



Special Operations Command
Department of Defence

AM2324225

SOCOMD Governance Remediation - 2015

References:

- A. DCA Directive 01/15 SOCOMD Governance Remediation dated XX May 15

Background

1. Over the 2014–15 stand down period three notifiable incidents occurred at SASR in quick succession: [REDACTED] was found to have been removing Explosive Ordnance (EO) and other service property; a member was arrested by WAPOL for involvement in an armed robbery; and a qualified member reported a number of his civilian weapons, stored incorrectly in his personal locker within Campbell Barracks, were missing. In early February the AHQ PATO submitted a damning, yet accurate, report on EO management at SASR. These events precipitated a series of HQ directed interventions into SASR, eventually leading to the issue of DCA Directive 01/15 *SOCMD Governance Remediation* at Ref A.

2. Notwithstanding immediate operational priorities and commitments, governance remediation has remained my highest priority. The symptoms of the governance shortfalls were easily identified, however more important was identifying the causal factors. It is only in treating these that long-term enduring change will be implemented.

3. Culture, manning and operational tempo have previously been seen as the cause; in this instance I assessed the cause was failings in leadership and accountability. SOCOMD was no longer holding itself to account and maintaining the required standards across all areas. More specifically, I assess the problem was a gradual erosion of leadership and accountability across the full span of command responsibilities. This resulted in acceptance of incorrect norms and standards, and evidenced in poor discipline and governance shortcomings.

4. This is a stark and confronting assessment of a command that has been continually and exceptionally successfully deployed on operations since 1999. I take nothing away from this effort, and as an Army we should be rightly proud of what SOCOMD has achieved. Unfortunately, it has come with cost in other areas and command functions. While I do not absolve our people of their responsibility to behave in accordance with our standards and to follow the correct and accepted procedures; I observe that organisationally, Defence (through Army) has not fully laid the foundations required to have mitigated this risk. SOCOMD has had significant fiscal and equipment resources injected, but I submit the associated manning to effectively, efficiently and sustainably manage the additional resources has not occurred. By way of observation, during the Army focus on Beersheba in 2013–14, SOCOMD was not only held separate to wider Army modernisation efforts but was held below rank in two of its senior appointments. The incumbents did an outstanding job but that Army was willing for one of its functional commands to remain at BRIG/COL (rather than MAJGEN/BRIG) level for such an extended duration and at short notice is telling.

5. In the six months since the issue of Ref A, SOCOMD and in particular SASR, has made significant remediation progress. The easy and incorrect response would have been to

inject large manning resources: this may have treated the visible symptoms quickly but enduring change and eradication of the issues required SOCOMD to first change its approach, adhere to laid down procedures and use extant processes. Through the chosen approach, fidelity and clarity on the appropriate scale of additional manning has been achieved. Army and other areas of Defence have provided excellent support during the last six months in the form of staff advice, effort and expertise. Actual physical manning supplementation to SOCOMD has been relatively minimal: in the order of 10-15 personnel over short periods. This denotes that our emphasis is best placed on the results achieved because they stem from behavioural change.

6. In short, I assess SOCOMD has arrested the decline in governance and standards within its remit and largely been successful in remediating items directed in Ref A (para 7). While there remains further remediation effort, we are on the right trajectory. Identifying the causal factors has been as critical to our progress as has been rectifying issues. The principles I asked to be followed in this process remain extant:

- a. Meet the Army standard
- b. Adhere to extant Army processes
- c. Follow the line of accountability
- d. Identify the tasks, resources and assets more rightly under taken by other organisations within Defence and Army.

7. These principles direct our focus on understanding why and how SOCOMD faces these issues now, and will help ensure they do not recur, including in the broader Army. Through this paper, I therefore offer observations borne of our work, with analysis over the last six months, including some metrics indicating the changes and trends.

Context

8. SOCOMD, an organisation of approximately 2450 people, holds 24 DPRs resulting in approximately 62% of its force being held at any one time below 48hrs NTM. Its 88 pers HQ (excluding JIALO) perform the RTS responsibilities of a functional command (HQ FORCOMD: 267 pers); the training and preparedness like functions of a Bde HQ (69 pers); the Op readiness of HQ 1 DIV (140 pers); and the operational oversight of a HQJOC (420 pers).

9. SOCOMD has an annual budget of circa \$55m and it maintains the largest and most expansive international engagement program within Army, and per capita in Defence. Its individual and collective training schedule involves over 180 individual training courses and over 60 collective training exercises. The scale of this is reflected in the transactions in a three-four month period in one unit magazine equating to the Readyng Bde's yearly transactions. It has 16 liaison and embed positions overseas at any one time, and in the past ten months – in addition to major unit level operational commitments (HAWICK and OKRA) – has operationally deployed over 90 individuals.

10. SOHQ is a flat, operationally focussed organisation that is now not fit-for-purpose. Co-location with HQJOC and the previous close relationship with JOC in Sydney (2003-08) results in staff effort and a strong bias to operational issues. This is reflected in the extant

force assignment of SOHQ to CJOPS for operational planning and the broadly interpreted TECHON command and control relationship SOHQ has had with its deployed forces. It is difficult to argue against this operational focus given that successive CDF and CA assign the highest priority to support to operations.

The Problem

11. While I identify our primary challenge being leadership and accountability; design, structure and manning are also significant barriers to overcome. Emphasis on leadership and accountability these past six months have generated the immediate, necessary changes, and have been designed to achieve an enduring solution. This change should not be unexpected noting the quality of the people managing these issues.

12. In relation to governance and the situation SOCOMD found itself in Jan 15, four organisational behavioural trends (as distinct from design and structure) stand out. Within each of these there are numerous sub-factors that are not detailed.

13. First, while the majority of key decisions (organisation, force structure, capability development, design, location and command and control) can be considered uniquely correct, when collectively combined they led to fundamental weakness. SOCOMD has suffered from a series of decisions made incrementally over time, with a notable inability to sufficiently invest in its long-term future. An operational focus, high operational tempo and staffing capacity naturally focuses effort on the near-term.

14. Second, there has been a reliance and inclination to adopt improvised processes. Again this has been brought about by operational focus but similarly encouraged by innovation – something we do not want to inhibit. On many occasions standard Army processes were not followed. Ad hoc and abridged processes became the norm. The reason for originally abridging a process (responding to a short notice operational tasking) became lost with this ad hoc process evolving into the new norm. It was common (and anecdotally acknowledged outside SOCOMD) that SOCOMD worked around the system rather than working through the system with its inherent checks and balances. The primacy of producing or supporting operational outcomes is again evident, but with a cultural, or ‘special’ factor at play.

15. Third among the trends is the conundrum of loyalty and longevity vis-à-vis renewal and refresh. Loyalty to its people and in turn their loyalty to SOCOMD has underpinned both our success and failings. Loyalty and service to the unit and SOCOMD was rewarded by extended posting tenures. On many occasions SOCOMD would dictate to career management agencies the requirement to keep a member within a unit. This – coupled with a general concern among non-qualified members that a posting to SOCOMD was not helpful to their career aspirations – reduced manning options. It stymied organisational refresh, restricted the wider professional development of individuals, and at times entrenched poor habits. Conversely it has enabled SOCOMD to leverage considerable experience and return on specialist training investment – which has occasionally been without option if capability was to be maintained. The related factor of remuneration in this is acknowledged.

16. The fourth trend evident is the ongoing inclination to absorb too many responsibilities both at a HQ and unit level while maintaining focus on achieving an operational outcome and an emphasis on OPSEC. This highlights a failure to trust, or charge, external-to-SOCOMD organisations to do what is within their remit and their capability,

notwithstanding their responsibility. For example: holding and maintenance of some major equipment items that more rightly could be managed at JLU level. This has resulted in increased workloads on an already stretched staff capacity.

Manifestation of the problem

17. The manifestation of the problem is characterised by an operational focus, not an organisational focus. This has meant long-term planning and laying a foundation for the future suffered due to the immediacy of operational priorities over a 15 year period. Nowhere else in Army or the ADF has this long term, high-end commitment to operations occurred to the same level. Of note, the force deploying was always exceptionally prepared, well equipped and responsive at short notice but the effort required for this left gaps, deficiencies and shortfalls at home.

18. Over an eight year period SOCOMD raised, trained, force prepared, deployed and indirectly sustained through a broad interpretation of TECHON, twenty SOTG rotations. A HQ was deploying every six months and sub-unit FE every four months. On average this resulted in two sub-units across the command deploying or preparing for deployment every 18 months and the Commanding Officer (CO) and other key staff appointments away from units for at least six of every 24 months. This is in addition to the maintenance of short notice DCT/SRO response options. Such a prolonged absence of key appointments placed a heavy burden on units and SOHQ. This effort manifested in high leave balances and numbers of multiple tours and shortfalls in governance across the command.

19. SOCOMD units have a training and operational cycle, but given extant commitments it does not realise a similar benefit as the current ready, readying, reset cycle for Army Bdes or even the previous within-Bde cycles. The consequent challenges and deficiencies have been compounded by the command being on perpetual readiness.

20. SOHQ has assumed a broad span of responsibility covering all and more aspects of other functional commands. Having three direct report lines to support (CDF, CA, CJOPS) on my behalf places a significant staff burden on the HQ. Engagement is often required and advice sought from the central Defence groups. In broad, the four SOHQ Directorates cover: operations and plans; training and IE; personnel and logistics; and capability development and modernisation. Adding to the burden, SOCOMD also operates and maintains its own deployable CIS. Noting the scope of SOCOMD commitments in recent years, these Directorates cover a vast amount of work.

21. All areas have been stretched and it is unacceptable given our duty of care responsibilities that five members (recorded) have left in the last 12-18 months with mental health related illness. This workload has resulted in the HQ being unable to undertake some of the fundamental HQ responsibilities of direction, guidance and oversight of units. To manage the impost the command has devolved to unit level many responsibilities that otherwise should be held at a HQ level, including planning and conducting large collective certification activities. At a minimum, each area needs an immediate inject of approximately six to seven pers to provide some depth, redundancy and capacity. I have identified specific positions separately for your consideration.

22. Separate to this effort, since late 2005 SOHQ has introduced into service a complex capability overseen by JIALO. This spans capability development, training and a range of

other functions, and has better harnessed outside expertise. An excellent capability, this area similarly requires specialist manning which taxes an already stretched manning pool.

23. Within the two major units (SASR and 2 Cdo Regt) the CO are concurrently committed as both standing JTF commander and unit CO responsible for RTS functions. Their JTF are on the shortest NTM. This creates a tension that often defers to the operational responsibility. In addition CO SASR also holds the SADFO responsibility for a barracks that resembles a Bde like organisation in terms of base support functions.

Symptoms

24. In spite of the initial Command-wide action by my predecessor in mid-14, the cumulative effect of these pressures, coupled with the absence of strong leadership, manifested in the symptoms coming to prominence early this year. From governance issues in barracks to discipline problems while deployed, many would be familiar to you through previous reporting. I highlight some as they are a means by which we can measure progress. Each of these is attributable to lack of leadership at various levels:

- a. There was an apparent burn out of staff at both unit and HQ levels.
- b. There were a number of visible incidents of alcohol consumption on operations most of which involved officers and SNCO. As identified by my predecessor there was a prioritisation of 'mateship' over 'leadership' resulting in an undermining of the chain of command and a confused notion of what was acceptable.
- c. Standard procedures for explosive ordnance were not followed at a unit magazine (eg: use of civilian vehicles, only one escort, no CO order).
- d. Stocktaking of some items did not follow basic procedures (eg: items were not physically sighted).
- e. Classified documents were identified missing (eg: a significant quantity at SOHQ and a unit, both across an extended period reflecting lack of supervision).
- f. Unit vehicles were used with no accountability through ADO 049 forms.
- g. Speeding fines went unpaid (as the vehicle was unattributed).
- h. Technical deficiencies were not inputted through standard logistic systems to allow corrective action (eg: SFADRHIB was repaired within 14 days after the correct procedure was followed to inform DMO).
- i. Meals at messes were not correctly accounted for (individuals not swiping in; and Q stores were overflowing and exact quantities of stock was unknown).
- j. Compliance with basic security requirements was lacking, facilities maintenance was ad hoc, and compliance with PGPA was on occasions missing.

25. The majority of these occurrences were resident in SASR and that is where I have focussed Command remediation effort. Other units are not immune to similar issues but not

on the same scale. I am concerned that an ACAA audit at SASR in late 2014 never identified even these issues.

26. Against the totality of these issues, SOCOMD was immobilised by recurrent and often lengthy investigations and inquiries. This impacted capability (members being unavailable for deployment while subject to inquiry) as well as the morale and welfare of personnel.

27. The default risk mitigation strategy and response of personnel when asked how to fix this was to request increased manning and resourcing. It was also to invoke that somehow SOCOMD was 'special' and had unique requirements. I have resisted this characterisation and instead pursued a long-term strategy of changing behaviour, fully supported by the chain of command through the units, including challenging SASR to 'meet the Army standard'.

28. While not focussed on here, negative strategic workforce factors and the absence of a strategic workforce plan guiding SOCOMD decisions are a significant contributing factor visiting both organisational stress and risk onto almost every aspect of the SOCOMD enterprise model.

Remediation and next steps

29. I am pleased with the response to date from SOCOMD in remediating governance issues. I am confident the trajectory is sustainable with improved momentum. Progress is evident in discrete areas and I provide a number of key slides to illustrate the improvement (see **Annex A**). I particularly highlight the reduced number of discipline incidents and more generally the daily AIMS summary.

30. Key indicators of improvement include:

- a. The quality and assigning of accountability in QA's.
- b. The reduced number of members subject to administrative or disciplinary action:
- c. From 43 pers affected in Jan 15 to 10 pers in Sep 15.
- d. Matters for 57 pers finalised.
- e. Matters for 26 pers initiated since Mar 15. (9 of which are from a legacy incident).
- f. The lowest number of outstanding CMS transactions in Army as at end Jun 15.
- g. An improvement in SOCOMD NTI performance from 77% in Feb 15 to 93% in Aug 15.
- h. A reduction in RPS holdings at SASR from circa 4000 in Mar 15 to circa 2400 in Sep 15.
- i. A 0% discrepancy in EO stocktake at 2 Cdo covering 500 items.
- j. Production and distribution of relevant orders and instructions covering EO at SASR.

- k. A modest 15 anomalies from 1953 entries on an SFDA audit.
- l. Full compliance in an audit by RTO Cell FORCOMD audit assessing compliance with individual training governance
- 31. Measures implemented or being implemented include:
 - a. Quarterly SOCOMD Governance Board.
 - b. Instituted a pre-SUC training period for all incoming OC.
 - c. Safety audits within SOCOMD units.
 - d. AHQ-led physical security audit of Campbell Barracks.
 - e. Reintegrated SOCOMD logistic officer training into ALTC training continuum, supported by SOHQ.
 - f. Closer and more cooperative engagement with career management agencies.
- 32. Over the last 6-8 months SOCOMD has taken a deliberate policy stance to align accountability within the Command to what should be considered Army standards. The aim being that SOCOMD members are held to the same account for their actions as other Army members. This has entailed a broad education process to convey to all members the reason, basis and correctness of this stance. It also has required Command level intervention to drive behaviour and instil confidence in all members that they will be dealt with in a fair and consistent manner, but also on a case-by-case basis.
- 33. Key to the Command philosophy being inculcated within SOCOMD is that of leadership and its accountabilities. This requires that in instances where a group is involved in an incident, the more senior members, on balance, will be held to account as leaders. Important also within this philosophy is the notion that mistakes and lapses in judgement will occur. SOCOMD strives to have its Commanders and leaders at all levels own their mistakes, step forward and accept responsibility, and move on having learned from the experience. Accountability for mistakes must not only be accepted but it must also be seen to have been apportioned in a fair and consistent manner. However, where clear breaches of integrity or significant character flaws surface they will be viewed and acted on accordingly.
- 34. Underpinning this accountability contract is an acceptance by both subordinates and decision-makers that pending the gravity of an offence a member will likely have one of three broad actions imposed:
 - a. Separation from the ADF.
 - b. Posting from SOCOMD with an offer to return following satisfactory performance.
 - c. Administrative sanction imposed while remaining in SOCOMD.
- 35. Ultimately, my approach is to re-affirm command, leadership and accountability and to use the extant disciplinary and administrative system to support this where necessary. This is a command-led process not a legally driven one. This necessitated a candid critique of

existing arrangements and a challenge of existing practices and outlooks as to the health of the existing command climate and the associated imperative to change. Double standards, compromised leaders, unconscious bias, the assumed adequacy of norms, a reluctance to fault correct outcomes below Army standard, defensiveness to critique, an instinct to cover shortcomings rather than declare them were all in evidence to varying degree and contributed to a lapse in confidence when it came to accountability.

36. A concomitant issue that is analysed, reported and addressed separately under the heading Organisational Culture, Behaviour and Attitude, provides further insight into the command climate in place and how this contributed to many of the issues cited here. Further initiatives to strengthen arrangements and build organisational resilience along culture, behaviour, attitude and ethics lines are being implemented. These include the establishment of an Ethics and Behaviour Advisory Group of external individuals including former CO SASR Jim Wallace and representatives from the Red Cross and St John Centre for Ethics. A program of visiting speakers drawn from FVEY SOF, who discuss their equivalent challenges and how they have addressed these will occur in the near future. Finally, a study to determine a better understanding of the Culture of SOCOMD and the development of a methodology against which to assess performance and improvement at individual, organisational and unit levels in the areas of behaviour, attitude, values and ethics has commenced.

37. Underpinning all these initiatives is the need to invest more in the knowledge, awareness and education of all leaders within SOCOMD to prevent a recurrence. While SOCOMD already invest heavily in these areas and arguably has one of the best individual training mechanisms available, this is oriented towards operational outputs. Partnered initiatives for the SOCOMD enterprise that address the history, complexity and inter-dependencies of the FORGEN, Organisational, Departmental and IA domains is limited. Therefore, knowledge of how the Command is designed, governed and is expected to work effectively nested within Army and Defence is inconsistent.

Conclusion

38. SOCOMD is not irrevocably broken but nor is it currently fit-for-purpose. While the program of governance remediation has identified shortcomings, it has also allowed SOCOMD to realign itself with Army standards and procedures.

39. Despite this, as a result of this and associated analysis, as a commander I am now in a position where as a result of being conscious to the design, structure and capacity limitations within my Command, my freedom of action to identify, decide and act on a wide range of issues without wilful compromise to directed levels of capability, function, accountability and duty of care to my people is increasingly limited.

40. There are two necessary objectives I seek: a realignment of leadership and accountability, and additional staff capacity for immediate critical deficiencies. The first is within my control and now underway, the second I seek support from Army, and through it, support from ADF/Defence. Structural design changes will allow SOHQ to provide a non-deployable Bde HQ-like effect and thereby better service RTS functions with less vulnerability to Operational imperatives. In line with the First Principles findings, a stronger strategic centre servicing my strategic responsibilities and separating them from the operational level staff effort is being developed.

41. Deeper review of the strategic outlook, functions and design of SOCOMD that build from this initial analysis need to commence and are beyond the capacity of SOCOMD to lead. While AHQ might lead this, significant Joint, Defence, OGA and Alliance inputs will be necessary.

42. In terms of DCA Directive 01/15 I assess the majority of action remains in Phase 2, a small element is in Phase 3 (EO, maintenance and vehicle management) and planning for Phase 4 is underway. On the basis of this, I welcome both your and DCA visits to SOCOMD and SASR in the near future to review progress in person and to subsequently discuss successful closure of the DCA Directive *SOCOMD Governance Remediation*.

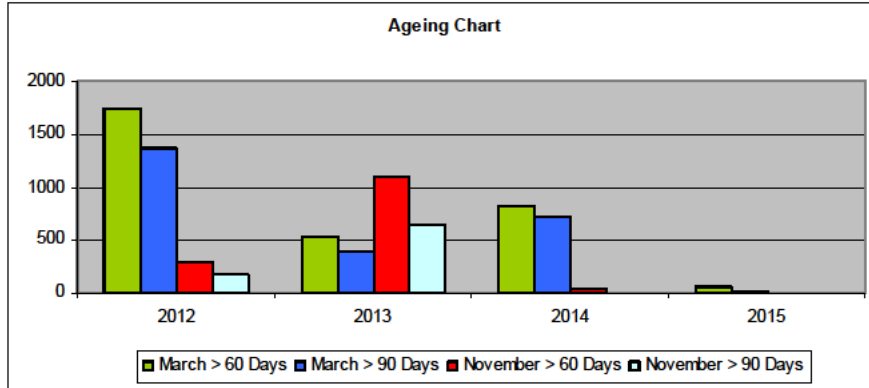
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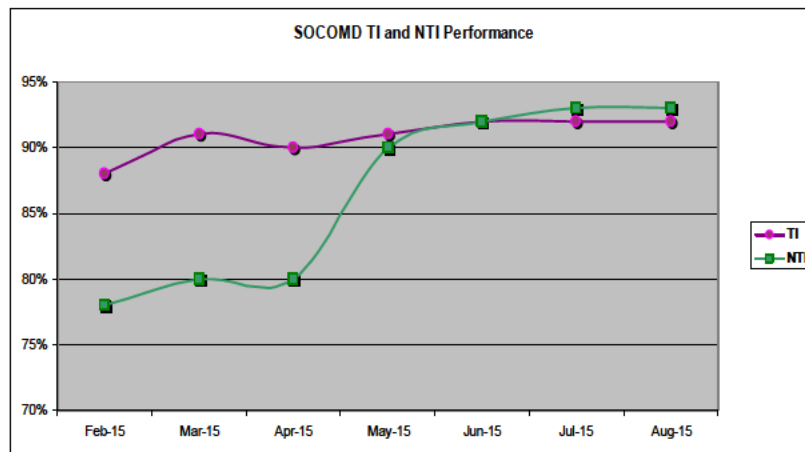
Annex:

A. SOCOMD Trends Data WEF Oct 15

CMS Transactions



SOCOMD NTI Performance



Members subject to administrative or disciplinary action

