

SAS just wants the truth. We do not have a callous disregard for human life.

November 17, 2020



An Australian SAS soldier in Afghanistan.

For the first time in the history of the Australian Special Air Service Regiment, and after much internal deliberation, a small group of soldiers has made the collective decision to step out from the shadows to remind our country what they are, and what they are not.

We are the soldiers, the 'Operators' as we are known, who have served and are continuing to serve in the SASR.

We have decided to speak, as one, to the Australian public, who have trusted us and invested in us to defend our country for more than 60 years.

All of us have been carefully selected for the privilege of serving our country in the SASR. Our government has invested millions of dollars of

public money in each one of us to provide you with unique and specialised capabilities in the defence of our nation.

Our Regiment is now the subject of [the longest inquiry into allegations of war crimes](#) conducted by the Australian Defence Force.

Accusations and allegations of war crimes as well as failures of leadership cut to the very core of the SASR. Such actions go against the very purpose of who we are as an organisation, and against the very nature of who we are as individuals.

We are not indifferent to human suffering. We do not have a callous disregard for human life. We are however, selected for our unwavering moral compasses that we proudly hang our Sandy Berets on. We are not out of control. Indeed, we have spent most our professional soldiering careers in the SASR drilling and exercising, specifically to avoid casualties among non-combatants.

We define SASR mission success by how precisely we can apply the minimum amount of force to achieve a desired strategic outcome with the absolute minimal loss of human life. This is evident in the tens of thousands of missions and programs we have carried out around the world.

We are all singularly bound by the principle of "truth in reporting".



Afghan officers from the Provincial Police Response Company and Australian Special Operations Task Group Soldiers move towards waiting UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters as part of the Shah Wali Kot Offensive.

This principle underpins our single most important regimental capability: long-range surveillance and reconnaissance. Truth in reporting enables the SASR to act as the operational eyes and ears of the ADF and the Australian government — without truth in reporting, we are nothing.

As early as 2006, it was our commitment to truth in reporting that instigated what has now resulted in the four-year-long Brereton inquiry into allegations of war crimes in Afghanistan.

Truth in reporting is why we spoke up then and now.

The matters before us are of an extremely grave nature, and we accept that the impact of the Brereton inquiry may adversely affect former and serving members and their families, as well as our strategic relationships with other coalition forces around the world.

Whatever the outcome, we prefer our Regimental history to reflect hard truths over comforting fantasy. If it can be destroyed by the truth, it deserves to be destroyed by the truth.

We also believe that the same principle of truth in reporting should be

embraced by the media, so as not to unduly impugn the reputation of the SASR as a whole, or inadvertently imply improper behaviour committed by former or serving members. Equally, we applaud accurate portrayals of misconduct provided it is supported by appropriate context and evidence.

Just as we embrace truth in reporting, we demand our leadership to do the same. Leaders are bound in their duty to convey what we have seen and reported and we hold them to the same standards to which we hold ourselves.

It is our relentless pursuit of individual and organisational excellence that defines us as an organisation and a Regiment.



Australian Army soldiers from Special Operations Task Group and their Afghan National Security Force partners board a US Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter at Multi-National Base Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan province, southern Afghanistan, in 2012.

We lead by example. On combat operations, we were forced to sacrifice many of our technological advantages over highly adaptive adversaries who knew no rules or bounds. We accepted continually shifting goal posts and decisions made by governments in the absence of a defined campaign outcome in Afghanistan. We begrudgingly accepted these strategic decisions while attempting to effectively operate in an

environment characterised by uncertainty, danger and our own casualties.

We are not war criminals, nor have we ever set our morality aside. We are professional volunteer soldiers who frequently upheld the values of the Australian Army during a 10-year expeditionary campaign in the Middle East, despite the absence of any clear definition of victory.

We believe in the same legal principles that underpin the very fabric of Australian society, something that we have sworn to defend with our lives.

We support the removal from the Regiment and legal prosecution of anyone found guilty of breaching of the Laws of Armed Conflict, the Geneva Convention or the Rules of Engagement. We outright reject and despise criminality in all its forms, especially in the context of soldiering. We support unbiased investigatory due process, the rule of law and the burden of proof. There is absolutely no place in the ADF, least of all in the SASR, for any individual who believes they are untouchable or above the law.

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'Difficult' ADF report out next week

About "20 SAS soldiers have something to worry about" in terms of possible charges for war crimes in relation to the report by Major General Paul Brereton, says Sky News Political Editor Andrew Clennell.

Having had full legal representation, should it be proven that any former or serving individuals within the SASR have acted outside the law or the expected standards and behaviours demanded of an Australian soldier, we underline that we will wholeheartedly support their prosecution and removal from the Regiment. They have acted against everything the SASR fights and stands for. They are not one of us.

We are committed to accepting the outcomes and consequences of the Brereton inquiry and to action its recommendations. Then we will return to the shadows where we belong. We do not seek to be glorified for our actions or demonstrating our moral courage. We only seek the validation that truth in reporting is who we are and what we do.

We are proud of the internal examinations into our Regiment that have highlighted a culture of toughness and professionalism of the extraordinary men and women who do extraordinary work under extraordinary circumstances.

We are the tactical, operational and strategic eyes and ears for the ADF and the Australian government, with strategic and innovative capabilities to reach out and strike our adversaries when required.

We are soldiers, we are professionals, and we are Australians. We are committed to upholding the values of the Australian Defence Force. We believe in truth in reporting, moral courage and constant vigilance from the shadows in defence of Australia.

We are the SASR. Who Dares Wins.

These words are endorsed by five serving and seven former SAS operators.