more women and people of indigenous and ethnic backgrounds needs active consideration.
 11. Where circumstances allow, SOCOMD leadership should be seeking to promote mobility and agility within the workforce through postings across and out of the Command, into other agencies or even into the private sector.
 12. SOCOMD needs to pay close attention to career management support for SF personnel. Resource and regulatory constraints, along with a strong unit culture, can limit the flexibility for career management support. This is an Army and Defence-wide issue beyond the capacity of SOCOMD to solve alone.
 13. Candidates for promotion to senior NCO levels should be required to have had recent broader experience outside the Command.
 14. SOCOMD should develop further through DSOTEC its comprehensive ethics training program based on a combination of schoolhouse and situational techniques.
 15. The Command must continue to insist on the timely enforcement of firm but fair discipline and the reporting of infringements.
 16. SOCOMD should continue to be a test bed for new equipment and new techniques of warfare, drawing upon Australian industry where possible.
 17. Distinct regimental cultures should be encouraged for the teamwork, *esprit* and cohesion they invoke, but constant vigilance is required to ensure individual unit cultures do not deviate from the culture of Army and become obstacles to the higher objective of achieving unity within the Command and its nesting within Army.
 18. SOCOMD should continue to take seriously its obligations for the welfare of members, their families and veterans through the Force, Family and Veteran Support program.
 19. Leadership recognition of the essential contribution of SOER and SOLS to the united Command remains important. There is a case for considering more direct entry recruitment into SOER for skilled tradespeople.
 20. The leadership and members of the Command should continue their collaborative engagements with Army, the ADF and partner agencies and departments, ensuring that SOCOMD is seen as a helpful, trusted, reliable and skilled team player.
 21. Proactive leadership must be maintained to focus SOCOMD on its core tasks, while seeking to inoculate it against a recurrence of the sorts of cultural, behavioural and accountability concerns that arose during the Afghanistan years.