

A handover of the most recent rotations of Australia's Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan took place in March, with a number of major successes over the preceding seven months divulged.

Homecoming SOTG commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel I praised the outcomes achieved by Australian special forces under his command, working alongside Afghan units from a number of agencies.

"I am very proud of the men and women who served with me on this latest rotation – their professionalism, commitment and mission focus was a credit to themselves, their units and the wider Australian efforts in Uruzgan," Lieutenant Colonel I said.

"It was very pleasing to see Afghan National Security Force elements increasingly plan, lead and successfully carry out missions, with the SOTG providing specialised assistance as required.

"The average ratio of Afghan personnel on all partnered missions increased to 65 per cent, well above the ISAF-mandated level of 50 per cent for the transition process, and reflects on the efforts of all those who supported this rotation, as well as building on the significant achievements of the rotations that have gone before us.

"Alongside this we saw Afghan authorities issue 67 warrants for arrests and compound searches, with Afghan prosecutors [present for the serving] of most of these warrants, to ensure successful prosecution in the Afghan legal system.

"This increasing ability of the Afghan legal system to use evidence-based processes is highly significant as it supports the transition from counter-insurgency operations to civilian-policing operations."

Personnel on this SOTG rotation conducted numerous training courses for the ANSF during their time in Afghanistan.

Aside from military skills training, courses also included leadership and management,

rule of law, basic evidence handling, human rights, marksmanship training, first aid application and basic cordon and searching skills.

Lieutenant Colonel I said this training was a vital part of what the SOTG did in Afghanistan.

"This is a major focus of our efforts here in Tarin Kot, preparing the Afghan security forces to enable them to be capable of providing security for the people of Uruzgan," he said.

"We are instructing our ANSF partners in a broad range of courses, all aimed at developing their competencies and capacity to undertake security operations, and it is really pleasing for all of us to witness the growing confidence and the important strides that have been made over the past few months."

Lieutenant Colonel I said that, operationally, the SOTG had proved its effectiveness on missions with Afghan partner units to disrupt insurgent networks,

with the partnered forces removing 31 insurgent commanders and several hundred insurgent fighters, from the battlespace over the past seven months – though he did not elaborate on whether or how many were removed permanently/fatally or how many had been arrested and processed through legal systems.

"The loss of so many commanders has limited the insurgents' ability to

plan and coordinate large attacks aimed at destabilising the province, and has brought about greater security for the local population," he said.

SOTG and its partners also had a significant impact on insurgent narcotic production and distribution in Afghanistan. Since July 2012, SOTG members, together with partners from the Afghan National Interdiction Unit and the US Drug

Enforcement Administration, destroyed 10 major drug processing facilities and more than 20 tonnes of narcotics and narcotic-manufacturing chemicals.

This included the destruction of 11.4 tonnes of opium morphine during an operation in October last year – the largest single cache of this narcotic ever found and destroyed in Afghanistan.

Lieutenant Colonel I said that by targeting narcotics production, the ANSF and the SOTG could directly reduce insurgent attacks.

"Narcotics production and trafficking is vital to the insurgency as it is their main source of funding," he said.

"By severing the link between the insurgency and the narcotics trade we are directly reducing the number of attacks insurgents are able to carry out because, without the money from narcotics, they are unable to fund fighting campaigns."

A total of 1355 weapons were also recovered or destroyed, and 761kg ▶



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