

The United States of America recently commemorated the 20th anniversary of the 9/11/2001 terror attacks performed by Islamic extremists, part of a group called Al-Qaeda-The Base, and the bloodiest attack on US soil since the war of 1812. As many would guess, we immediately went hunting to find those responsible; that precision strike mission turned into the Global War on Terror (GWOT). As the wheel turns and we enter into the rest of the century; now is the time to do a Hot Wash on equipment, techniques, and tactics and how lessons from the past 20yrs can be carried forward in light of the strategic Great Power competition and evolving terror threats whether it is narco terror from drug cartels or the many-pronged attacks by the various Islamists factions.

One of the most effective strategies came from our significant investment in night vision technology and an incredible amount of training for our and our partners' soldiers. The phrase that was popularized during this time was "We own the night." The various image intensification devices, IR lasers, IR illuminators, and thermal imaging units were employed by the team assaulting a compound, vehicles, and aircraft providing overwatch.

There is a long history of night raids throughout history; being comfortable operating in that environment helped one of the US's storied units, Roger's Rangers. Those skills transitioned well into the American Revolution with the "Swamp Fox" and Francis Marion, who harassed and frustrated Cornwallis in the low country. History says this type of fighting will continue to be effective, but how will it change with the proliferation of technology?

Russian and Chinese night vision devices have improved in leaps and bounds over the past 20 years, and we are starting to see them issued to their military on a larger scale. Additionally, the Russians, to a lesser extent, but more so the Chinese; have used our sizable private consumer base (most significant in the world for guns and accessories) to fund their R&D, train their engineers/designers and buy western machines that are needed to make these highly technical products. It is a perfect example of how the Chinese Communist Party uses their civilian/military fusion and dual use principle where there are no differences like in the western world between civilian tech and military. Within China, everything is the State, so when a company owned by the State (there are no privately-owned companies in the CCP) builds thermal devices for export for the US market, they take that hard currency and invest it in R&D, machines, etc. This allows the entities to build higher-end thermal devices, competing with western companies. In turn, it increases hard currency returns to the mainland while also improving the systems issued to their military. The Russians have been doing the same for years under brands like ATN and others but not to the concerted level seen by the Chinese. While it does not appear that night vision is quite as widely issued as in the US military, they are far more prevalent among front-line units, and their newer weapons platforms are able to accommodate the other needed accessories (lights, lasers, etc.). The final significant change is the widespread availability of drones along with thermal/night vision cameras.

A chapter of GWOT has ended with the United States and our allies having exited Afghanistan. Radical Islamists, other violent terror organizations, and great power threats have not ceased to exist. There have been increased reports over the years of seeing far more night vision used by the Taliban, DAESH, and other groups. As one can see from the pictures below, this includes head-borne night vision, dedicated thermal/night vision units([hyperlink to parrot website](#)), and increased use of drones for recon or as an explosive suicide drone.



Streets of Kabul



Taliban fighter in the presidential Palace with what appears to be an ATN scope

The US military can not operate as it used to where it assumed there was little night vision use, so there was no need to worry about IR lasers, IFF markets, illuminators, etc.; we just lit it up. Additionally, there are several lasers used for targeting, signaling, and other uses. How do we move forward into the next fight? Are there different wavelengths that can be used? There have been an increased use of passive thermal units and Short Wave Infrared (SWIR) units that add some additional features. Future PEO soldier has new units on the horizon like the IVAS which is a fusion do it all system theory that blends thermal, night vision, and other sensors. What other products/technology might be applied in this future fight? How do training, tactics, and procedures need to change?

I'd like to hear from you readers about this. I don't think this is a problem with only one solution; I believe that it will require a diverse number of solutions tailored to different environments. One idea that bears more study is additional training in fighting at night without technology, going back to our roots.

Drone link

<https://www.parrot.com/us/drones/anafi-thermal>

IVAS details

<https://soldiersystems.net/2021/04/01/ivas-production-contract-award/>

<https://soldiersystems.net/2021/02/19/us-army-integrated-visual-augmentation-system-mounted-amplifies-capabilities/>

Source for presidential palace photo

<https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/8/15/in-pictures-taliban-fighters-enter-afghan-presidential-palace>