

Special forces operators, including Australian soldiers pictured, routinely conduct CQB operations with helmet-mounted night-vision equipment, laser designators and suppressors.

Australian DoD: 1332855

CQB technologies help forces grapple with short-range front line

With an increased emphasis on hand-to-hand combat during current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, UK and US forces are welcoming new technologies and training, reports **Andrew White**

An enemy that seamlessly emerges from and fades back into an indigenous population at will has meant coalition forces operating in Afghanistan have never been more vulnerable to the threat of close-quarter battle (CQB).

Whether it be a foot patrol through a bustling street market, 'shura' with tribal elders, or compound clearance in search of a high-value target (HVT), troops are now being forced to consider how they can best protect themselves at close quarters while conducting military operations in urban terrain (MOUT), not to mention caves and remote dwellings.

However, even with this in mind, there has been a mixed response from various international governments with regards to the provision of adequate and relevant training and resources for such warfare, whether it be small arms, specialist ammunition, electro-optical devices, mini-unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) or unarmoured combat training.

It is no secret that 'contacts' in Afghanistan occur either at very close range or at between 500-900 m and beyond. The latter has attracted greater consideration over the past few years with the introduction of additional sniper and sharpshooter weapons, light machine guns and improved warheads for anti-tank guided munitions (ATGMs). Far less attention, however, has been paid to as-

sault teams who find themselves storming compounds and buildings, while being unable to identify threats waiting for them on the other side of thick, dried-mud-walls.

This has led to various special forces operators across NATO (who are in a better position than most standard infantry to cherry pick their own equipment) selecting a more varied weapons mixture for such tasks in hand. For example, non-standard issue .45-calibre pistols are being carried in place of 9 mm systems whose 'stopping' power or lethality has been questioned.

Similarly, some operators are choosing to carry 7.62 mm assault rifles in place of issued 5.56 mm weapons, for the same reason. These each carry their own risks when it comes to rounds passing all the way through bodies and causing unintended injury or death to 'background' targets.

In response, the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) is pursuing a requirement to acquire a specialist weapon system for CQB operations. A request for information (RfI) was released in May 2009 for a "close-quarter lethality" weapon, aimed at providing a 5.56 mm system for use in "confined" spaces, according to contracting authority Defence Equipment & Support's (DE&S's) Light Weapons, Photography and Batteries Team.

Similarly, sources tell *Jane's* that the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is firming up plans to equip the entire US spe-

cial forces community with FNH USA's Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle (SCAR) in 2010, following a limited user-evaluation programme in 2009.

For CQB scenarios, conventional UK forces have access to the 5.56 mm L22A2 carbine, a short-barrelled version of the SA80A2 assault rifle as used by armoured units and the Army Air Corps. Additionally, Heckler & Koch's (H&K's) 9 mm MP5 sub-machine gun has traditionally been linked to special operations.

However, the MoD is looking to acquire 300 weapons in a contract worth around EUR7.25 million (USD10.3 million). A modified off-the-shelf weapon is expected to be selected. The key user requirements including an ability to "deliver an incapacitating effect on an unarmoured human target" at ranges of up to 200 m and capacity to be brought to bear in "confined" spaces.

According to the DE&S, a weapon system that can be fired from either shoulder and includes a folding or extendable butt is preferred. It must also be capable of carrying the in-service SureFire FA556 suppressor via a threaded barrel muzzle and be able to house a four-MOA (minute of angle) mini red dot/holographic CQB sight.

The MoD said weapons trials had been due to start in December 2009 but the organisation declined to comment on the status of the programme in January.

Industry sources tell *Jane's* that inter-