



Special Operations Task Group

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The Special Forces Task Group, initially made up of "up to 200 personnel" deployed in September 2014 was located initially at Al Minhad Air Base in the UAE.

No details of the make-up of the SOTG were released, but according to [Paul Toohey](#) of News Corporation, the SOTG is "under the leadership of the [2nd Commando Regiment](#)". The task group could include personnel from the units under the Army's [Special Operations Command](#), which mainly include the [Special Air Service Regiment](#), the [1st](#) and [2nd Commando Regiments](#), and Special Operations [Engineer Regiment](#) and the [Special Operations Logistics Squadron](#).

In March 2015, [the Australian government announced](#) the deployment of a further 300 ground troops to train Iraqi security forces, which were to be based at al-Asad Air Base near al-Baghdadi in Anbar province. On 16 April, the first [70 of the planned 300 soldiers from the Australian Army's 7th Brigade](#) left [Enoggera Barracks](#) in Brisbane for Iraq, to be based at Camp Taji, together with 100 New Zealand troops, [who had trained together](#) with the ADF troops before leaving Brisbane.

The 7th Brigade is a multi-role combat brigade, [currently made up of](#)

- 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry)
- 1st Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery
- 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment
- 139th Signals Squadron
- 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment
- 8th/9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment
- 7th Combat Service Support Battalion

Accordingly the [Taji-based group](#) will include infantry, cavalry, logistics, communication and medical personnel.

On 30 March the government [announced](#) Australian Special Forces were training Iraqi Army 7th Division engineers explosive ordnance disposal and countering IEDs.

After a long delay in securing a Status of Forces Agreement from the Iraqi Government, Vice-Admiral Johnston announced on 65 November that the SOTG would be based in Baghdad, operating primarily with Iraqi counter-terrorism forces.

"Working at the battalion headquarters, it is an advise and assist role. But they will carry

weapons for self-defence purposes. And that would be the normal long arms or short arms that they would carry with them. And potentially depending on – we would evaluate, I mentioned those occasions where we may go to a forward operating base, we'll do a risk evaluation of the circumstances at that base, and they may take heavier equipment with them, to be able to be used, to defend themselves if required. So very much dependant on where their partner force is operating and the risk levels associated with it. So we're not on patrol with them in the sense of going out to engage directly with ISIL forces – that's not what we're there to do."

War crimes allegations

In March 2015, [Canberra Times journalist Nicholas Stuart raised questions](#) about the association of the SOTG with Iraqi Security Force units accused of war crimes in operations against ISIS, in particular, the Iraqi Special Operations Force (ISOF) and its "Golden Brigade". Stuart revealed that the United States had declined to mentor ISOF because of its reputation for criminal behaviour against ISIS, before Australia accepted that role.

Stuart also questioned the seriousness of the ADF's response to questions on the matter following the broadcasting of [an ABC \[US\] report on atrocities](#) being carried out by ISF forces, apparently from ISOF.

"You certainly wouldn't trust our Defence Force to let us know what's really going on. Take their response to a query from Sky News last week. The military said it's "not aware of any human rights abuses by Iraqi soldiers who are being trained by Australian Special Forces". It seems no cases "have been reported". Another way of saying "I know nothing". Unfortunately it's not funny."

[How the ADF is mentoring Iraqi forces can't be shown in a cute snapshot](#), Nicholas Stuart, The Age (16 March 2015)

["Dirty Brigades!": US-Trained Iraqi Forces Investigated for War Crimes](#)", ABC News [US], 11 March 2015

See also:

- [Status of Forces - Iraq \(2014\)](#)
- [al-Asad Air Base](#), Anbar
- [Camp Taji](#)
- [Joint New Zealand – Australian training group](#)

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