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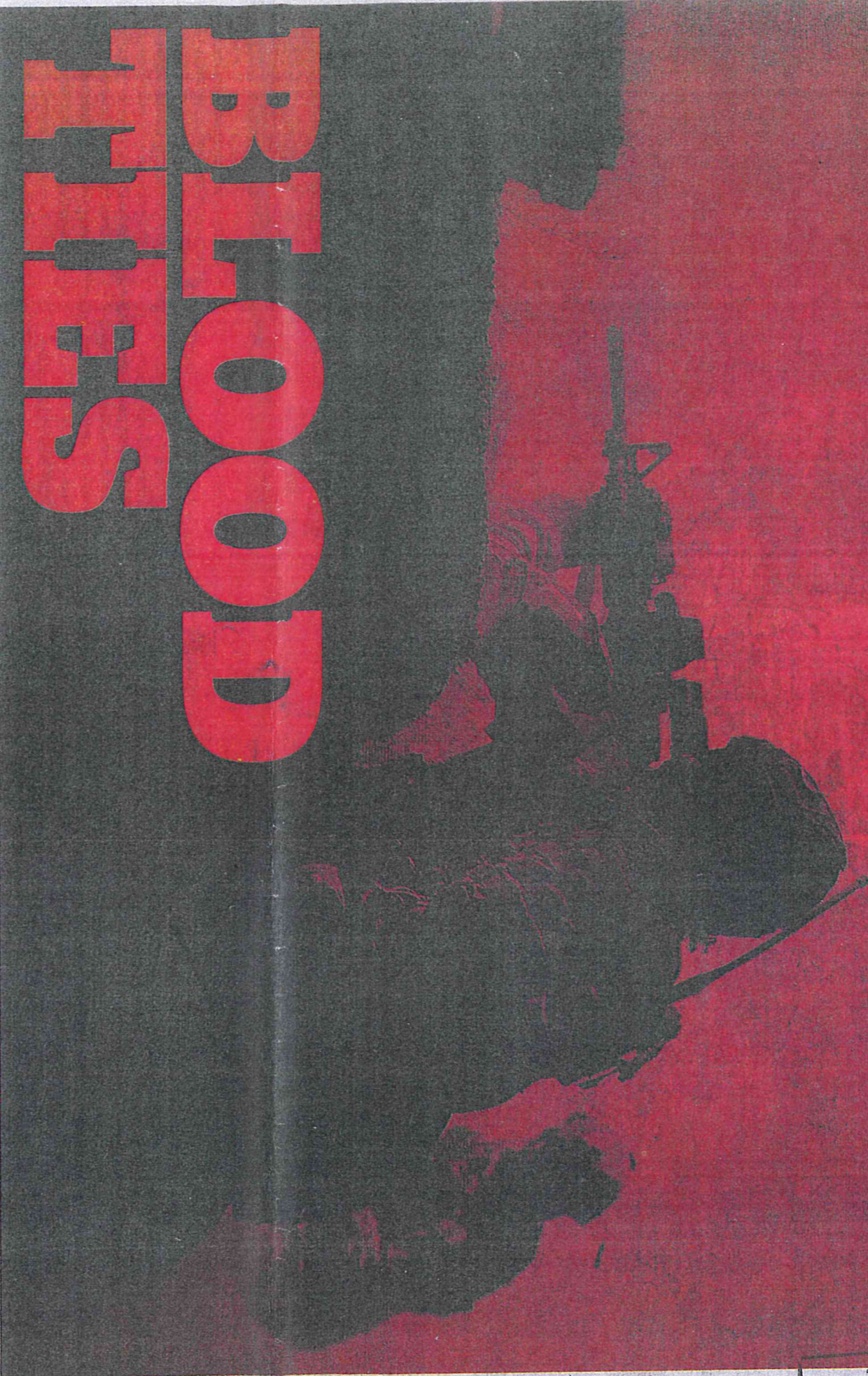
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# Sunday Age

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# BLOOD TIES

**Exclusive**  
Chris Masters  
Nick McKenzie

A Special Air Service Regiment trooper on his first deployment to Afghanistan was pressured to execute an elderly, unarmed detainee by fellow higher-ranking soldiers as part of a "flooding" ritual, according to defence insiders who were witnesses at the scene.

And on the same mission, another man with a prosthetic leg was killed by machine-gun fire. His plastic leg was souvenired and later taken back to SAS headquarters in Perth to be used as a novelty beer drinking vessel.

The summary execution of the elderly detainee on Easter Sunday,

2009, is one of several incidents involving a rogue SASR team operating in Afghanistan which has been uncovered by an *Age* investigation and corroborated by special forces insiders.

The grey-haired, bearded Afghan man executed by the "rookie" was, according to some SASR members, a suspected Taliban member, but at the time presented no threat to Australian soldiers. The newly deployed soldier allegedly shot the man after being prompted by two more senior soldiers, one of whom was earlier overheard proclaiming a need to "blood the rookie".

One of the sources said the killing was less abhorrent than the pressuring. "If shit needs to be done, do it yourself," the soldier said.

SASR sources claim the man with the prosthetic leg was machine-gunned by a soldier that, for legal reasons, *The Sunday Age* will call "Leonidas".

Leonidas is also implicated in the killing of a detainee three years later in September 2012 during a SASR mission in the village of Darwan. Leonidas allegedly kicked handcuffed detainee Ali Jan off the edge of a small cliff, badly injuring his face, according to claims of two defence force insiders who witnessed the event.

As the detainee lay injured, hands still bound, the two witnesses say Leonidas was party to the decision among soldiers to "get him out of his misery". The claims have been backed by the relatives of Ali Jan.

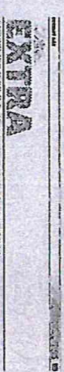
who were interviewed last week by an Afghan journalist on assignment with *The Age*.

The allegations, which have circulated among insiders for years, have now been corroborated by various sources across the globe during a six-month *Age* investigation.

They are likely to be central to inquiries commenced two years ago by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force, assisted by NSW Supreme Court judge Major-General Paul Brereton.

The IGADF inquiry was commissioned by then chief of army, Lieutenant-General Angus Campbell (soon to be become chief of the

INSIDE THE SAS



WHO DARES SPEAK?

## COOL CHANGE

Jane Kennedy's rock'n'roll makeover  
SUNDAY LIFE



## WORLD CUP

Teams, draw, and our experts' picks  
SPORT



Weather

TODAY Fog then sunny 7-15 TOMORROW Mostly sunny 6-16 Page 31

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## DIGITAL SUNDAY



## PHOTO

Rebecca Howson got into the spirit of things at the Melbourne Oz Comic-Con at the Convention Centre yesterday. Go online to see a gallery of the event.



## ONLINE



We're counting down to the 21st FIFA World Cup in Russia. Go online for our World Cup 2018 fixture interactive.

## INSIDE

## NEWS

Australia's largest online GP booking business 'HealthEngine' has been caught altering negative patient reviews and publishing them as "positive customer feedback", potentially misleading users.

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## WORLD

Chinese government hackers have compromised the computers of a US Navy contractor, stealing highly sensitive data related to undersea warfare - including secret plans to develop a supersonic anti-ship missile for use on US submarines by 2020.

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## EXTRA

Aspiring immigrants to the United States are turning to fake marriages in testing times.

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## OPINION

Women are the losers in *Meanjin's* botched politics of symbolism, writes Julie Szego.

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## PLUS



MAGAZINE ADZ BA

# Parliament target for cyber strike

■ Andrew Brown

A third of all cyber attacks investigated in the past financial year by Australia's cyber security agency targeted the federal government.

Figures from the Australian Cyber Security Centre revealed that of the 671 cyber security incidents in 2016-17 that warranted an operational response, 33 per cent of those were aimed at Federal Parliament.

According to the centre, almost 14 per cent of threats were aimed at state or territory governments. However, the Australian Signals Directorate declined to comment on the statistics for specific jurisdictions.

Of the remaining cyber threats, more than 29 per cent targeted industry. All other attacks made up just less than 23 per cent.

An Australian Cyber Security Centre spokesman said threats were on the decline.

"As the security of government agencies and awareness of the threats have increased, the ASCS has been required to respond to fewer incidents," the spokesman said.

"The federal government continues to constitute the majority of targets, followed by industry and state and territory governments."

The decrease in the number of cyber attacks Australian Cyber Security Centre investigated comes as a bipartisan deal was reached in Federal Parliament to introduce laws that will crack down on foreign interference.

The laws were introduced following warnings of unprecedented espionage damaging the national interest. Attorney-General Christian Porter said last week that tougher measures were needed.

"There's an unprecedented level of foreign intelligence activity in Australia and that means more foreign agents and more foreign powers using more tradecraft and more technologies to engage in espionage and foreign interference and the attempted foreign influence of our democratic processes," Mr Porter said.

Analysis by the Australian Cyber Security Centre revealed cyber crime is estimated to cost

Australians \$1 billion a year. However, some estimates state the real impact to the nation is about \$17 billion annually.

"As people and systems become increasingly interconnected, the quantity and value of information held online has also increased and, unfortunately, so have the efforts to steal and exploit that information," the Cyber Security Centre spokesman said.

Among the most frequent types of cyber security threats was ransomware, as well as malware targeting businesses.

"It affects individuals and organisations alike, and can impose significant costs in both recovery and downtime," the spokesman said. "Trusted third parties access continues to be exploited, regardless of organisation size."

The figures on cyber security threats to the federal government comes after a \$9 million cyber security operations centre for Parliament House was announced in last month's federal budget.

Cyber crime costs Australians \$1 billion a year.

The Department of

Parliamentary Services said seven staff members were expected to work in the new centre, which will be set up in the 2018-19 financial year to focus on protecting the parliamentary computer network. UNSW Canberra cyber security strategy and diplomacy professor Greg Austin said while there was a significant number of cyber security threats in 2016-17, the true number may never be known.

"The relationship between cyber security awareness and the actual cyber security of the federal and state governments aren't that strongly connected," he said.

"Governments and corporations talk about their cyber security awareness as if it's the solution to the problem, when there's about 1000 other more important things to do to monitor cyber security than just promote awareness."

The Cyber Security Centre is expected to hand down its next report on cyber threats in October.

## SAS rookie 'blooded' by

■ From Page 1

Defence Force) following a scoping study instigated by then special forces commander Major-General Jeff Sengelman, and conducted by Dr Samantha Crompvoet.

At the time, General Sengelman took what must have been an unpopular stand among some of his peers by lifting the lid on the secrets of the SASR, but also raising

questions about command failure.

Dr Crompvoet's report came to detail "unsanctioned and illegal application of violence on operations" and a "complete lack of accountability" involving Australia's elite special forces.

Observers say Australia's longest war was allowed to bleed on, desensitising special forces operators engaged in too many deployments. Over time, the

## HURRY UP or lose childcare

■ Eryk Bagsshaw

More than 360,000 families are set to lose their childcare benefits in less than a month, leaving them hundreds of dollars out of pocket for failing to sign up to the Turnbull government's new childcare package.

The government has urged families to get a move on as it looks to encourage more women back to work with its personal income tax cuts and \$2.5 billion childcare boost.

The existing two-tiered system - the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate - will end from July 1, as families rush to get paperwork together for the new all-in-one online platform.

The overhaul, which new Education Department figures show 750,000 families have already signed up for, will pair childcare subsidies to the amount of work, study or volunteering a parent does, with the primary caregiver given a means-tested subsidy of up to 50 hours a week for 24 hours of activity. The figures show that more than 360,000 families have still to sign up.

The new system will eliminate a cap on childcare that has led to

thousands of families earning up to \$187,000 running out of government payments before the end of the year.

"When people run out, typically between March and May, they start looking to cut back those hours of care, or they just do it really tough for those couple of months," said Goodstart early learning advocacy manager John Cherry.

Simon Birmingham said the package was the most significant change to childcare in 40 years.

The reforms "are about putting more money back in the pockets of families and tackling those disincentives to work," he told *The Sunday Age*. "The system that's evolved over time means too many mums, dads and carers drop out of the workforce."

Labor says it is "deeply concerned" that one-in-four families could be worse off under the changes, particularly those with one stay-at-home parent who does not meet the minimum four hours of activity to access the subsidy.

secretive status of special forces generated a culture allowing mateship to overwhelm accountability.

The IGADF inquiry into "rumours of the possible breaches of the Laws of Armed Conflict" parallels an International Criminal Court investigation into alleged atrocities committed in Afghanistan by Taliban, militants and coalition forces. The ICC's interest is likely to



The souvenired prosthetic leg.

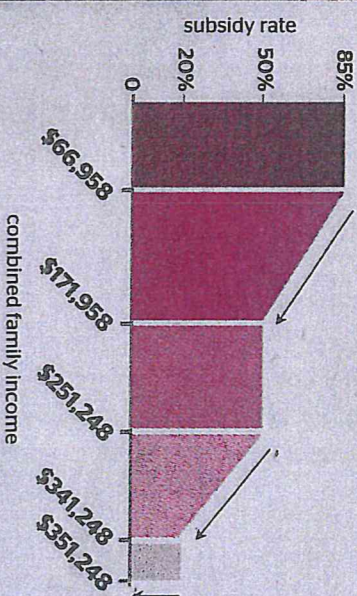


Jan Thima, with her children Buabucha, 5, and Tongthana, 3. Photo: Jason South

## How does it work?

Three factors determining the childcare rate

**1. Combined family income:** Will determine the percentage of subsidy.



### 2. Hours of activity | Hours of subsidy (maximum)

For families earning up to <b>\$66,958</b> ▲	<b>24 hours</b>
Less than <b>8 hours</b>	
For families earning up to <b>\$351,248</b> ▲	<b>36 hours</b>
<b>8 to 16 hours</b>	
More than <b>16 to 48 hours</b>	<b>72 hours</b>
More than <b>48 hours</b>	<b>100 hours</b>

### 3. Type of childcare service: calculated per hour.

Centre-based day care:	<b>\$11.77</b>
Family day care:	<b>\$10.90</b>
Outside school hours:	<b>\$10.29</b>
In home care:	<b>\$25.48 (per family)</b>

Mother of two Farrah Millar was diagnosed with breast cancer on the day her second son was born, then her partner left her. "My family was turned upside down," she said. She did not meet the activity threshold of the new system because she had to spend her time getting treatment, forcing her to spend days in a holding pattern with Centrelink to prove she was in exceptional circumstances.

It was only when she published a blog post on KidsSpot that she was approved for a full subsidy.

"There is just a huge gap, I was fortunate that I was able to campaign for my case," she said. "It looks simplified... but for anyone who is new to the system or isn't computer savvy it isn't, and they can often be the people that need it most."

Labor's spokeswoman for early childhood education, Amanda Rishworth, said she has concerns about parents who work casually being forced to estimate the amount of hours they will receive to establish their subsidy entitlement. "The parent might find themselves with irregular work and



won't get as many hours as they had before," she said. "They could end up with a debt to the Commonwealth."

She said the childcare centres in areas with high migrant populations and low incomes were struggling to get parents to sign up.

"One community centre has had to pay a translator to translate the process for families," she said.

The government maintains situations such as Ms Millar's are a hiccup in a system undergoing fundamental reform and that once the changeover is completed, the package will be better at targeting spending and encouraging primary

carers - mostly women - to take up more work.

A Senate inquiry heard last week up to 90 per cent of a part-time working parent's wages was taken by childcare and a reduction in family tax benefits if they worked a fourth day per week.

"The biggest trap in the whole system is for people who work part time with kids in childcare," said the Grattan Institute's chief executive, John Daley.

"It's not surprising that women that respond to that very raw financial incentive, it's very hard to go back to work for nothing."

Mr Daley found Australia would be up to \$25 billion better off if it matched Canada's female workforce participation rate, which has soared on the back of generous childcare subsidies and low to middle-income tax cuts.

Moonee Ponds mother Jan Thima said without the extra childcare subsidy she will receive she would have had to cut back on toys and clothes for her three-year-old son. "I want to be back at work, but I don't have any family here like a

grandma or grandpa, so the childcare is a solution to look after my kids."

She is about to start her practicum for her own early education diploma. The activity test means her study will now count towards the subsidy for an extra day, saving up to \$110 a week. "Next month I can send him three days a week and it will cost almost the same amount," she said.

The Turnbull government believes its proposed \$2.5 per cent flat tax for those earning \$40,000-\$200,000 a year will complement the childcare packages by reducing the amount of taxpayers that congregate just below a tax bracket increase, a phenomenon known as "bunching".

PricewaterhouseCoopers partner Paul Abbey said women having children and not returning to work full time was a key weakness of Australia's workforce participation.

"The flat tax rate takes bunching out of the equation for them, especially if they are self-employed and have flexibility," he said.

"The rate change will no longer be a disincentive to committing more time and effort."

# executing elderly, unarmed man

be one reason the ADF wants to stay ahead of the curve for the sake of its international reputation.

Dr Crompyoet's report describes "enormous and difficult challenges" facing the Australian government in combating rogue actions by soldiers, warning the misconduct goes "well beyond blowing off steam" and involves "problems deeply embedded in the culture of the Special Forces".



## Odds shorten on poll in spring

Analysis  
Mark Kenny

Labor is quietly preparing for a spring election, despite Malcolm Turnbull's continued assurances of a 2019 poll.

Sources confirm the opposition has recently stepped up its internal processes for completing policy documents, finalising candidates, and mapping out its media buys.

The flurry of activity reflects Labor's hard-headed assessment of the electoral landscape spearheaded by a wariness about the Super Saturday by-elections on July 28.

The feeling is that the by-elections could lead quickly to a general election if the government improves its vote or parliamentary majority.

That could see a snap poll called for September or October, sending unlucky voters in Mayo (SA), Longman (Qld), Braddon (Tas), Perth (WA), and Fremantle (WA) back to the ballot box.

While that would represent a backflip by the PM, even Labor insiders concede this "negative" for Turnbull would be short-lived.

Labor's strategic assessment looks past Turnbull's assurances to the politico-economic arithmetic, concluding that after nearly two years of fruitless toil, the equation is beginning to tilt the Coalition's way. Economic growth of 1 per cent last

quarter putting growth over the year to March at 3.1 per cent, well ahead of the 2.75 per cent budget prediction, was the government's best news since its near-death 2016 election win. Allied with record jobs growth and rising company profits, the expanding economy reinforces the Coalition's "jobs and growth" message.

Labor also points to the government's plan to put its blocked company tax and income tax bills to a vote before the winter break. This is despite trenchant opposition to company tax cuts and pressure to hive off the third stage of its seven-year income tax cuts plan.

Ordinarily, legislative defeat makes governments look feckless but Senate intransigence in the current context could help build the case that only a fresh general election can resolve parliamentary intransigence.

Much, of course, turns on the three seats the Liberal Party is contesting. If the government loses support, which is usual in by-elections, it's back to Plan A. But any improvement would validate the Coalition complaint that the Parliament is demonstrably at odds with public opinion. A win would turbocharge that case.

In such circumstances, Turnbull would come under immediate internal pressure to simply junk his 2019 commitment and capitalise electorally at the ballot box.

Why wait? Last week's solid economic numbers have invited a new risk assessment in the Coalition: what if we stick to the 2019 timetable and the economy slips back again? In a turbulent world, stranger things have happened.