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The crucible of war: Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

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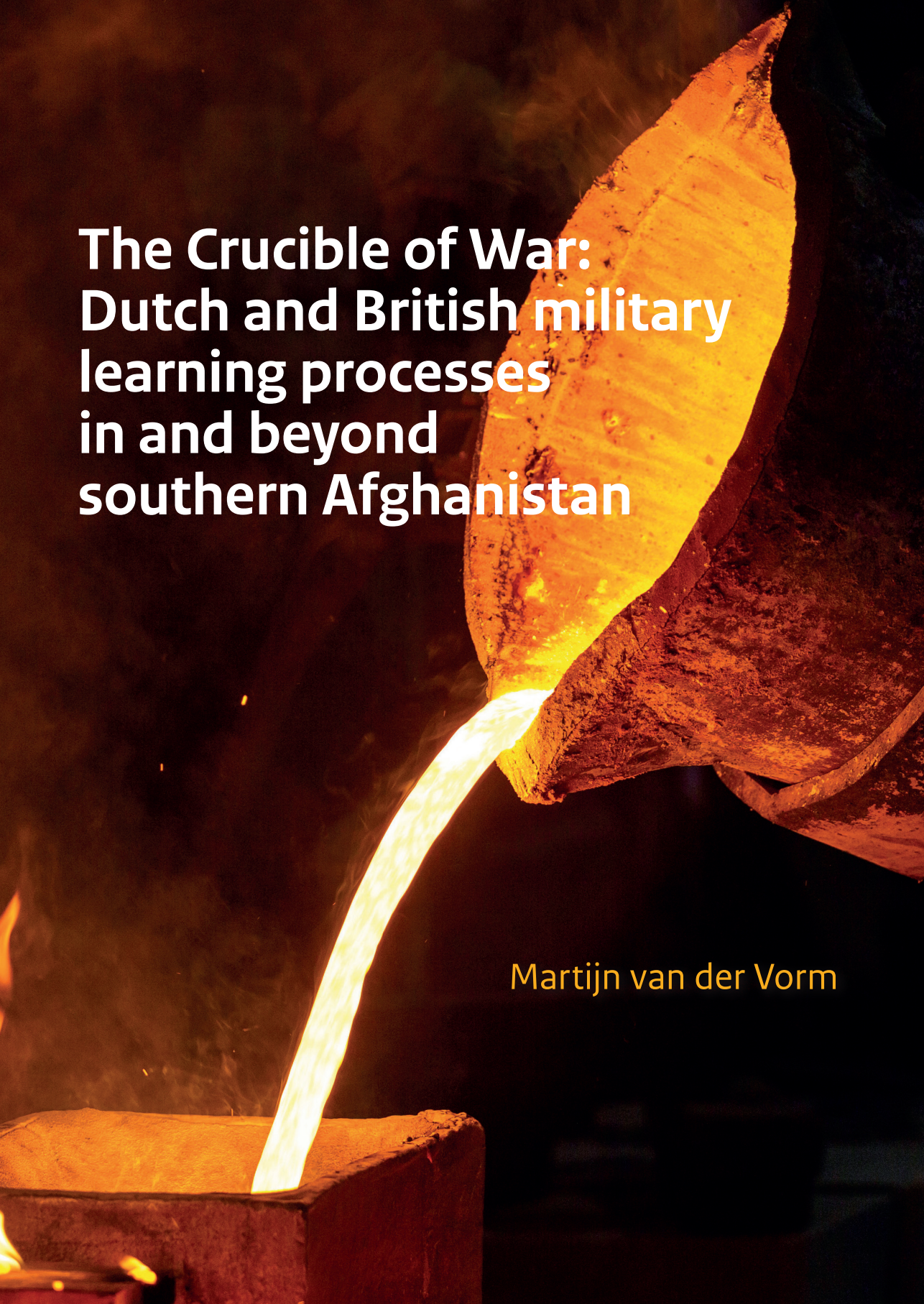
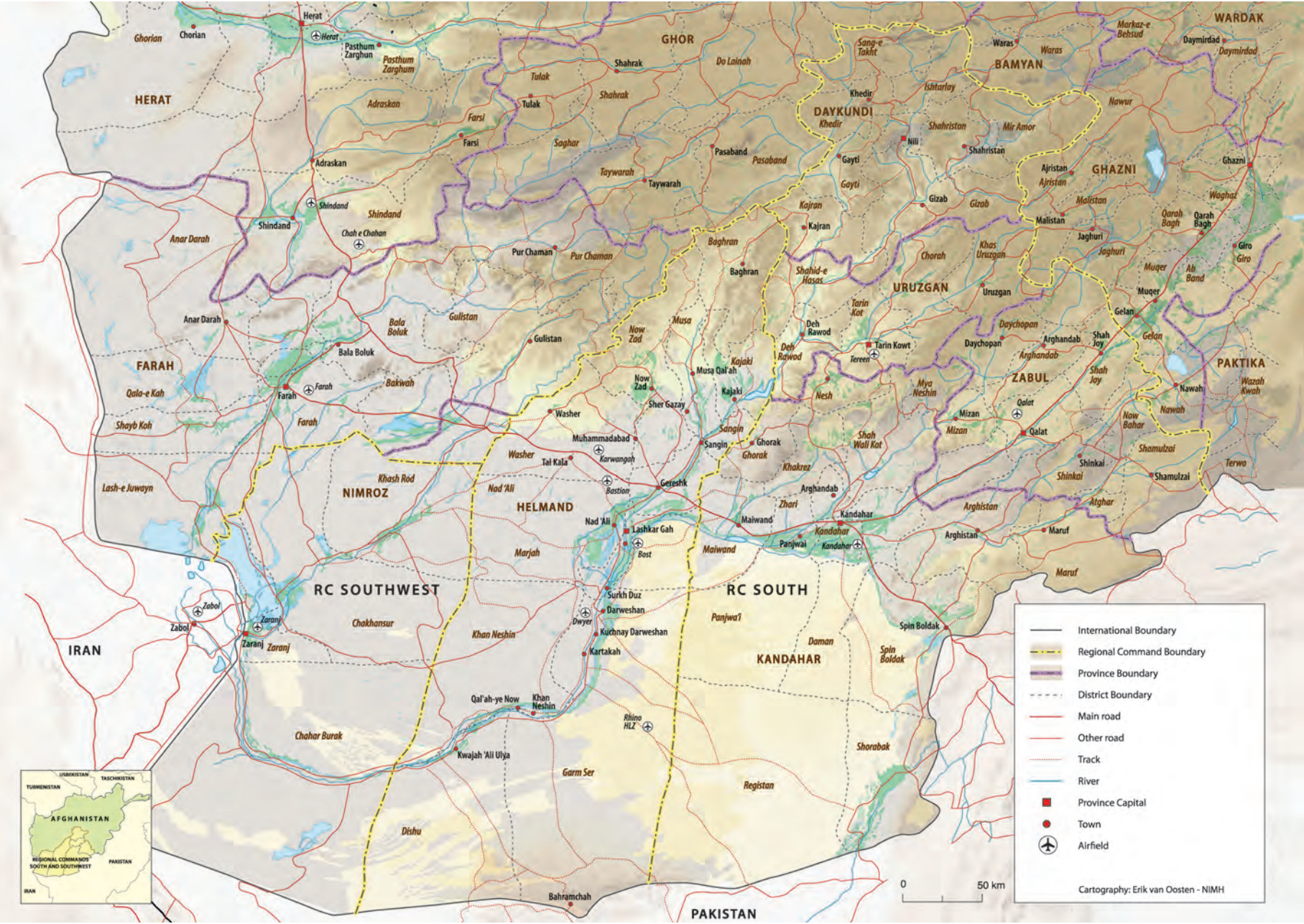


The Crucible of War: Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

Martijn van der Vorm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Ishtarlay
Nawur
Shahristan
Mir Amor
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Taywarah
Saghar
Pasaband
Kajran
Gizab
Malistan
Waghaz
Qarah Bagh
Jaghuri
Giro
Khas Uruzgan
Chorah
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Ab Band
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Baghran
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Now Zad
Kajaki
Sher Gazay
Nesh
Mya Neshin
Qalat
Mizan
Nawah
Now Bahar
Shamulzai
Shinkai
Terwo
Washer
Muhammadabad
Karwangan
Tal Kala
Gereshk
Bastion
Nad 'Ali
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Bost
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Gulistan
Qala-e Kah
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Lash-e Juwayn
Bakwah
Khash Rod
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Kuchnay Darweshan
Kartakah
Panjwa'i
Daman
Spin Boldak
Shorabak
Registan
Bahramchah
International Boundary
Regional Command Boundary
Province Boundary
District Boundary
Main road
Other road
Track
River
Province Capital
Town
Airfield
0
50 km
Cartography: Erik van Oosten - NIMH
USBEKISTAN
TASCHIKISTAN
TURMENISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
REGIONAL COMMANDS SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST
PAKISTAN
IRAN

The Crucible of War

Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

Martijn van der Vorm

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Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

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To my parents, Rien and Nel van der Vorm

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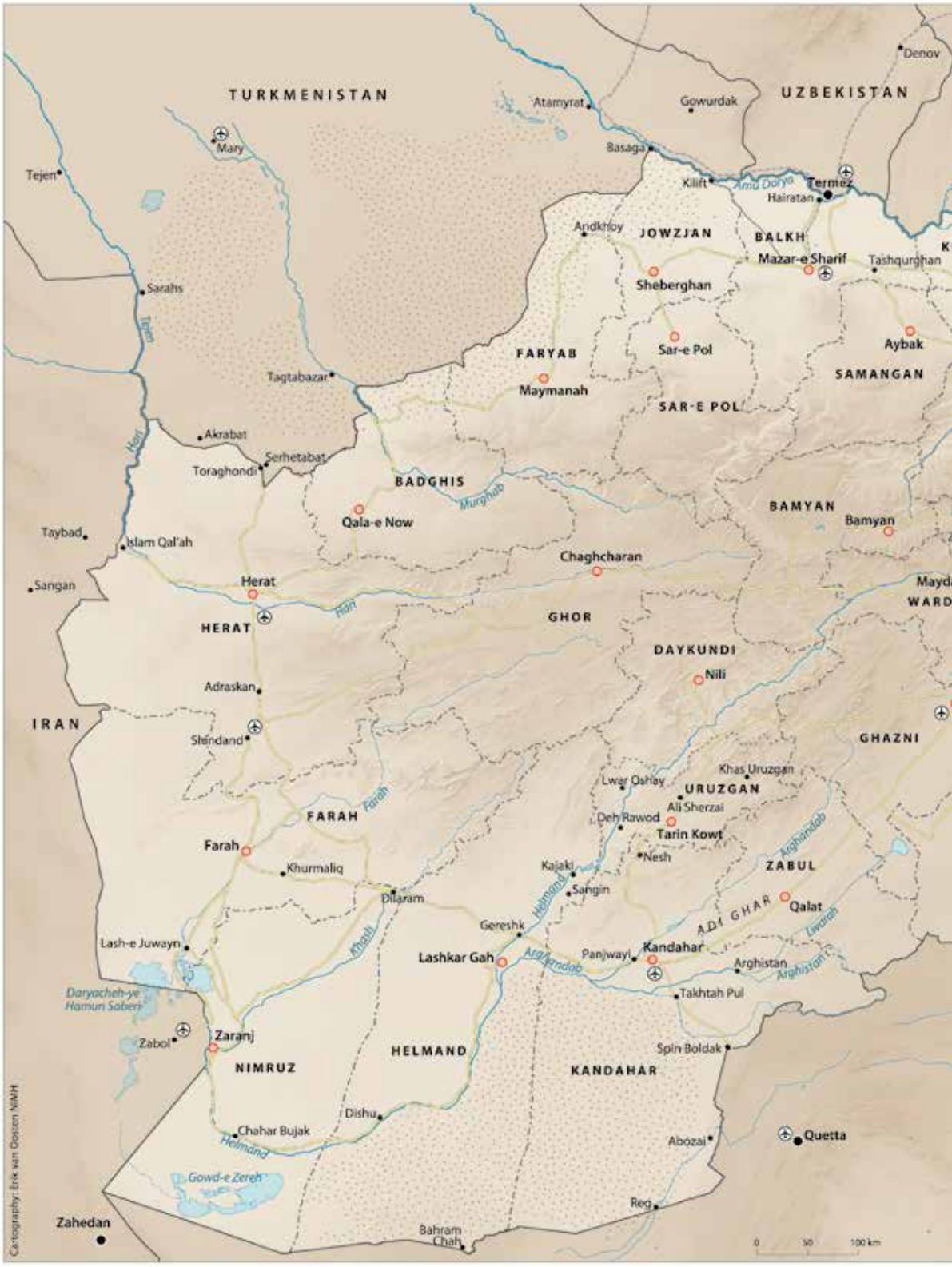
TURKMENISTAN
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Denov
Atamyrat
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Mary
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Aridkhoy
JOWZJAN
BALKH
Mazar-e Sharif
Tashqurghan
Sheberghan
Sarahs
Sar-e Pol
Aybak
FARYAB
SAMANGAN
Tagtabazar
Maymanah
SAR-E POL
Akrabat
Serhetabat
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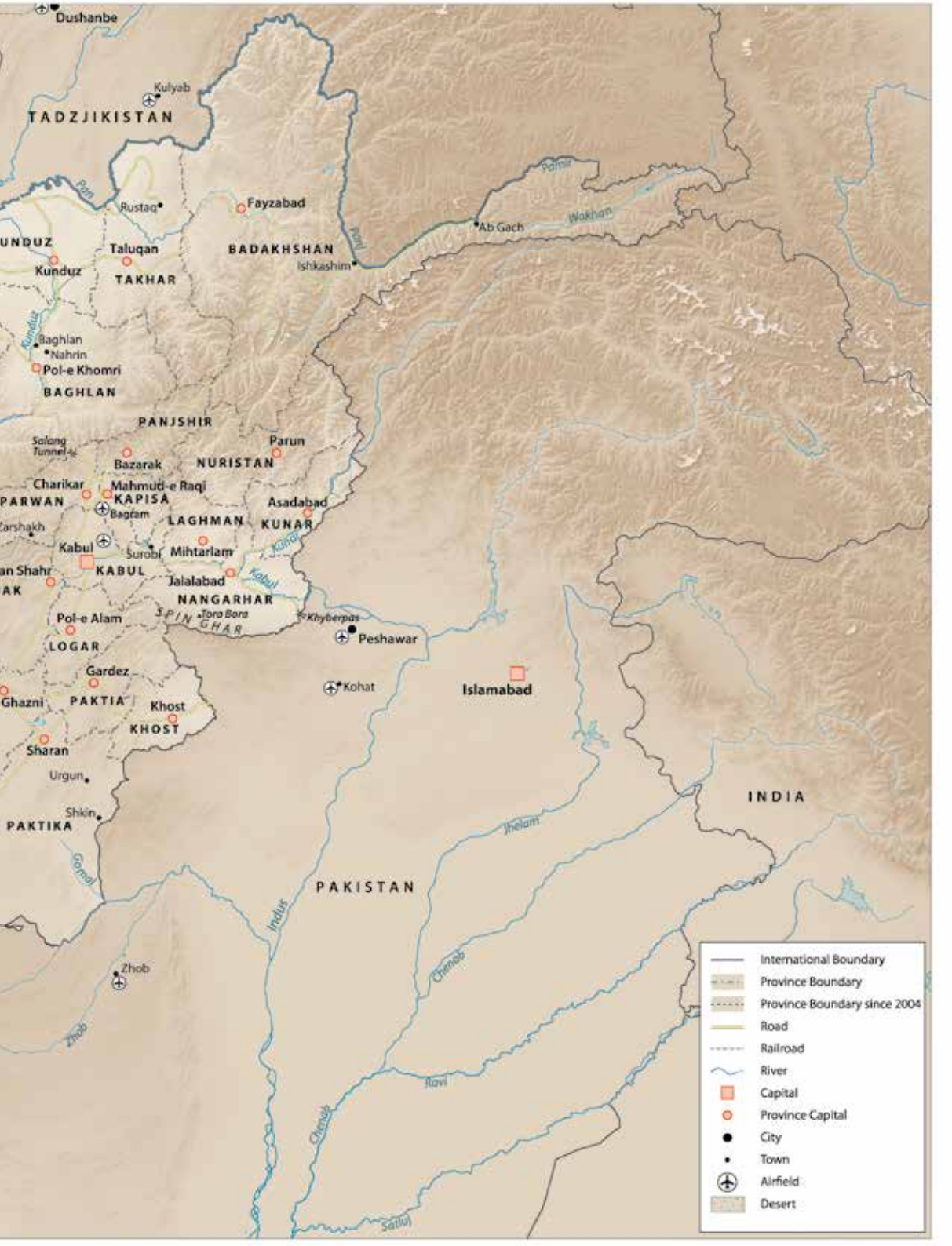
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Bazarak
NURISTAN
Charikar
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PARWAN
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Asadabad
Bagram
LAGHMAN
KUNAR
Zarshakh
Kabul
Surobi
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Kunar
an Shahr
KABUL
Kabul
Jalalabad
AK
NANGARHAR
Pol-e Alam
SPIN GHAR
Tora Bora
Khyberpas
Peshawar
LOGAR
Gardez
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Islamabad
Ghazni
PAKTIA
Khost
KHOST
Sharan
Urgun
INDIA
Shkin
PAKTIKA
Jhelam
Gomal
PAKISTAN
Indus
Zhob
Chenab
Zhob
Ravi
Chenab
Satlul
International Boundary
Province Boundary
Province Boundary since 2004
Road
Railroad
River
Capital
Province Capital
City
Town
Airfield
Desert

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research puzzle: The lessons of modern counterinsurgency operations

War is, in its essence, a strategic competition in which the ability to adapt to the enemy and the operational environment is the key towards success on the battlefield. The side that proves to be able to adapt more quickly and effectively to the challenges produced by conflict will emerge victorious from the struggle.[1] Conversely, the combatant that fails to adapt to the circumstances at hand will be defeated.[2] Over the last two decades, the study on how armed forces learn during wartime has burgeoned.[3] In part, this academic interest can be ascribed to the Western large-scale counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.[4] In much of the literature on counterinsurgency, the ability to learn and adapt is emphasized as essential to be successful in such operations: "All sides engage in an extremely rapid, complex and continuous process of competitive adaptation".[5]

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Western militaries involved were caught unprepared to conduct counterinsurgency operations. These armed forces were organized for and conceptually attuned to conventional warfare.[6] This was compounded by the fact that most of the involved militaries had recent experiences in peace support operations in more benign environments.[7] Consequently, Western armed forces sought to adapt to the specific conditions of counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan. For European militaries, the operations in Afghanistan, under the International Security Assistance Force mission (ISAF), were the main catalyst for adaptation as the Taliban insurgency increased in strength

1 Williamson Murray (2011). *Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change.* New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 1-3.

2 Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 9.

3 See for instance: Frank Hoffman (2021). *Mars Adapting: Military Change during War.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press; David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime.* New York: Oxford University Press; Raphael Marcus (2018). *Israel's Long War With Hezbollah: Military Innovation and Adaptation Under Fire.* Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press; Meir Finkel (2011). *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield.* Stanford: Stanford University Press; T. Mahnken (Ed.)(2020), *Learning the Lessons of Modern War* (pp. 181-196). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

4 See for instance: Stuart Griffin (2017). Military Innovation Studies: Multidisciplinary or Lacking Discipline. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 40*(1-2), p. 196-197; Tom Dyson (2019). The military as learning organisation: establishing the fundamentals of best-practice in lessons learned. *Defence Studies*, p. 1-4.

5 David Kilcullen (2010). *Counterinsurgency*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 2.

6 See for instance: Thomas Mockaitis (2016) The COIN Conundrum: The Future of Counterinsurgency and U.S. Land Power. Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, p. 18-19; David Ucko (2009). *The New Counterinsurgency Era.* Washington DC: Georgetown, p. 67-69; Martijn Kitzen (2012). Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency: An Ambiguous Reality. *Scientia Militaria, 40*(1), pp. 1-24.

7 See James Wither (2009). Basra's not Belfast: the British Army, 'Small Wars' and Iraq. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 20*(3-4), p. 611-616; Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2012). Counterinsurgency and Peace Operations. In P. B. Rich, & I. Duyvesteyn (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (pp. 80-97). London: Routledge, p. 80-82; Ucko, *New Counterinsurgency* , p. 9-12;.

over time. The Western armed forces had to learn how to confront a potent insurgency while under fire.[8]

Central to this study are the British and Dutch armed forces and their experiences in southern Afghanistan. While both militaries had been deployed to Iraq and earlier missions in Afghanistan since 2001, the most intense episode of these conflicts arose during their contributions to southern Afghanistan. From 2006, when ISAF expanded its mandate to southern provinces of Afghanistan, the British deployed to take charge of Helmand province and the Dutch took responsibility for neighboring Uruzgan province (see map on pages 12 and 13). Although primary troop contributing nations like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada (in Kandahar) publicly emphasized their deployments as 'stabilization' efforts, their troops became involved in heavy fighting. Consequently, lofty plans about reconstruction and fostering good governance were temporarily jettisoned as ISAF-troops had to fight hard to establish their presence in the south.[9] The ISAF-contingents were confronted with an intense insurgency and had to find a balance between fighting off the Taliban, supporting the Afghan authorities, providing security and services to the local population and keeping their respective domestic publics on board for the effort in Afghanistan. Like their allies, the British and Dutch forces had to adapt to meet the challenges posed by the insurgents. The learning processes adopted by these two countries will be examined in-depth in this study.

There was of course some irony in the fact that the Western militaries had to learn the principles of counterinsurgency. Many European states had experience from policing their colonial empires and fighting the wars of decolonization after the Second World War. Certainly, the erstwhile European great powers often had been, if not outright defeated, bedeviled by irregular adversaries.[10] In these earlier conflicts the conventional military advantages accounted for little, as the domestic public often was wary about the efforts to retain (or reassert) control over their reluctant compatriots in far-flung territories following

8 See for example: Olivier Schmitt (2017). French Military Adaptation in the Afghan War: Looking Inward or Outward. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 40*(4), pp. 577-599; Torunn Haaland (2016). The Limits to Learning in Military Operations: Bottom-up Adaptation in the Norwegian Army in Northern Afghanistan, 2007–2012. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 39*(7), 999-1022; Mikkel Rasmussen (2013). The Military Metier: Second Order Adaptation and the Danish Experience in Task Force Helmand. In T. Farrell, F. Osinga, & J. A. Russell (Eds.), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (pp. 136-158). Stanford: Stanford University Press; Fabrizio Cottichia and Fernando Moro (2016). Learning From Others? Emulation and Change in the Italian Armed Forces Since 2001. *Armed Forces & Society, 42*(4), pp. 696-718

9 Stephen Saideman (2013). Canadian Forces in Afghanistan: Minority Government and Generational Change while under Fire. In T. Farrell, F. Osinga, & J. A. Russell (Eds.), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (pp. 219-241). Stanford: Stanford University Press; Theo Farrell (2013). Back from the Brink: British Military Adaptation and the Struggle for Helmand. In T. Farrell, F. Osinga, & J. A. Russell (Eds.), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (pp. 108-134). Stanford: Stanford University Press; Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm (2016) . *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Army Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'.* Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 201-207.

10 Andrew Mack (1983). Why big nations lose small wars: The politics of asymmetric conflict. *World Politics, 27*(2), pp. 175-200.

their own lands having been ravaged by war.[11] Thus, despite significant military efforts, European states had in most cases been unable to reach their political objectives in these wars and, one by one, the European states relinquished their colonies.[12] With the colonial era now over, the Western European armed forces primarily focused on the threat posed by the armored divisions of the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe.[13] Western militaries came to see counterinsurgency operations as a lesser form of warfare or even an unwelcome distraction as opposed to conventional warfare against a peer competitor.[14] As a result the experiences with counterinsurgency dissipated and had to be relearned in the early 21st century.

The British reputation for astuteness in fighting counterinsurgency conflicts such as in Malaya and Northern Ireland was shattered, first in Basra, Iraq and later in Helmand, Afghanistan (see chapter 5).[15] The British, the Dutch, and their allies made adaptations to the operational challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan and thereby ostensibly relearned forgotten knowledge. Furthermore, counterinsurgency was rediscovered as a germane topic of study for academics and practitioners.[16]

In Afghanistan the ISAF-mission ended in December 2014 and was succeeded by the much smaller *Resolute Support Mission* whose role was limited to "train, advise and assist" Afghanistan's security forces, coupled with counterterrorism activities such as targeted airstrikes and raids by Special Operations Forces (SOF) to contain the undefeated Taliban.[17] Yet over time, the Taliban increased in strength while the Afghan government found itself besieged in the cities. The limited Western assistance proved insufficient to prop up the Afghan authorities and security forces.[18] When the international forces withdrew in 2021, the Taliban rapidly succeeded in conquering the country, culminating in the fall of Kabul in August 2021.

11 Gil Merom (1998). Strong Powers in small wars: The unnoticed foundations of success. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 9*(2), pp. 38-63.

12 See for a general overview of this period for example: Jeremy Black (2016). *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: A Global History.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 159-163; Ian Beckett (2001). *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750.* London: Routledge, p.86-120.

13 Martin van Creveld (2000). Through a Glass, Darkly. *Naval War College Review, 53*(4), p. 41.

14 Martijn Kitzen (2012). Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency: An Ambiguous Reality. *Scientia Militaria, 40*(1), pp. 1-24.

15 See for critical analyses of British performance in Iraq and Afghanistan for example: Andrew Mumford (2011). *Puncturing the Counterinsurgency Myth: Britain and Irregular Warfare in the Past, Present, and Future.* Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute; David Ucko and Robert Egnell (2013). *Counterinsurgency in Crisis: Britain and the Challenges of modern warfare.* New York: Columbia University Press; Alexander Alderson (2009). *The Validity of British Counterinsurgency Insurgency Doctrine after the War in Iraq 2003-2009.* Cranfield: Cranfield University.

16 David Ucko (2012). Whither Counterinsurgency. In P. B. Rich, & I. Duyvesteyn (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Countrinsurgency.* London: Routledge, p. 68-69; David Kilcullen (2006). Counter-insurgency Redux. *Survival, 48*(4), p. 111.

17 Anthony Cordesman (2015). *Afghanistan at Transition: Lessons of the Longest War.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 128-132.

18 See for this stage in the Afghan war: Carter Malkasian (2021). *The American War in Afghanistan: A History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 361-403.

Thus ended the latest experience by Western militaries with counterinsurgency operations. Regrettably, some signs indicate that Western militaries are already in the process of discarding the knowledge they have acquired during the counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.[19] Instead, these armed forces are recalibrating to enhance their ability to fight conventional wars against state actors.[20] Yet if analyzed correctly, throughout history previous wars have represented relevant knowledge for the keen observer.[21] Without institutionalization of these lessons, armed forces are bound to repeat the same mistakes.[22]

From a theoretical perspective then, the study on how armed forces learn during conflict is germane, but incomplete. The resulting vital complementing question is to what extent these lessons are retained in the context of another conflict.[23] Are the lessons regarded as applicable solely to the previous conflict? Does the altered context lead to further contemplation and a reappraisal of the knowledge acquired in wartime? What is the influence of the new context on the lessons learned? To paraphrase William Fuller, is the previous conflict the exception to the rule or is it a portent of all future wars?[24] Both approaches are of course problematic, so managing experience and knowledge from past wars is relevant to finding a balance between retaining useful lessons, and sufficient flexibility and adaptability.

An oft-cited problem in this literature is that formal institutional learning mechanisms and their knowledge repositories struggle to keep up with the operational challenges and the pace of operations. Invariably, service members turn to informal networks to acquire the sought knowledge.[25] While these informal networks are expedient in sharing knowledge, overreliance on informal learning has the inherent weakness that it can easily lead to evaporation of the knowledge, in particular due to personnel turnover.[26] While this turnover is pertinent in peace time, its effects are exacerbated during deployments, where rotations are scheduled in intervals ranging from roughly five to twelve months.

19 David Ucko and Thomas Marks (2018). Violence in context: Mapping the strategies and operational art of irregular warfare. *Contemporary Security Policy, 39*(2), p. 212.; Jason Clark. (2019, March 29). *"Good Allies": International Perspectives on Afghanistan.* Retrieved from The War Room: https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/good-allies

20 David Ucko (2012). Whither Counterinsurgency. In P. B. Rich, & I. Duyvesteyn (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Countrinsurgency*. London: Routledge, p. 67-68.

21 Jonathan Bailey. (2006). Military history and the pathology of lessons learned: the Russo-Japanese War, a case study. In W. Murray, & R. H. Sinnreich (Eds.), *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession* (pp. 170-194). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 193-194.

22 Cohen and Gooch. (2006). *Military Misfortunes*, p. 223

23 The literature on military change often distinguishes between war and peace time. However, Western armed forces are continuously deployed and as such part of a conflict. These new conflicts affect how the lessons of previous conflicts are regarded and whether they are still relevant. For instance, Western armed forces remained in Afghanistan after the end of ISAF in 2014. As the character of this engagement changed profoundly, it did not capture as much attention as previously. Other missions or potential conflicts began take precedence in conceptual deliberations instead of the narrower Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.

24 Fuller (2008). What is a military lesson?

25 Kollars (2015). War's Horizon, p. 545-548; Serena (2011). *A Revolution in Military Adaptation*, p. 161-163.

26 Catignani (2014). Coping with Knowledge, p. 58-59; De Winter (2015). *The Army after Afghanistan*, p. 47-49.

In the literature on how militaries learn from conflict, the dialectic between the organization's newly acquired knowledge and the perceived core competences is a common theme. In Western armed forces, this tension is manifested by the practice of irregular warfare during recent missions and the perceived importance of preparing for inter-state conventional war.[27] Some scholars and officers see experience in irregular war as detrimental to the ability to fight conventional adversaries.[28] In the military context, this is a reflection of the central theme of organizational learning theory, which theorizes how organizations cope with the inherent tension between exploiting knowledge to refine their routine operations, and exploring knowledge to redefine their mission, strategy and structure in order to increase their chance for success or even survival in the long run. Paradoxically in this analogy, routine operations equate with conventional warfare while the practice of irregular warfare corresponds with exploring new competencies that lie beyond normal tasks.

To a certain extent, the apprehension by armed forces at the institutional level to adapt to irregular war is understandable when a dichotomous distinction between "irregular war" and "conventional war" is upheld. Military organizations must operate in lethal, complex, and chaotic environments and have established mechanisms to deal with the uncertainties of war through making calculated assumptions. The notion of conventional war is perceived to be ingrained in Western armed forces and helps them to render "complex situations actionable from a military, instrumental perspective."[29] Despite the many expeditionary missions in stabilization or counterinsurgency contexts, conventional warfare remains the core task for Western militaries that cannot be wished away. When change is forced on military organizations, this can erode basic capabilities.[30]

Yet, this distinction between irregular war and conventional war is not only unhelpful for analyzing conflicts, but also false. Contemporary warfare requires both the ability to combat capable opponents as well as to employ other, non-kinetic instruments.[31] Whereas the former is within the competency of armed forces, the latter is more problematic. Striking a balance between these options, and knowing when and how to deploy them, is more of an art than a science.

27 See for example: Hasselbladh and Yden (2019). Why Military Organizations Are Cautious About Learning?; Long (2008). *Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence*; Kitzen (2012). Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency.

28 See Douglas Porch (2011). The dangerous myths and dubious promise of COIN. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 22*(2), pp. 239-257; Gian Gentile (2010). Freeing the Army from the Counterinsurgency Straitjacket. *Joint Forces Quarterly, 58*(3), pp. 121-122.

29 Hasselbladh and Yden (2019). Why Military Organizations Are Cautious About Learning?, p. 15.

30 Ibidem, p. 15-16; Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation under Fire*, p. 16-18.

31 David Ucko and Thomas Marks (2018). Violence in context: Mapping the strategies and operational art of irregular warfare. *Contemporary Security Policy, 39*(2), p. 211-214; Martijn Kitzen (2020). Operations in Irregular Warfare. In A. Sookermanny (Ed.), *Handbook of Military Sciences* (pp. 1-18). Cham: Springer p. 18; Ucko?

Consequently, studying discrete adaptation processes during the latest counterinsurgency missions is insufficient. While the British and Dutch missions in Uruzgan and Helmand have been designated as formative experiences, the institutionalization processes in these militaries are subject to the same dynamics of adjusting to a different strategic context. In other words, retention of knowledge after a mission requires a deliberate institutional effort. Whether these militaries have succeeded in institutionalizing the lessons from Afghanistan afterwards is therefore an open question. To examine the enduring impact of the experiences to Afghanistan, this research covers the developments within both militaries up to and including 2020. As armed forces are large bureaucracies, profound organizational change after conflict generally requires significant time and effort. By using this timeframe, there is a decent interval between the end of the operations and efforts to institutionalize the resulting experience. Moreover, this scope allows for assessing the impact of strategic upheavals since 2014 such as the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East and the Russian aggression against Ukraine on the Dutch and British learning processes. Accordingly, the main research question underpinning this study is: *to what extent have the Dutch and British militaries learned from their counterinsurgency operations in southern Afghanistan between 2006 and 2020?*

1.2: Objectives and relevance

1.2.1: Research objectives and questions

The main research objective of this dissertation is thus to reconstruct and understand the learning processes of the Dutch and British militaries in relation to their experiences in Uruzgan and Helmand from 2006 to 2020. By answering the main research question, we gain insight into how and why operational experiences were used to enact organizational change. Furthermore, by extending the research beyond the operations in Afghanistan, we can examine the lasting impact of these experiences on the Dutch and British armed forces. This provides an answer to the aforementioned concern that Western militaries are already forgetting the knowledge from the latest counterinsurgency operations.

To answer this question, the Dutch and British operations in Uruzgan and Helmand are examined in the empirical chapters of this book. The focus of these chapters will be on the learning processes during and after the campaigns. Additionally, the political and organizational contexts of the Dutch and British contributions to the ISAF-mission are scrutinized to see how these affected the campaigns. This includes abridged examination of the Dutch and British relevant experiences in prior stabilization missions before deploying to southern Afghanistan. The empirical chapters show that during the operations, simultaneous

formal, and informal processes of adaptation were occurring at the same time. Attending to both sets of processes means that in this way, whether, how and why lessons were captured can be analyzed. Conversely, the deficiencies that were not addressed or even recognized will be examined. Finally, the dynamics of institutionalization of these lessons are assessed; as the missions ended, what were reasons to retain or reject the knowledge acquired in the field? Furthermore, what was the impact of new missions and potential altered strategic outlooks on the implementation? To accommodate this analysis of institutionalization in the Dutch and British militaries, the empirical data covers developments up to the year 2020. Moreover, this research aims to shed light on associated questions. Why are certain lessons learned and others not? What are the different dynamics underpinning formal and informal learning? How can informal learning processes lead to institutionalized knowledge for future missions? By comparing the Dutch and British cases, pertinent differences and similarities can be distinguished. In turn, the findings from these case studies can help to understand common military learning processes in relation to conflict. As such, this understanding forms a secondary, more theoretical objective of this study.

In general, this dissertation aims to contribute to theoretical works on how armed forces acquire knowledge and use it to enhance performance. By identifying what factors and organizational dynamics affect learning processes, we can enhance our understanding of change in armed forces. A particularly relevant subject of study is how knowledge is retained after a mission is concluded. While counterinsurgency operations have driven significant changes in Western militaries, the dominant current in these organizations points towards readiness for conventional warfare. This suggests that if armed forces are to retain the knowledge and capabilities acquired during recent expeditionary missions, they must seek to balance these distinct requirements within the constraints of finite resources. As such, the empirical findings of this research contribute to the theoretical understanding of military learning processes.

1.2.2: Empirical relevance

As the vast body of literature attests, there has been significant scholarly attention for the adaptation efforts by Western militaries during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[32] The British and Dutch experiences in southern Afghanistan form no exception. For the Dutch operations in Uruzgan, several academic works have been published that examine the campaign and adaptations.[33] Other works focus on specific aspects of adaptation such

32 See for instance David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime*. New York: Oxford University Press; Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga and James Russell (Eds.). (2013). *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford: Stanford Universty Press;

33 See George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21(3), pp. 429-458; Kitzen, Osinga and Rietjens. Soft Power, the Hard Way, pp. 159-192.

as interagency cooperation, relations with local powerbrokers, and special forces.[34] A comprehensive in-depth analysis of the Dutch military learning processes is lacking and can contribute to the understanding of this campaign.

The literature on adaptation by British forces in Helmand is more extensive.[35] Some of these works have been rather positive about the British ability to learn from their experiences.[36] Others have been more critical on the extent of changes and their effects.[37] Furthermore, insightful works have been written on the overall Helmand campaign.[38]

However, an under-explored aspect for both militaries is the enduring effects of the learning processes in the organizations. As stated in the research objective, this study examines the efforts to institutionalize experiences from the campaigns in southern Afghanistan. Analyzing the extent to which the British and Dutch militaries have incorporated these experiences can help to identify the lasting effects of the missions and the potential readiness for future operations. To this end, the learning processes during the operations in southern Afghanistan warrant scrutiny as these have informed the evaluations and subsequent institutionalization processes. By studying these learning processes in a comprehensive manner, the impact of the Afghan campaign on the British and militaries can be assessed. Furthermore, by comparing these cases, pertinent similarities and differences can be identified.

1.2.3: Theoretical relevance

Examining how armed forces institutionalize the lessons of war for future use forms an understudied aspect in the significant body of literature on military change. When reviewing the literature on military change, which chapter 2 does in-depth, there seems to be a distinction between wartime adaptation and more far-reaching innovation in peacetime.[39]

34 Sebastiaan Rietjens (2012). Between expectations and reality: the Dutch engagement in Uruzgan. In N. Hynek, & P. Marton (Eds.), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational contributions to reconstruction* (pp. 65-78). Abingdon: Routledge; Martijn Kitzen (2016). *The Course of Co-option: Co-option of local power-holders as a tool for obtaining control over the population in counterinsurgency campaigns in weblike societies.* Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy; George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). Formative Years: Military Adaptation of Dutch Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan. *Special Operations Journal, 2*(2), pp. 146-166.

35 The most comprehensive study on British learning processes during the Helmand campaign is offered by Tom Dyson (2020). *Organisational Learning and the Modern Army: a new model for lessons-learned processes.* Abingdon: Routledge.

36 Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon (2009). COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal, 154*(3), pp. 18-25.

37 See: David Betz and Anthony Cormack (2009). Hot War, Cold Comfort: A Less Optimistic Take on the British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal, 154*(4), pp. 26-29; Sergio Catignani (2012). 'Getting COIN' at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army. *Journal of Strategic Studies, 35*(4), 513-539.

38 Theo Farrell (2017). *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001-2014.* London: The Bodley Head; Jack Fairweather (2015). *The Good War: Why We Couldn't Win the War or the Peace in Afghanistan.* London: Vintage.

39 see Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 252-253.

Still, as Eliot Cohen and John Gooch posit, the inability to learn from previous conflicts constitutes a distinct category besides failure to adapt and to anticipate (innovate).[40] While recent works on military adaptation have offered enhanced understanding on how armed forces learn, the scope has been limited to war time changes.[41] However, formally accepted changes during conflict do not equal institutionalization of this knowledge afterwards. Often, wartime adaptations are reverted once the conflict has ended[42] and this suggests that knowledge retention after war is subject to specific dynamics. Works on the enduring lessons from (counterinsurgency) operations contend that this knowledge is often discarded after wars.[43]

To understand the dynamics of learning in and beyond war, a comprehensive theoretical framework is needed. In chapter 2, a new framework is presented that synthesizes organizational learning theory and the literature on military innovation and adaptation. An important benefit of the literature on organizational learning is that it regards learning as a process that captures the transfer of knowledge from the individual to the institution. Moreover, these learning processes shape how individuals operate within the organization.[44] A further salient aspect of the literature is that it examines the internal dynamics, such as politics and strategic leadership, in relation to how organizations learn.[45] Still, armed forces have distinctive attributes that must be considered when studying learning processes. In particular, the pressures of war influence what and how militaries learn.[46]

The resulting framework from this synthesis contends that there are three distinct but related learning processes in relation to conflict: informal adaption by units in the field; formal adaptation that is supported and accepted; and institutional learning when lessons are retained for use in future. In this way, this study contributes to understanding military learning processes. Furthermore, it highlights pertinent dynamics at work in the various strands of learning processes. Ultimately, a more profound insight on how and why knowledge

40 Eliot Cohen and John Gooch (2006). *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War.* New York: Free Press, p. 26-28.

41 See Frank Hoffman (2021). *Mars Adapting: Military Change during War.* Annapolis: Naval Insittute Press; Michael Hunzeker (2021). *Dying to Learn: Wartime Lessons from the Western Front.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

42 See for instance: Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, p. 250.

43 See Richard Downie (1998). *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War.* Westport: Praeger, p. 55-57.; Austin Long (2016). *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press; David Fitzegerald (2013). *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

44 See for instance Mary Crossan and Marina Apaydin (2010). A Multi-Dimensional Framework of Organizational Innovation: A Systemic Review of the Literature. *Journal of Management Studies, 47*(6), 1154-1191; Ikujiro Nonaka and Noburo Konno (1998). The Concept of "Ba": Building a Foundation for Knowledge Creation. *California Management Review, 40*(3), pp. 40-54.

45 Scott Ganz (2018). Ignorant Decision Making and Educated Inertia: Some Political Pathologies of Organizational Learning. *Organization Science, 29*(1), p. 55; Priscilla Kraft and Andreas Bausch 2016). How Do Transformational Leaders Promote Exploratory and Exploitative Innovation? Examining the Black Box through MASEM. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 33*(6), p. 702-703.

46 Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, p. 30-35; Williamson Murray, *Military Adaptation*, p. 2-4.

is transferred and retained in armed forces can help to prepare these organizations for future challenges and prevent forgetting relevant lessons.

1.3: Research design and methodology

1.3.1: Methodology

At the heart of this research is a comparative case study based on empirical data to explain how and why the Dutch and British militaries learned from their experiences in Afghanistan. As most archival records remain classified at the time of writing, a historical reconstruction was not feasible.[47] Still, an empirical analysis could be conducted based on a variety of sources within the case studies. More importantly however, a comparative case study allows a more structured and focused approach. This helps identifying similarities and differences between the cases.[48]

As such, the research combines deductive and inductive approaches. Despite restrictions to archival records, this study had access to a wealth of data, enabling the cases to be examined in sufficient depth and within their contexts. The frame of reference on the substance of counterinsurgency lessons as presented in chapter 3, helps to focus and structure the empirical chapters. This frame of reference categorizes the ability to learn, overall conduct of a campaign, interagency cooperation, intelligence, non-kinetic activities, and responses to operations by the adversary. For the latter category, the case studies examine and compare the efforts to mitigate the threat of IEDs. This was the most conspicuous adaptation with regard to enemy activity during the operations in Afghanistan. Furthermore, not only the learning processes themselves are examined, but also the impact on both the campaigns and organizations.[49] The empirical data is given precedence in constructing the case studies. In this way, the research aims to capture the complexities of military learning processes.

Simultaneously, to analyze the learning processes in and beyond conflict, a theoretical understanding of how such processes work is necessary. As elaborated upon in the previous sections, attempts at comprehensive theoretical explanations that fuse learning in war and institutionalization of lessons afterwards are currently limited. Therefore, chapter 2 has a more inductive approach. It synthesizes relevant aspects of organizational learning theory with the literature on military innovation. This provides a lens grounded in theory that can help explain how and why the learning processes manifested in these specific case studies.

47 Robert Yin (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage,p. 9-13.

48 Alexander George and Andrew Bennett (2004). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences.* Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 63-65.

49 See Jane Gilgun (2019). Deductive qualitative analysis and grounded theory: Sensitizing concepts and hypothesis-testing. In A. Bryant, & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory* (pp. 107-122). London: Sage

The inherent drawback of this combination is that the case studies cannot generate a new comprehensive theory on military learning processes. Nevertheless, the combination can help highlight the pertinent dynamics at play in armed forces in relation to expeditionary missions. In this way, the analysis of these cases can stimulate new thinking on organizational learning in armed forces.

As for the selection of the cases, this research has opted to compare similar cases.[50] Both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom deployed their forces in 2006 to ISAF Regional Command South. Invariably, the armed forces had to adapt to the local conditions and operational challenges in the adjacent provinces of Uruzgan and Helmand. Moreover, service members of both countries regarded these missions to be a formative experience for the militaries. As such, the armed forces were profoundly affected by these operations, which indicates their relevance to explain institutionalization of knowledge.[51] To be sure, there are salient differences in the dynamics in Uruzgan and Helmand and between the Dutch and British armed forces, in size, organization and political context, and these do influence learning processes. These elements are explored in the first sections of chapters 4 and 5. By developing parallel case studies, this comparison can help identify which dynamics affected the process of learning.

A further consideration in this case selection is the availability of sources. The familiarity with Dutch operations in Uruzgan and access to sources naturally helped the selection of the first case. Early in the research, different potential case studies were explored. For instance, the Australian experiences in Uruzgan warrant consideration. Yet, during the Dutch tenure in Uruzgan, the Australian operations were more circumscribed in scope. This limited the feasibility to compare the cases. Canadian operations in Kandahar province provided a further option. However, for both Canada and Australia the availability of sources was far more limited than in the United Kingdom. Consequently, given the access to British sources, the UK's experience in Helmand was selected as a mirroring case.

1.3.2: Scope and limitations

As this dissertation's subtitle suggests, the research focuses on British and Dutch military learning processes in and beyond Afghanistan. As such it includes the experiences of Task Force Helmand and Task Force Uruzgan. Concurrently, the research examines how the operations affected the response by the wider organizations, at both the joint level (Ministry of Defence) and on the service levels (British and Dutch armies). As for the impact of these experiences, the research is capped to include developments up to 2020. As aforementioned,

50 George and Bennet, *Case Studies*, p. 81.

51 Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 242-244.

further case studies like the Canadian operations in Kandahar and Australian operations in Uruzgan have been considered for this dissertation to ensure a broader view.[52] However, additional cases would preclude studying the Dutch and British cases in sufficient depth. Moreover, this would require collecting, processing, and analyzing significant amounts of extra sources to construct the empirical cases. Additionally, the research does not elaborate on adaptations in the ISAF-campaign as a whole or at learning processes in NATO.[53]

Within the case studies as presented in chapters 4 and 5, the research emphasizes the general national campaigns and the operations in the land domain. This is not to deny the invaluable role of allied air forces in Afghanistan, but the developments in air power in Afghanistan have been studied extensively elsewhere.[54] A further limitation of this study is that is does not examine the efforts to build the Afghan national security forces as this is subject of a concurrent research project within the Netherlands Defence Academy. Any relevant insights of this separate project will be included in this dissertation.[55] To be sure, training and mentoring of local security forces is a key component of counterinsurgency operations, yet this research predominantly analyzes the internal learning processes in the studied militaries.

A final important consideration for this research is that the author is a serving officer in the Netherlands armed forces. This position offers the advantage of proximity to sources. Furthermore, having been deployed to Afghanistan on different tours help to identify themes and familiarity with operations and the environment there. At the same time, this fact also holds risks of biases. First, being part of the organization under study offers a more fine-grained understanding of its dynamics but also provides a mental frame of reference that can constrict the inquiry. Although this position cannot be disregarded, being aware of the implications of this viewpoint throughout the research helps to mitigate potential biases.

52 For Canada in Kandahar see: Steve Saideman (2016). *Adapting in the Dust: Lessons Learned from Canada's War in Afghanistan.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Howard Coombs (2019). Canada's Lessons. *Parameters, 49*(3),pp. 27-40For the Australian experience, see: Karen Middleton (2011). *An Unwinnable War.* Victoria: Melbourne University Press; Maryanne Kelton and Aaron Jackson (2015). Australia: Terrorism, Regional Security, and the US Alliance. In G. A. Mattox, & S. M. Grenier (Red.), *Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan: The Politics of Alliance* (pp. 225-241). Stanford: Stanford University Press; Gareth Rice (2014). What Did We Learn from the War in Afghanistan? *Australian Army Journal, 11*(1), pp. 6-17.

53 See for a good examination on NATO learning processes: Heidi Hardt (2018). *NATO's Lessons in Crisis: Institutional Memory in International Organizations*. New York: Oxford University Press.

54 See: Rob Sinterniklaas (2019). *Information Age Airpower in Afghanistan: Development of the air campaign in Afghanistan and how it supported strategic and operational goals of civil and military policy mekers between 2001 and 2016.* Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy

55 Lysanne Leeuwenburg and Ivor Wiltenburg (2022) *Met Geweer en Geduld: Trainen, adviseren en vechten met het Afghaanse leger in Uruzgan*. Amsterdam: Boom.

1.3.3: A note on sources

To acquire the empirical data for the case studies on the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the research uses a combination of primary sources, secondary literature, and semi-structured interviews. Of course, most archival records on operations in Afghanistan remain classified currently. For the Dutch case study however, access was obtained to the archival records of Task Force Uruzgan and the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Most of these documents are still classified and could not be referred to. However, this archive helped to reconstruct important aspects of the campaign, identify relevant themes, and point to potential interview partners. Furthermore, the records served as additional validation for other sources. For the United Kingdom, access to operational archives was, understandably, not possible.

Still, a substantial number of primary sources such as doctrinal documents, policy papers and parliamentary proceedings was available. Furthermore, individuals shared documents that give additional insight in the efforts in southern Afghanistan. An additional valuable source was evaluation reports by the British and Dutch armed forces concerning their operations in Helmand and Uruzgan. Furthermore, a large volume of secondary literature on British operations in Helmand mitigated this limitation.[56] In the Netherlands, academic research to Task Force Uruzgan often focused on more specific to aspects of the mission rather than an overview of the campaign.[57]

An important additional source of data was formed by approximately 130, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The participants were selected through study of other sources or through referrals by other participants. Because the roles and operational contexts differed for each participant, the protocols used for the interviews were specifically attuned to the individual participant to address certain events or rotations. These interviews were held with Dutch and British service members and civil servants that were directly involved in the operations in Uruzgan and Helmand. A small number of interviewees are academics that had a supporting role during the operations in Afghanistan. As such, the interviews added personal considerations and perspectives during and after the described events.[58]

56 See Theo Farrel (2013). Back from the Brink: British Military Adaptation and the Struggle for Helmand. In T. Farrell, F. Osinga, & J. A. Russell (Eds.), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (pp. 108-134). Stanford: Stanford University Press; Anthony King 2012). Operation Herrick: the British Campaign in Helmand. In N. Hynek, & P. Marton (Eds.), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational contributions to reconstruction* (pp. 27-41). Abingdon: Routledge; Frank Ledwidge (2017). *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

57 Martijn Kitzen, *Course of Co-option*; Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Army Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'.* Leiden: Leiden University Press; Dimitriu and De Graaf, The Dutch COIN-approach.

58 Brenda Moore (2014). In-depth Interviewing. In J. Soeters, S. Rietjens, & P. Shields (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies* (pp. 116-128). Abingdon: Routledge, p. 123-124.

During the interviews, subjects could be mentioned that are (still) classified. Furthermore, information could be shared that can affect operational or personal security. Therefore, the interviews have not been recorded. Instead, the researcher took notes during each interview and subsequently produced an abridged transcription. To ensure confidentiality, the data in this research will not be attributable to individual interview partners, as a substantial number are still serving in military personnel or are active civil servants. Around half of the interviews were conducted through digital means as COVID-19 restrictions precluded traveling during the research phase.

Of course, using interviews as source for this research requires considering potential pitfalls. First, the accuracy of the recollections by interview partners can be diminished, especially after multiple years since the events. By using additional sources for informing the questions before the interview and verification of the data afterwards, that risk has been mitigated in this research. Moreover, data analysis and coding of the transcriptions helped to identify similarities and differences in the responses.[59] Finally, in the research the individual interviews are generally corroborated with other interviews or sources.[60] The second potential pitfall is that of self-selection among interview partners. Perception of past events might be different among individuals that are willing to participate in interviews from those who decline.[61] To be sure, not every approached interview partner agreed to participate. Moreover, some participants withdrew their consent later. Of course, that data is not included in the dissertation. By striving to include a broad array of interview partners over different rotations as well as civilians, the research has attempted to address the issue of self-selection to the greatest extent possible.

Together, these sources helped building the case studies to their current form. As such, the case studies help explain military learning processes in and beyond conflict. Furthermore, these chapters offer an empirical study on how the operational experiences impacted the Dutch and British armed forces.

1.4: Book outline

To attain the stated research objective, this dissertation is structured in three parts. The first part consists of the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this research. The current chapter introduces the objective, themes, and design of the dissertation. It elaborates on the considerations underpinning the research and presents its structure. Chapter 2 offers

59 Dennis Gioia, Kevic Corley and Aimee Hamilton (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, *16*(1), pp. 15-31.

60 Yin, *Case-study Research*, p. 118-120.

61 Moore, In-depth interviewing, p. 125-126.

a theoretical framework on how armed forces learn in relation to conflict. To this end, it synthesizes the literature on organizational learning and military innovation. This chapter posits that learning in war constitutes a distinct but related process to institutionalization of knowledge afterwards. Furthermore, it studies the pertinent dynamics and factors influencing learning processes in military organizations. Finally, this chapter provides an analytical model that helps studying the process of learning in and beyond conflict. The third chapter will then provide a frame of reference on the substance of lessons in counterinsurgency operations. Based on an analysis of historical counterinsurgency prescriptions, ranging from the colonial era to the 21st century, a set of themes emerge. Combined with the theoretical framework on learning from chapter 2, this provides a lens through which we can analyze the case studies.

The second part of the dissertation examines the two case studies on the learning processes by the Dutch and British armed forces in relation to their experiences in southern Afghanistan in chapters 4 and 5. Each empirical chapter is structured in three parts. First, the political and organizational contexts of the missions to southern Afghanistan are established. Furthermore, previous recent operational experiences by the Dutch and British militaries are examined. Secondly, the learning processes during the missions are studied. Broadly, these can be categorized in learning at the campaign level and learning in specific themes or vignettes. These vignettes include interagency cooperation, intelligence, non-kinetic activities, and efforts to mitigate the threat of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The third sections of either case-study chapter look at efforts towards institutionalization of the hard-won knowledge of the Afghan campaign.

Part three provides the concluding chapter and answers the questions that drove this research. It offers the main theoretical contributions of this study and what this means for thinking on learning in military organizations. Additionally, it enumerates the key empirical findings of the case studies and their implications. This leads to a more profound understanding of the extent to which the Dutch and British militaries learned from their experiences in Uruzgan and Helmand. Moreover, it offers insight to how these learning processes worked and what dynamics influenced them. Finally, avenues for further research and some practical musings are proposed.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2: The Military Dimensions of Organizational Learning

2.1: Introduction

The study of how military organizations implement change has grown steadily over the last decades.[62] Collectively, the resulting literature is known as "military innovation studies."[63] This field encompasses all efforts to enact organizational change in armed forces. For instance, study of military innovation includes "revolutions in military affairs" or even tectonic shifts in scientific paradigms and their effects on warfare.[64] Other works examine the implementation of innovative technology or concepts in peacetime.[65] Then, there are the analysis of battlefield adjustments and adaptations.[66]

By and large, the latest research has focused on adaptations made by Western armed forces in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[67] Conversely, the earlier literature emphasized on novel concepts, and technologies that were introduced "top-down" in times of peace.[68] The distinction between "peace time innovation", and "wartime adaptation" is by no means dichotomous. New technologies, and concepts must be validated, and refined through application during real conflicts; at the same time, experiences during conflict invariably help drive the search for measures that can enhance the performance of the military organization.[69]

62 See Stuart Griffin (2017). Military Innovation Studies: Multidisciplinary or Lacking Discipline. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 40*(1-2), p. 198-203; Michael Horowitz and Shira Pindyck (2019). *What is A Military Innovation? A Proposed Framework*. University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3504246 *Strategic Studies, 40*(1-2), pp. 196-224.

63 See Adam Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 29*(5), p. 906-907.

64 See MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray (Eds.). (2001). *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Antoine Bousquet (2009). The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity. London: Hurst.

65 See for instance: Barry Posen (1984). *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany between the World Wars*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.Michael; Elizabeth Kier (1997). *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Michael Horowitz (2010). *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

66 See: Meir Finkel (2011). *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield*. Stanford: Stanford University Press,p. 223-226; Lawrence Freedman (2017). *The Future of War: A History*. London: Penguin, p. 277-279; Williamson Murray (2011). *Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 5; Michael Hunzeker (2021). *Dying to Learn: Wartime Lessons from the Western Front*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Raphael Marcus (2018). *Israel's Long War With Hezbollah: Military Innovation and Adaptation Under Fire*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

67 See for example: Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James Russell (Eds.). (2013). *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford: Stanford Universty Press; Chad Serena (2011). *A Revolution in Military Adaptation: The US Army in Iraq*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press; James Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

68 Grissom. (2006). Future of Military Innovation Studies, p. 919-920.

69 Murray. (2011). *Military Adaptation*, p. 1-2.

As these examples indicate, the research on military change contains a diverse set of subjects and dynamics. However, this diffuse application of "military innovation" has yet to provide a compelling explanation on how armed forces learn in relation to conflict. Recent research was primarily concerned with how armed forces *adapted* to challenges *during* conflict. For the purpose of this research, the distinctions between adaptation, innovation, transformation, and associated terms are interesting but not critically important. Rather, this chapter is concerned with the full range of learning processes by military organizations, and their dynamics. Consequently, whether an institutionalized lesson can be categorized as an adaptation or as an innovation is beside the point; the germane question for this chapter is how learning processes work during and after war. What is currently missing in the literature is an overall explanation of how armed forces learn from experiences during conflict, and how this knowledge is retained afterwards.

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical framework to study the process of learning within military organizations in relation to conflict.[70] To this end, a synthesis between organizational learning literature and the literature on military innovation will be presented. This synthesis will thereby achieve the main objective of this chapter of identifying the dynamics that influence institutionalization of lessons from war in military organizations. It posits that learning in, and beyond, conflict are distinct elements with peculiar dynamics that arise within a larger process. Consequently, I argue that in order to understand how militaries learn and change, this process should be studied in its entirety.

For this purpose, this chapter is structured into three sections. The first section examines relevant aspects of organizational learning literature. Given the breadth of this field, a comprehensive overview of the literature and adjacent subjects is beyond the ability of this research. To address the research question, the chapter explores the relevant processes and dynamics of organizational learning that can help explain the institutionalizing of knowledge from experience. The second section provides an overview of the literature on military innovation studies. It analyzes pertinent developments in the field and identifies specific elements that can help to explain how militaries learn from conflict. Furthermore, this part assesses earlier use of organizational learning theory in military case studies. This overview can help identify potential lacunae for explaining how armed forces learn in relation to conflict. Finally, the third section fuses elements of military innovation studies with organizational learning theory. Consequently, a novel theoretical framework is presented that distinguishes between informal and formal learning during conflict and the efforts towards institutionalization following the conclusion of a war or mission. Additionally, this section builds an analytical model that incorporates these distinct but related strands

70 This chapter is an adaptation of previous work by the author on learning in military organizations, see: Martijn van der Vorm (2021). *War's Didactics: A Theoretical Exploration on how Militaries Learn from Conflict*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy; Martijn van der Vorm (2021). Learning and Forgetting Counterinsurgency. In R. Johnson, M. Kitzen, & T. Sweijs (Eds.), *The conduct of War in the 21st Century: Kinetic, Connected and Synthetic* (pp. 189-208). London: Routledge

of learning. Ultimately, this synthesis will help to understand how armed forces learn from their wartime experiences and seek to retain this knowledge for future conflicts.

2.2: Organizational learning theory

How organizations learn has long been a subject of intense academic attention. Initially, the organizations under study were mainly business companies that seek profit in a competitive environment.[71] More recently, learning processes are also studied in other types of organizations such as, for instance, non-governmental organizations.[72] An important driver of this interest is that organizations themselves are interested in how they learn, as this can help improve their performance and long term success.[73] As of yet, there is no overarching theory that explains and predicts how organizations learn.[74] Nonetheless, the literature of organizational learning holds useful elements to study learning by military organizations in relation to conflict.

This chapter does not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of that vast discourse.[75] Instead, it will give an overview of central concepts within organizational learning theory in order to establish an essential understanding of the field. The objective of this chapter is to identify what elements of this literature can help to explain how organizations acquire, disseminate, transform and utilize knowledge to enhance their performance. In the subsequent sections these concepts will be contrasted with works on military change.

71 Hans Berends and Elena Antonacopoulou (2014). Time and Organizational Learning: A Review and Agenda for Future Research. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 16*, p. 437; Linda Argote and Ella Miron-Spektor (2010). Organizational Learning: From Experience to Knowledge. *Organization Science, 22*(5), p. 1123.

72 See for example: Kathleen Carley and John Harrald (1997). Organizational Learning Under Fire: Theory and Practice. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 40*(3), pp. 310-332; Wout Broekema (2018). *When does the phoenix rise? Factors and menchanisms that influence crisis-induced learning by public organizations.* Leiden: Leiden University; Anna Mahura and Gustavo Birollo (2021). Organizational practices that enable and disable knowledge transfer: The case of a public sector project-based organization. *International Journal of Project Management, 39*, pp. 270-281

73 Bernard Burnes, Cary Cooper and Penny West (2003). Organisational learning: the new management paradigm? *Management Decision, 41*(5/6), p. 452; Linda Argote and Ella Miron-Spektor (2010). Organizational Learning: From Experience to Knowledge. *Organization Science, 22*(5), p. 1123.

74 Mary Crossan, Cara Maurer, and Roderick White (2011). Reflections on the 2009 AMR Decade Award: Do we have a theory of organizational learning? *Academy of Management Review, 36*(3), p. 457-458.

75 Overviews of the literature on organizational learning are readily available see for example: Mary Crossan and Marina Apaydin (2010). A Multi-Dimensional Framework of Organizational Innovation: A Systemic Review of the Literature. *Journal of Management Studies, 47*(6), pp. 1154-1191; Burnes, et al. (2003). Organisational learning, pp. 452-464; Berends and Antonacopoulou (2014). Time and Organizational Learning, pp. 437-453.

2.2.1: Definition

The literature on organizational learning offers a plethora of definitions.[76] At a fundamental level, organizational learning encompasses two processes: a cognitive process of acquiring new knowledge, and a behavioral process of utilizing new knowledge for enhancing organizational performance.[77] At root, improvement of the organization's performance is the main objective of learning.[78] Improvement of performance is inherently related to the reduction of errors. A somewhat bare-boned definition of organizational learning is that it is "a process of detecting and correcting error".[79]

More illuminating is the definition offered by Marleen Huysman: "Organizational learning is the process through which an organization constructs knowledge or reconstructs existing knowledge."[80] Yet, this definition lacks the relation of learning to the organization's performance. C. Marlene Fiol and Marjorie A. Lyles do emphasize the enhancement of performance: "Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding."[81]

However, what is missing from these examples is the organization's relation with its environment. To ensure its survival, any organization seeks to improve its operations and address threats and opportunities from the environment; when unable to do so, the organization will eventually fail.[82] A relevant definition then must combine the aspects of knowledge creation, organizational performance, and its environment.

Consequently, the working definition of organizational learning adopted for this study is an extension of Huysman's description: the process through which an organization constructs knowledge or reconstructs existing knowledge for maintaining or enhancing its performance in relation to its environment.

An important caveat to this definition is that learning processes by themselves do not directly or necessarily lead to better performance. For instance, organizations can learn the wrong

76 For an elaborate overview of definitions up to 1993 see: Jörg Noll and Sebastiaan Rietjens (2016). Learning the hard way: NATO's civil-military cooperation. In M. Webber, & A. Hyde-Price (Eds.), *Theorising NATO: New perspective on the Atlantic alliance*. London: Routledge, p. 225.

77 Wout Broekema (2018). *When does the phoenix rise? Factors and mechanisms that influence crisis-induced learning by public organizations*. Leiden: Leiden University. p. 24.

78 Cyril Kirwan (2013). *Making Sense of Organizational Learning: Putting Theory into Practice.* Farnham: Gower Publishing, p. 142.

79 Chris Argyris (1977). Double Loop Learning in Organizations. *Harvard Business Review*, 55(5) p. 116.

80 Marleen Huysman (2000). An organizational learning approach to the learning organization. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 9(2), p. 134-135.

81 C. Marlene Fiol and Marjorie Lyles (1985). Organizational Learning. *The Academy of Management Review*, 10(4), p. 803.

82 Argyris (1977). Double Loop Learning, p. 117-118; Huysman (2000). An organizational learning approach, p.136.

lessons or apply knowledge incorrectly.[83] Moreover, implemented solutions to identified performance gaps can be ineffective due to changes in the environment. This notion equally applies to military organizations, where environmental factors can negate adaptations. Furthermore, the enemy will seek to gain advantages through adaptation.[84]

2.2.2: Organizational learning as a process

Generally, organizational learning is described as a process that consists of consecutive steps. This general characteristic has led to various models and descriptions of organizational learning, but most scholars agree on the cyclical nature of the process.[85] Furthermore, organizational learning is regarded as a dynamic process and additionally, multiple learning processes can exist concurrently within an organization.[86]

2.2.2.1: *Levels of learning*

In the literature on organizational learning, multiple levels of learning are identified: individual, group, project, organizational and inter-organizational. These levels have distinct attributes that shape the interaction between them. To understand the process of learning in its entirety, its components must be assessed.

Organizational learning starts with individual members' experience from interacting with the environment.[87] In this way, individuals acquire knowledge that can make them more adept in performing their tasks.[88] As such, individual members can address performance gaps by adjusting their approaches. At the same time, they can develop heuristics that are detrimental to the organization, such as short-cuts that impede safety.[89]

83 George Huber (1991). Organizational learning: the contributing processes and the literatures. *Organization Science, 2*(1), p. 89.

84 Aimee Fox (2018). *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 9.

85 Marylin Darling, et al. 2016). Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation. *The Foundation Review, 8*(1), pp. 59-73; Crossan and Apaydin (2010). A Multi-Dimensional Framework of Organizational Innovation, pp. 1154-1191.

86 Barbara Grah, et al. (2016). Expanding the Model of Organizational Learning: Scope, Contingencies, and Dynamics. *Economic and Business Review, 18*(2), p.191.

87 Maria Aragon, Daniel Jimenez and Raquel Sanz Valle (2013). Training and performance: The mediating role of organizational learning. *Business Research Quarterly, 17*, p. 162; Argote and Miron-Spektor (2010). Organizational Learning, p. 1124; Ikujiro Nonaka and Noboru Konno (1998). The Concept of "Ba": Building a Foundation for Knowledge Creation. *California Management Review, 40*(3), p. 40-42.

88 Daniel Kim (1993). The Link between Individual and Organizational Learning. *Sloan Management Review, 35*(1), p. 38-39.

89 Catherine Wang and Pervaiz Ahmed (2003). Organisational Learning: a critical review. *The Learning Organization, 10*(1), p. 9.

This individual knowledge is often tacit.[90] Through close proximity, tacit knowledge can be shared between individuals.[91] Still, this is insufficient for sharing knowledge beyond immediate coworkers. By making the knowledge explicit, it can be consciously shared in a group.[92] Instruments for explicating knowledge are discussion, instruction, or written manuals. This facilitates knowledge dissemination and retention, enabling members of a group, can retrieve this explicit knowledge.[93] A group's capacity to learn can be enhanced by implementing learning mechanisms such as periodic evaluations or providing feedback.[94] Although the organization can support learning at group level, teams can implement such mechanisms by themselves.

An additional way to study more informal learning practices is through "communities of practice."[95] Here specialists share a common, informal group identity based on their trade or position, for instance engineers or consultants.[96] Within these communities, specific knowledge can be shared between their members both at an organizational or inter-organizational level. In other words, these specialists can learn from each other's experiences, even when this knowledge is not present in their own team or organization.[97] A potential negative effect of such communities is that they become insulated from other sources of knowledge.[98]

Beyond teams and "communities of practice," learning from projects forms a distinct analytical lens. A project can be defined as a temporary organization that is tasked with obtaining a particular goal.[99] To be sure, not every temporary organization will have a detailed objective that can be optimized. For instance, military missions are often

90 Ikujiro Nonaka and Georg von Krogh (2009). Perspective—Tacit Knowledge and Knowledge Conversion: Controversy and Advancement in Organizational Knowledge Creation Theory. *Organization Science, 20*(3), pp. 635-652; Huysman (2000). An organizational learning approach, p. 136.

91 Ikujiro Nonaka and Ryoko Toyama (2003). The knowledge-creating theory revisited: knowledge creation as a synthesizing process. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*(1), p. 4-5.

92 Nonaka and Konno (1998). The Concept of "Ba", p. 43-44.

93 Jeanne Wilson, Paul Goodman, and Matthew Cronin (2007). Group Learning. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(4), p. 1054-1055.

94 Nory Jones and John Mahon (2012). Nimble knowledge transfer in high velocity/turbulent environments. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 16*(5), p. 778-779

95 Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 89.

96 Wai Fong Boh (2007). Mechanisms for sharing knowledge in project-based organizations. *Information and Organization, 17*(1), p. 47-49.

97 Stephen Duffield and Stephen Whitty (2016). How to apply the Systemic Lessons Learned Knowledge model to wire an organisation for the capability of storytelling. *International Journal of Project Management, 34*(3), p. 430-431.

98 Mahura and Birollo (2021). Organizational Practices, p. 279

99 Hans Berends and Irene Lammers (2010). Explaining Discontinuity in Organizational Learning: A Process Analysis. *Organization Studies, 31*(8), p. 1049.

conducted by bespoke task forces with broadly formulated end states.[100] In general, the project (or temporary) organization can learn and adapt throughout its existence.[101] Apart from this intra-project learning, institutionalizing of lessons for new projects is relevant for this research. In this way, knowledge is available for future use.[102] However, the temporal aspects of projects often impede the ability to learn from them. Generally, achieving the project's objective is prioritized over knowledge retention.[103] Furthermore, after the end of a project, the temporary organization can be dissolved which can lead to the dissipation of the acquired knowledge.[104]

Finally, organizational learning relates to how lessons affect the whole organization's performance. As the scale of the organization that must change increases, the implementation of such change can become more complicated. In particular, profound adjustments to the strategy of the institution will be hard to enact.[105] Furthermore, new knowledge of this nature will affect how individual members perceive their performance and possibly the environment. Consequently, the institutionalization of lessons will affect subsequent learning processes.[106]

2.2.2.2: *Models of organizational learning*

To assess the consecutive steps of organizational learning, scholars have built analytical models to understand the entire process.[107] In this subsection, several of these models are examined. While exhaustive overview of models is beyond the scope of this research, this short analysis can help understand the different steps of organizational learning and how they are linked.[108]

100 Rolf Lundin and Ander Soderholm (2013). Temporary organizations and end states: A theory is a child of its time and in need of reconsideration and reconstruction. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, 6*(3), p. 591.

101 Sue McClory, Martin Read and Ashraf Labib (2017). Conceptualising the lessons-learned process in project management: Towards a triple-loop learning framework. *International Journal of Project Management*, 35(7), pp. 1322-1335.

102 Anna Wiewiora, Michelle Smidt and Artemis Chang, (2019). The 'How' of Multilevel Learning Dynamics: A Systemic Literature Review Exploring How Mechanisms Bridge Learning Between Individuals, Teams/Projects and the Organization. *European Management Review*, 16, p. 95.

103 Rolf Medina and Alicia Medina 2017). Managing competence and learning in knowledge-intensive, project-intensive organizations: A case study of a public organization. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 10(3), p. 517.

104 Berends and Lammers (2010). Explaining Discontinuity, p. 1061; Chantal Savelsbergh, Liselore Havermans and Peter Storm (2016). Development paths of project managers: What and how do project managers learn from their experiences? *International Journal of Project Management*, 34(4), p. 559-562.

105 Fiol and Lyles (1985). Organizational Learning, p. 808.

106 Daniel Kim (1993). The Link between Individual and Organizational Learning. *Sloan Management Review, 35*(1), p. 45-48

107 Mary Crossan, Cara Maurer, and Roderick White (2011). Reflections on the 2009 AMR Decade Award: Do we have a theory of organizational learning? *Academy of Management Review, 36*(3), p. 449

108 See for example: Mikael Holmqvist (2003). A Dynamic Model of Intra- and Interorganizational Learning. *Organization Studies, 24*(1), p 114; Anna Wiewiora, Michelle Smidt and Artemis Chang (2019). The 'How' of Multilevel Learning Dynamics: A Systemic Literature Review Exploring How Mechanisms Bridge Learning Between Individuals, Teams/Projects and the Organization. *European Management Review*, 16, p. 99-102.

For example, Ikujiro Nonaka and Noboru Konno offer a model that explains how knowledge is transferred from the individual to the institution. A main argument is that tacit knowledge sharing forms a crucial part in the learning process. In the step of "*Socialization*," members of the organization can learn from each other through close proximity. To extend the range of dissemination the knowledge must be made explicit through "*externalization*." Instruments for this step can be written or verbal instructions.[109] The third step of "*combination*" is the deliberate effort by the organization to capture knowledge and integrate it in its normal processes. For this step, the organization must accept the validity of this knowledge in order to change its operations.[110] Finally, new knowledge must be "*internalized*" by the organization's members. Through training and education, individual members learn this new knowledge and apply it in their work. As such, the explicit knowledge becomes tacit again, thereby emphasizing the cyclical character of organizational learning.[111]

A more recent and intricate model is provided by Barbara Grah, *et al.*[112] Based on a literature review the authors construct a model that adds applying the acquired knowledge to enact change within the organization. They incorporate Huber's processes: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory.[113] However, they argue that storing the knowledge in itself is inadequate. The new knowledge must be applied to enhance performance. This will help create new experiences and feedback on the organization's performance, thereby continuing the cycle of learning.[114] Marleen Huysman contributes a succinct model that includes the organization's environment as a source for knowledge.[115] This relationship is reciprocal as the organization's knowledge affects the environment.[116] Huysman posits that the organization can learn from competitors, but also from feedback from its clients. Moreover, an organization can implement external knowledge by hiring new personnel or consultants. Still, this form of knowledge acquisition can be subject to biases and miscommunication.[117]

A final, well-known analytical model is provided Mary Crossan, *et al.*[118] It depicts the steps of *intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing*. The first step of *intuiting*, states that

109 Nonaka and Konno (1998). The Concept of "Ba", p. 42-44.

110 Ibidem, p. 44-45.

111 Ibidem, p. 45.

112 Barbara Grah, et al. (2016). Expanding the Model of Organizational Learning, pp. 183-212.

113 George Huber (1991). Organizational learning, p. 91-99.

114 Ibidem, p. 204.

115 Crossan, et al. do acknowledge that learning is not a closed cycle, but they do not explicitly depict it in their model, see page 522.

116 Huysman (2000). An organizational learning approach, p. 139-140.

117 Ibidem, p. 140

118 See for example Sandra Duarte Aponte and Delio Castaneda Zapata (2013). A model of organizational learning in practice. *Estudios Gerenciales, 29*, pp. 439-444; Maria Aragon, Daniel Jimenez and Raquel Sanz Valle (2013). Training and performance: The mediating role of organizational learning. *Business Research Quarterly, 17*, pp. 161-173.

individual learning from experience is often a subconscious process. This is influenced by the individual's frames of reference, aptitude to process information and existing knowledge. Therefore, the acquired knowledge is mostly tacit.[119]

By *interpreting*, this tacit knowledge is given meaning by the individual and the immediate team. After this, the group can apply the new knowledge to address deficiencies through the step of *integrating* it within the group's tasks. To ensure that this knowledge is applied throughout the organization, the step of *institutionalizing* is required. As this can affect the operations, the structures, and the norms of the organization, its leadership has to support the resulting changes. This precondition means that this last step entails deliberation and time.[120] As knowledge is institutionalized, this will influence how individual members perceive their operations in relation to the environment and thus how they learn.[121]

Huber/Grah, *et al.*	**Nonaka and Konno**	**Crossan *et al.***	**Huysman**
Knowledge acquisition	Socialization	Intuiting	Individual knowledge
Information distribution	Externalization	Interpreting	Communicated knowledge
Information interpretation	Combination	Integrating	Organizational knowledge
Organizational memory	Internalization	Institutionalizing	Environmental knowledge
Knowledge application (Grah)	-	-	-

Table 2.1: Identified steps of organizational learning. Note that the processes as identified by these scholars are cyclical.

To be sure, models of organizational learning processes by themselves do not explain learning. As the authors acknowledge, these learning processes have an inherent political dimension as existing institutional norms is challenged through knowledge acquisition. [122] To understand these dynamics, the following subsection will examine the literature on the most pertinent concepts.

119 Crossan, et al. (1999). An Organizational Learning Framework, p. 526-527.

120 Ibidem, p. 527-530.

121 Ibidem, p. 532.

122 Jan Schilling and Annette Kluge (2010). Explaining Discontinuity in Organizational Learning: A Process Analysis. *Organization Studies*, *31*(8), p. 343-353.

2.2.3: The dynamics and political dimension of organizational learning

While organizations learn to address deficiencies and adjust to changes in their environment, accumulated knowledge does not automatically lead to enhanced performance.[123] At a fundamental level, organizational learning can have two broad interdependent manifestations: *exploitation* and *exploration*. *Exploitation* can be described as improving existing competencies. This allows an organization to enhance its efficiency and helps to attain success in the short term. Conversely, *exploration* is more focused on questioning the organization's core assumptions in relation to potential changes in the environment. If we assume a changing environment, then *exploration* is essential for the organization's survival.[124] More succinctly, exploitation seeks reliability in experience, while exploration seeks variety in experience.[125]

While both exploitation and exploration are crucial for the organization's success, its leadership must seek to balance these two efforts as organizational time, attention, and other resources are finite.[126] Furthermore, these types of learning require different viewpoints and activities. In essence, exploitation is driven by experience and is generally internally focused.[127] Given the immediate impact of improving current operations that help organizational stability in the short term, exploitation is more familiar and easier to pursue.[128] At the same time the awareness of changes in the environment, changes that may precipitate profound changes in the organization for new opportunities, competitive advantages and addressing critical deficiencies, is crucial for the organization's existence over time. However, the higher echelons of an organization can be apprehensive to engage in such profound changes, as doing so might impede the normal operations. At the lower levels of the organizations, this reluctance can lead to personnel to become cautious in pointing out performance gaps lest they be "punished" for challenging the institution's norms.[129] From the perspective of leadership, the hesitation to radically alter objectives, policies and operations is understandable, as this entails risk-taking with uncertain returns.[130] This inherent tension forms part of the crux of organizational learning.

123 Karl Weick and Frances Westley (1999). Organizational Learning: Affirming an Oxymoron. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Managing Organizations*. London: SAGE Publications, p. 205-206.

124 James March (1991). Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning. *Organization Sccience, 2*(1), p.71-72.

125 Holmqvist (2003). A Dynamic Model, p. 96.

126 Ibidem, p. 100.

127 Anil Gupta, Ken Smith, and Christina Shalley (2006). The Interplay between Exploration and Exploitation. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*(4), p. 694.

128 March (1991). Exploration and Exploitation, p. 71-72; Levinthal and March (1993). The Myopia of Learning, p. 110.

129 Argyris (1977). Double Loop Learning in Organizations, p. 116.

130 March (1991). Exploration and Exploitation, p.71; Weick and Westley (1999). Organizational Learning, p. 190-191.

The balancing act between exploitation and exploration is therefore a strategic consideration for the organization's leadership. This is further complicated by an inherent political dimension. [131] When a group in an organization argues for a change of direction that will affect the organization, this has repercussions for the internal distribution of power.[132] Beyond the rational apprehension of leaders to create risks by changing the direction of the organization, the disinclination for alterations can also stem from the higher strata wanting to retain the current power arrangements.[133] Consequently, new knowledge will not always be promoted in an organization.[134] Thus, while organizational learning is a deliberate process, it is certainly not always driven or shaped by rational decision making that solely affects organizational performance, but also the internal power distribution.[135]

The literature on organizational learning identifies two mechanisms to navigate the balance between exploitation and exploration: ambidexterity, and punctuated equilibrium. Ambidexterity indicates the ability to wield two elements simultaneously, in this case exploitation and exploration. For organizations in complex and volatile environments, such as armed forces, the need for such ambidexterity is apparent. A way to attempt to attain balance is to assign the two aspects as tasks to various parts or subunits of the organization. For instance, the subunit that is responsible for routine operations will often be tasked with *exploitation*. Conversely, another element of the organization can be tasked with *exploration* through experimentation and scanning for external developments. This latter arrangement requires some organizational "slack" that allows resources and attention towards exploration, as this normally will not yield tangible benefits in the short term.[136] In practice, organizations will generally have to navigate between exploration and exploitation simultaneously. Consequently, organizations and their constituent units must adopt an ambidextrous stance. This requires being attuned to feedback from routine operations and to the dynamics of the environment.[137]

Another mechanism, punctuated equilibrium, is based on a "temporal cycling between extended periods of exploitation and short bursts of exploration [...]."[138] In other words,

131 Berends and Lammers (2010). Explaining Discontinuity in Organizational Learning, p 1061.

132 Thomas Lawrence, Michael Maus, Bruno Dyck (2005). The Politics of Organizational Learning: Integrating Power into the 4I Framework. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(1), p. 180,

133 Scott Ganz (2018). Ignorant Decision Making and Educated Inertia: Some Political Pathologies of Organizational Learning. *Organization Science, 29*(1), p. 55.

134 Thomas Lawrence, Michael Maus, Bruno Dyck (2005). The Politics of Organizational Learning: Integrating Power into the 4I Framework. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(1), p.181.

135 Ibidem, p 182-184; Huysman (2000). An organizational learning approach, p. 135.

136 Zeki Simsek (2009). Organizational Ambidexterity: Towards a Multilevel Understanding. *Journal of Management Studies, 46*(4), p. 599-603.

137 Javier Tamayo-Torres, Jens Roehrich, and Michael Lewis (2017). Ambidexterity, performance and environmental dynamism. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management, 37*(3), p. 291.

138 Gupta, et al. (2006). The Interplay between Exploration and Exploitation, p. 698.

this concept posits that organizations experience stable periods in which changes do occur, but these are incremental and evolutionary. Yet a crisis in operational performance, due to the advent of new technology, being outcompeted, or other developments in the environment, may force more momentous change to the organization, including the organization's mission and core assumptions.[139] While this implies a binary state between stability and transformational change, the reality is often more nuanced. Based on the developments and the organization's reactions to them, the range of the effects of learning can differ. Evidently, within larger organizations, experiences from interaction with the environment can have diverse effects on the organization's subunits.[140] A pertinent challenge of punctuated equilibrium is that the organization must be sufficiently attuned to its environment to recognize developments that require profound change. Moreover, there must be organizational mechanisms in place to enact the necessary restructuring.

Perhaps the most well-known designations that distinguish between levels of learning are "single loop" and "double loop" learning. First, single loop learning allows the organization to continue its normal processes and pursue its objectives with corrections based on information feedback during operations. Individuals or groups of individuals acquire knowledge from their experience while operating within the organization and its environment. Through this experience, they can identify deficiencies within the operations of the organization. Furthermore, this learning does not always require the support of the organization's leadership.[141]

Conversely, "double loop" learning is more profound.[142] In this type of learning, the actions are not limited to small corrective actions, but the institutional norms are challenged and changed. Of course, this type of learning requires the active support of the organization's leadership due to the significant repercussions on its operations.[143] As such, single loop and double loop learning resemble the concepts of exploitation and exploration.

Beyond single and double loop learning, the literature also identifies "triple loop" learning. Yet, there are diverging views of what triple loop learning entails.[144] Without engaging in a contentious effort for defining this concept, here triple loop learning is identified as the

139 Christoph Loch and Bernardo Huberman (1999). A Punctuated-Equilibrium Model of Technology Diffusion. *Management Science*, *45*(2), p. 160-161.

140 Andrew Wollin (1999). Punctuated Equilibrium: Reconciling Theory of Revolutionary and Incremental Change. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, *16*, p. 365-367.

141 Argyris (1977). Double Loop Learning, p. 116; Fiol and Lyles (1985). Organizational Learning, p. 807-810.

142 Other scholars call this "higher learning", see for example: Fiol and Lyles (1985). Organizational Learning, p. 808.

143 Argyris (1977). Double Loop Learning, p. 118-122.

144 Paul Tosey, Max Visser and Mark Saunders (2011). The origins and conceptualizations of 'triple-loop' learning: A critical review. *Management Learning*, *43*(3), p. 291-297.

process that reflects on the organization's ability to learn.[145] Reflecting on and enhancing the learning processes naturally affects the efficacy of the ability to learn from experience and improve the organization's performance. By establishing and resourcing a formal learning process, the organization can ensure that knowledge is used to enhance its performance. However, as such mechanisms often require additional resources while not directly contributing to the short-term outcome, lessons learned processes often receive scant attention.[146]

In sum, short-term objectives such as stability, continuity and possibly enhanced profits favor the type of learning that helps to *exploit* the strengths of an organization. In the long term however, organizations must continually *explore* new ways to operate in relation to their environment to identify opportunities and threats to its success or even existence. This dilemma is not always driven by technocratic considerations, but is at least subject to internal political dynamics, as the implementation of new knowledge can upset the organizational status quo. As such, learning is not solely based on the interaction by an organization and its environment, but is also subject to its culture, learning arrangements and hierarchical structure. Following from the underlying dynamics at play in organizational learning, a closer look at these factors influencing or impeding the process of learning is warranted.

2.2.4: Influencing factors on organizational learning

When examining learning processes in organizations, the factors influencing the ability to learn should be considered. Of course, the internal traits of organizations can differ significantly. A large bureaucracy will have different attributes than a small start-up company. Moreover, the environments in which organizations operate will differ, and therefore have an impact on how each organization learns.

In the literature, several influencing factors on how organizations learn are identified.[147] Common factors are culture, organizational structures, strategy, and environments, seen as able to act both as facilitators and as inhibitors to organizational learning.[148] These factors are inherently interdependent, as they simultaneously affect the organization and its place in the environment.

145 See Georges Romme and Arjen van Witteloostuijn (1999). Circular organizing and triple loop learning. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(5), p. 440; Kristi Yuthas, Jesse Dillard and Rodney Rogers (2004). Beyond Agency and Structure: Triple-Loop Learning. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51, p. 238-240.

146 Sue McClory, Martin Read and Ashraf Labib (2017). Conceptualising the lessons-learned process in project management: Towards a triple-loop learning framework. *International Journal of Project Management*, 35, p. 1333-1334.

147 See for example the doctoral dissertation by Tommi Tikka. He identifies 15 "conditions" for organizational learning: p. 44-63.

148 Fiol and Lyle (1985). Organizational Learning, p. 804. These aspects are applied by Barbara Grah, et al. (2016). Expanding the Model of Organizational Learning, p. 196.

First of all, the environment in which an organization exists shapes the experiences from which it learns. Relevant aspects of the environment are for example volatility, competition, dependence on resources, clients, and regulatory institutions.[149] For instance, an enterprise in a highly volatile market is more likely to explore new opportunities, and willing to incur associated risks, as competition compels it to continuously seek new opportunities and processes to survive.[150] Another perspective on volatile environments can be obtained through organizations that have to respond to crisis situations, such as natural disasters. Depending on the uniqueness of a crisis situation, the organization tasked with the response must navigate between planned reactions and improvisation. While a unique crisis will yield a wealth of experience, capturing new knowledge for posterity will be a lesser priority than dealing with the situation at hand. After a crisis has been dealt with, the organization can incorporate the acquired knowledge into new plans and procedures.[151]

On the other side of the spectrum, one can imagine a bureaucratic organization that operates in a more stable environment and is therefore inherently averse to radical change. This is not to say that such an organization is unable to learn, but learning will require more time, resources, and concerted effort. With a stable environment, organizations are more likely to place emphasize on increasing efficiency in their normal operations.[152] Furthermore, public organizations have to contend with additional pressures, as their operations are subject to political and public scrutiny.

Likewise, internal factors influence organizational learning profoundly. Organizational culture is regarded as a defining trait in this respect. Of course, organizational culture is shaped by its environment: it is manifested in shared beliefs and norms that shape how an organization operates and learns.[153] This has two main effects. First of all, it affects what knowledge is assessed to be relevant to the organization. Culture also shapes how that knowledge is acquired, utilized, and distributed.[154] Secondly, a culture that delegates responsibility and rewards initiative will be more open to the free flow of knowledge and the changes this might induce.[155]

Furthermore, culture has a profound influence on the way an organization is structured. Some scholars regard, organizations that are structured as networks, with delegated

149 Argote and Miron-Spektor (2010). Organizational Learning, p. 1125.

150 Keith Thomas and Stephen Allen (2006). The learning organisation: a meta-analysis of themes in literature. *The Learning Organization*, *13*(2/3), p. 124-125.

151 Donald Moynihan (2008). Learning under Uncertainty: Networks in Crisis Management. *Public Administration Review*, *68*(2), p. 352-353.

152 Fiol and Lyle (1985). Organizational Learning, p. 805.

153 Weick and Westley (1999). Organizational Learning, p. 205-206.

154 David De Long and Liam Fahey (2000). Diagnosing cultural barriers to knowledge management. *The Academy of Management Executive*, *14*(4), p. 125-126.

155 Weick and Westley (1999). Organizational Learning, p. 191-192.

authority, as being more conducive to acquire new knowledge.[156] Moreover, in a decentralized structure, knowledge can be more easily diffused and incorporated to enact change in the organization.[157] Other scholars argue a decentralized structure impedes the implementation of new ideas, as the acquired knowledge is regarded as relevant to just the subunit rather than the wider organization. Here, the loose connection between the subunit and the wider organization causes a different outlook on the applicability of knowledge.[158]

A related aspect to culture and structure is the influence of leadership on an organization's ability to learn. Leaders are shaped by the organization's culture, but also concurrently exert influence on this culture. Furthermore, they function as an intermediary between individual members and the abstract notion of the "organization" itself.[159] When leaders espouse learning as a crucial process within the organization, they can foster a sense of curiosity, and experimentation among their personnel.[160] Moreover, leaders can perform a crucial role in feeding forward new knowledge towards the higher echelons of the organization. When a leader (manager) accepts the relevance of knowledge acquired at individual or group level, he or she can advocate the use of this knowledge by the wider organization.[161]

Culture, structure, and leadership conducive to learning from interacting with the environment are thus crucial for organizational learning. However, organizations have to make specific provisions for acquiring, interpreting, integrating, and distributing knowledge. Shaker Zahra and Gerard George define these organizational routines and processes as "absorptive capacity." They distinguish between "potential absorptive capacity" and "realized absorptive capacity", with the former consisting of identifying, acquiring, processing, and understanding new knowledge.[162] In order to then realize the absorption of new knowledge and enact change in the organization, new knowledge must be combined with existing knowledge. Subsequently, this knowledge can be used to "refine, extend, and leverage existing competencies or to create new ones [...]."[163]

156 Wiewiora, et al. (2019). The 'How' of Multilevel Learning Dynamics, p. 105.

157 Christina Fang, Jeho Lee and Melissa Schilling (2010). Balancing Exploration and Exploitation Through Structural Design: The Isolation of Subgroups and Organizational Learning. *Organization Science, 21*(3), p. 627-628.

158 Jan Schilling and Anette Kluge (2009). Barriers to organizational learning: An integration of theory and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 11*(3), p. 355.

159 Yochanan Altman and Paul Iles (1998). Learning, leadership, teams: corporate learning and organisational change. *The Journal of Management Development, 17*(1), p. 50.

160 Priscilla Kraft and Andreas Bausch (2016). How Do Transformational Leaders Promote Exploratory and Exploitative Innovation? Examining the Black Box through MASEM. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 33*(6), p. 702-703.

161 Wiewiora, et al. (2019). The 'How' of Multilevel Learning Dynamics, p. 104.

162 Shaker Zahra and Gerard George (2002). Absorptive Capacity: A Review, Reconceptualization, and Extension. *Academy of Management Review, 27*(2), p. 186-189.

163 Ibidem, p. 190.

Other scholars argue that while identification of organizational processes that affect learning is in itself useful, this must be translated into explicit organizational mechanisms to assess their individual and collective impact on learning.[164] To start with, the operations of an organization will invariably yield environmental and internal feedback about the organization's performance. To address deficiencies in performance, the organization must have the ability to identify, collect, analyze, and disseminate this feedback. Moreover, the information of the feedback must be assessed as relevant to the organization.[165] Concurrently, the storage, implementation, and distribution of knowledge within the organization is a further important consideration.

Aspects that can assist these operations are, for example, knowledge databases, knowledge management specialists, and intra-organizational training. Perhaps the quintessential organizational element that is concerned with learning is a "Research and Development" (or equivalent) team that searches for new knowledge that could be useful to the organization.[166] Even with this search capability, absent or dysfunctional organizational learning mechanisms will impede the flow of knowledge throughout the organization and are detrimental to effective learning. At the same time, specific learning mechanisms are vulnerable to discontinuation or resource withdrawal, as they often do not manifestly contribute to the organization's short-term results.[167]

2.2.5: Sub conclusion

By exploring the literature on organizational learning, several aspects of the field stand out. First of all, organizational learning is the process focused to enhance the organization's performance. This is reflected in the working definition used for this research: *the process through which an organization constructs knowledge or reconstructs existing knowledge for maintaining or enhancing its performance in relation to its environment*.

Secondly, for an organization to learn from experience, knowledge development follows several distinct levels (individual, group, project, organization) which must be considered to understand the process in its entirety. A third element of the literature that is considered is the depiction of the learning process in analytical models. Although these models offer diverging explanations of organizational learning, they contribute to our understanding of

164 Peter Lane, Balaji Koka, and Seemantini Pathak (2006). The Reification of Absorptive Capacity: A Critical Review and Rejuvenation of the Construct. *Academy of Management Review, 31*(4), p. 847.

165 Kathleen Carley and John Harrald (1997). Organizational Learning Under Fire: Theory and Practice. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 40*(3), p. 320-322.

166 Micha Popper and Raanan Lipschitz (1998). Organizational Learning Mechanisms: A Structural and Cultural Approach to Organizational Learning. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 34*(2), p. 170-172.

167 Cyril Kirwan (2013). *Making Sense of Organizational Learning: Putting Theory into Practice.* Farnham: Gower Publishing, p. 123

how the process of learning works. Moreover, the models emphasize the continuous dynamic of learning. The fourth salient aspect of the literature is that it shows consideration for the political and social dimensions of learning. Although learning to enhance performance is a laudable objective, political considerations and the tension between exploration and exploitation complicate organizational change based on new knowledge. A fifth and final attribute of the field is that it identifies several factors that influence learning such as the organization's environment, culture, structure, and leadership. Moreover, organizational learning is subject to fallacies that impede learning (examined in-depth in subsection 2.3.4.3).

The combination of these aspects of the literature renders organizational learning theory as a promising explanatory model for military change based on experiential learning. Yet, the idiosyncrasies of armed forces and war must be considered in order to understand how militaries learn. Of course, a defining characteristic of militaries organizations is that they have to apply force in a violent and chaotic environment against adversaries, that also include local and global audiences, various non-government organizations, corporate actors, interagency partners and multinational organizations. Yet, armed forces generally are preparing for such contingencies in times of peace. To understand these special attributes, the literature on military change is explored in the following section.

2.3: Military innovation studies and learning in military organizations

How military organizations acquire and implement new knowledge, both in and out of conflict, has been subject to intense study. This academic subfield is known as *military innovation studies*.[168] Over the last two decades, this body of literature has grown rapidly.[169] As noted previously, this is in large part due to the extensive scholarly work concerning the experiences of Western armed forces during their deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.[170] Still, adaptation in earlier conflicts, and innovation in peacetime, continue to attract considerable scholarly attention as well.[171] As such, the study of organizational change in

168 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 906.

169 Griffin (2017). Military Innovation Studies, p. 196-197; Rob Sinterniklaas (2018). *Military Innovation: Cutting the Gordian Knot*. Breda: Faculty of Military Sciences, Netherlands Defence Academy, p. 15-16.

170 The literature on military change during the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan covers many of the involved countries. See for example: Olivier Schmitt (2017). French Military Adaptation in the Afghan War: Looking Inward or Outward. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 40*(4), pp. 577-599; Robert Egnell (2011). Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan:what now for British counterinsurgency? *International Affairs, 87*(2), pp. 297-315; George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). Formative Years: Military Adaptation of Dutch Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan. *Special Operations Journal, 2*(2), pp. 146-166; Olof Kronval and Magnus Petersson (2016). Doctrine and Defence Transformation in Norway and Sweden. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 39*(2), pp. 280-296; Fabrizio Cotticha and Francesco Moro (2016). Learning From Others? Emulation and Change in the Italian Armed Forces Since 2001. *Armed Forces & Society, 42*(4), 696-718.

171 See for example: Michael Hunzeker (2021). *Dying to Learn: Wartime Lessons from the Western Front*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Aimee Fox (2018). *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Meir Finkel (2011). *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield*. Stanford:

armed forces holds a somewhat distinct position in relation to more generic scholarship on organizational learning.

2.3.1: Historiography and critique

Essentially military innovation is a catch-all phrase for change in military organizations. It is described in various ways: innovation, adaptation, learning, and emulation.[172] Unfortunately, as scholars like Adam Grissom and Rob Sinterniklaas demonstrate, these different designations of change are ill-defined and sometimes used interchangeably.[173] Grissom offered a consensus (if implicit) definition of what military innovation entails: changes in the way a "military formation function[s] in the field", "is significant in scope and impact", and "is tacitly equated with greater military effectiveness".[174] Others, like, Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff categorize adaptation, innovation and emulation as "pathways" that can lead to *military change*.[175] Of these three avenues towards military change, emulation is clearly and concisely defined as: "importing new tools and ways of war through imitation of other military organizations". Adaptation is defined as: "adjusting existing military methods and means", while innovation "involves developing new military technologies, tactics, strategies, and structures". Farrell, and Terriff state that adaptation can lead to innovation when multiple adjustments "lead to new means and methods."[176]

Nina Kollars considers adaptation as being a component of innovation. Kollars defines innovation as "a novel revision/change in how we do things, that is brought into practice on purpose".[177] Subsequently, she defines adaptation as "intended change aimed at the solution of a current problem for which current techniques and technologies are not desired".[178] Notably in these definitions, innovation is the superlative of adaptation, either as blanket term as argued by Kollars, or as a more novel and intense iteration of military change as stated by Farrell and Terriff.

Stanford University Press; Robert T. Foley (2014). Dumb donkeys or cunning foxes? Learning in the British and German armies during the Great War. *International Affairs, 90*(2), pp. 279-298; Antoine Bousquet (2009). *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity.* London: Hurst; Phil Haun (2019). Peacetime military innovation through inter-service cooperation: The unique case of the U.S. Air Force and Battlefield Air Interdiction. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 42*(1), pp. 1-27.

172 Sinterniklaas (2018). *Military Innovation*, p. 16.

173 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 907-908. Sinterniklaas (2018). *Military Innovation*, p. 17-21.

174 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 907.

175 Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff (2002). Introduction. In T. Farrell, & T. Terriff (Eds.), *The Sources of Military Change* (pp. 3-20). Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p. 6.

176 Ibidem, p. 6.

177 Nina Kollars (2012). *By the Seat of Their Pants: Military Technological Adaptation in War.* Columbus: The Ohio State University, p. 43-44.

178 Ibidem, p. 52.

To add to the plethora of definitions, other distinctions, and relations between the two concepts of adaptation and innovation exist. On his part, Williamson Murray draws a distinction between adaptation and innovation on the basis of context. According to Murray, adaptation is military change during conflict, while innovation pertains to change in peacetime.[179] By contrast, Matthew Tattar demarcates innovation as being proactive, while adaptation is reactive.[180]

The lack of clear and distinct definitions of the concepts of adaptation and innovation suggests that the blanket term of "military change" as offered by Farrell and Terriff is the most appropriate. As this research is primarily concerned with the process of learning in and from recent counterinsurgency campaigns, the strict categorizing of manifestations of military change in either "adaptation" or "innovation" is unnecessary. However, the term "adaptation," and its derivatives, will feature throughout the research. Adaptation fits better with the notion that the armed forces had to improvise and indeed adapt to the operational challenges posed the counterinsurgency campaigns, thereby following Tattar's notion that adaptation is reactive rather than proactive.

2.3.2: Approaches to study military change

The vague distinctions between adaptation and innovation are indicative for the field of military innovation studies. As critical scholars observe, military innovation literature has not yielded a comprehensive theory on the way military organizations implement change.[181] Whereas the issue of definitions can, as noted, pragmatically be skirted, the lack of a common theory for how military organizations change is of more consequence for this research. Earlier works in this field opted for different internal and external explanations on how armed forces change.

In his 2006 article, Grissom distinguished between four "schools of military innovation research" that had emerged since the 1980's: the "civil-military model", the "interservice model", the "intraservice model", and the "cultural model".[182] The quintessential example of the school of civil-military relations is Barry Posen's monograph "the Sources of Military Doctrine", which is habitually acknowledged as a foundational work.[183] Posen posited that military organizations are inherently prone to inertia. For innovation to occur, external

179 Murray (2011). *Military Adaptation in War*, p. 2.

180 Matthew Tattar (2011). *Innovation and Adaptation in War*. Waltham: Brandeis University (Doctoral Dissertation), p. 13.

181 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 925; Griffin (2017). Military Innovation Studies, p. 218-219; Sinterniklaas (2018). *Military Innovation*, p. 29-30.

182 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 908.

183 Ibidem.

intervention is needed by civilian leadership with collaboration of "maverick officers."[184] According to Deborah Avant, this dynamic was also discernible in irregular warfare, such as the Boer Wars and the Vietnam War. She argues that the sway politicians hold over their armed forces is indicative of how successful they can be in enforcing change.[185]

The interservice model argued that competition over finite resources between the military services within a state forms a driver for change. When a new technology or capability arises, for example ballistic missiles or aircraft carriers, the competition between military services will intensify to absorb this new task. These efforts will thus drive innovation in technology, concepts, and organization.[186] In essence the alternative *intraservice* model is a variation on this theme as it studies competition between arms or branches within a service. The scholar associated with this third school, Stephen Rosen, asserts that innovation is initiated by senior officers within a service who develop "a new theory of victory, an explanation of what the next war will look like, and how officers must fight if it is to be won".[187] By such theories of victory, new or existing branches compete for dominance within their service. This competition then drives new concepts such as aircraft carriers or airmobile infantry.[188]

The final school of military innovation that Grissom identified posits that cultural factors are the determinant of how military forces change. This view was introduced by Theo Farrell, and Terry Terriff, who argue that cultural aspects and internal processes of military organizations must also be examined to understand change. They regard military change as being a result of a complex interplay between the militaries, and their environments.[189]

Beyond these schools of thought, Grissom pondered the inclusion of "bottom-up" innovation. Whereas the four schools he identified explained military change as being implemented from the top downwards, historical evidence suggested that meaningful change can be initiated by units in the field.[190] Research on "bottom-up" innovation did exist, as Grissom acknowledged, but there was no real theory on how this type of military change worked.[191] By neglecting "bottom-up" innovation, the field of military innovation

184 Posen (1984). *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 222-236.

185 Deborah D. Avant (1993). The Institutional Sources of Military Doctrine: Hegemons in Peripheral Wars. *International Studies Quarterly, 37*(4), 409-430

186 See for example Harvey Sapolsky (1972). *Polaris System Development: Bureaucratic and Programmatic Succes in Government.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Andrew Bacevich (1986). *The Pentomic Era: the US Army between Korea and Vietnam.* Washington DC: National Defense University Press.

187 Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War*, p.20.

188 Ibidem.

189 Farrell and Terriff (Eds.). (2002). *The Sources of Military Change*, p. 271-275.

190 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 919-920.

191 See for earlier works on military change initiated at the lower levels of militaries: Bruce Gudmunsson (1989). *Stormtroop Tactics"Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918.* New York: Praeger; Michael Doubler (1994). *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas; Keith Bickel (2001); *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940.* Boulder: Westview Press.

studies lacked conceptual models upon which to test the empirical data.[192] Grissom's call for more research on military change initiated at the tactical level was singularly well-timed, as Western units at that time were struggling to adapt to the challenges posed by counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.[193]

Interestingly, Grissom discounts the utility of organizational learning theory to study "bottom-up" adaptation, referring in this critique to the theoretical framework provided by Richard Downie.[194] His reasoning for this is that organizational learning literature relegated the agency of frontline troops to merely information gathering. In Grissom's examples, initiatives from lower levels gain traction through informal dissemination, in some instances even while going against the organizational grain.[195] Grissom therefore argues that in Downie's model, and by extension the organizational learning literature up until that point, the agency for innovation is placed at the institutional level, and not with tactical (deployed) units.[196]

In "Learning from Conflict" (1998), Downie introduces a model for learning by military organizations. He uses this model for learning processes in "Low Intensity Conflict," which includes counterinsurgency, stabilization operations, and humanitarian interventions. Downie focuses on doctrinal change after conflicts, as "doctrine reflects learning that militaries have assimilated from their experiences".[197] He further argues that to explain doctrinal change, a theory must address the interaction between external factors that necessitate a change in doctrine and the "institutional response to those influences".[198] In other words, operational challenges during wartime will necessitate organizational changes to address them.[199]

To explain this process of change, Downie offered a framework of institutional learning. He defines this as "a process by which an organization (such as the U.S. Army) uses new gained knowledge or understanding from experience or study to adjust institutional norms,

192 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 925

193 See for work on early adaptation by Western armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan: Brian Burton and John Nagl (2008). Learning as we go: the US army adapts to counterinsurgency in Iraq, July 2004–December 2006. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 19*(3), pp. 303-327; James Russell (2010). Innovation in War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 33*(4), 595-624; Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon (2009). COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal, 154*(3), pp. 18-25

194 Grissom (2006). The future of military innovation studies, p. 926.

195 Ibidem, p. 920-922.

196 E-mail correspondence by the author with Adam Grissom, 12-12-2018.

197 Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, p. 2.

198 Ibidem

199 Ibidem, p. 5-6.

doctrine and procedures in ways designed to minimize previous gaps in performance and maximize future success."[200]

As such, institutional learning is depicted as a process (see figure 2.1) of six steps. The first step is that of evaluating the operational environment and the institutional performance relative to it. From this, organizational performance gaps can be identified (step 2). Subsequently, actions are initiated to ameliorate the organizational shortfalls. More succinctly, this is where elements within the organization improvise and adapt to the changed environment (step 3). What follows is the acceptance, or rejection, of the adaptation by the organization at the institutional level. When a consensus is reached within the organization about the applicability of an adaptation or lesson, this can be incorporated into doctrine (step 4). Conversely, when the adaptation is rejected, alternative solutions for addressing the operational challenges can be sought. When the doctrine is revised to include the necessary adaptations, the changes must be transmitted, so that all elements within the organization, such as individual commanders and deployed units, are made aware of them (step 5). The final stage then is that the change in doctrine leads to a change in organizational behavior (step 6).[201]

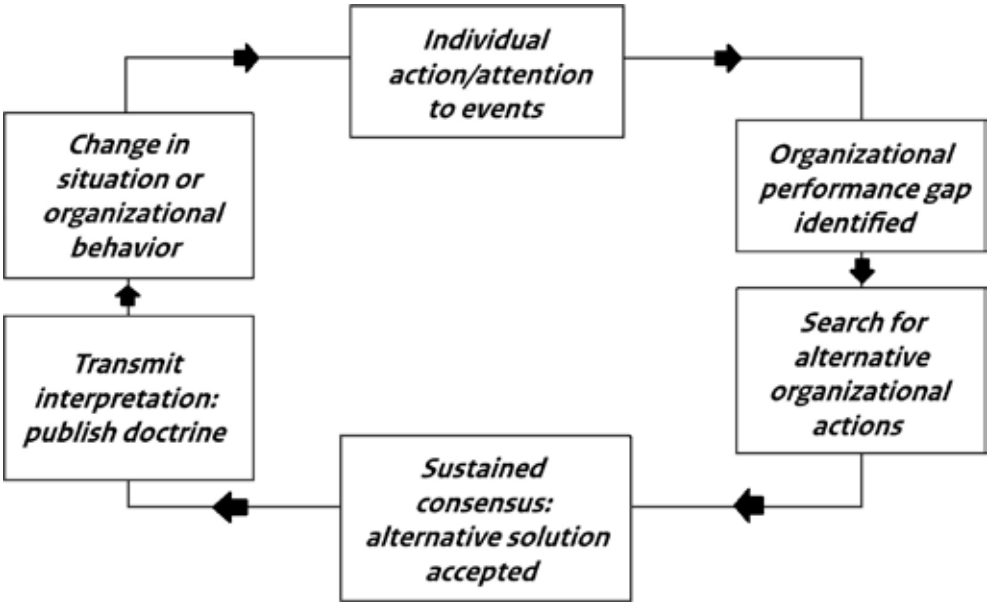


Figure 2.1: Downie's Learning Cycle

200 Downie (1998). *Learning from Conflict*, p.22.

201 Ibidem, p. 241-242.

Downie's model helps to understand the interaction between responding to operational deficiencies in the field and the institutional reaction and support to these experiences. This model was, perhaps more famously, adopted by John Nagl for analyzing how the United Kingdom and the United States adapted to the challenges in the wars in Malaya, and Vietnam respectively.[202] However, Downie's model is ill-suited for this, as it does not capture adaptations by units in the field that are not embraced by the organization. Still, wartime adaptations merit intense study as they provide the foundations of potential institutionalization.

2.3.3: Current trends in the literature

If anything, the study of how armed forces enact change has picked up steam in the last two decades. Consequently, the field of military innovation studies has seen important developments, but in general, however, most works are restricted to empirical works of contemporary or historical examples. More theoretical explanations for military change remain scarce.[203]

Within this considerable body of literature, four tentatively connected trends relevant to this research are discernible. To start, the "bottom-up" approach to military change has become a dominant theme. Secondly, a substantial portion of the recent research looks at the influence of cultural factors on military change. A third trend is the welcome addition of more non-Western perspectives, both in regular armed forces as for non-state actors such as insurgencies. Finally, renewed attention to organizational learning theory is in evidence.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provided an impetus to the study of "bottom-up" adaptation. Here, Western militaries were caught unprepared for the irregular aspects of these conflict and consequently had to adapt. The resulting scholarly works indicate that the primary agents of change were the units in the field.[204] By forming informal networks, troops on the ground shared knowledge and skills that enabled them to address day-to-day challenges.[205]

An interesting aspect is that creative solutions from the field are often met with reluctance or bureaucratic inertia at the institutional level. This lack of support from the institution

202 See Nagl (2002). *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p. 6-11.

203 Griffin (2017). Military Innovation Studies, p. 202.

204 Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War*, p. 4; Serena (2011). *A Revolution in Military Adaptation*, p. 173; David Johnson (2016). You Go to Coin with the Military You Have. In B. Heuser, & E. Shamir (Eds.), *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 115-118,

205 Nina Kollars (2015). War's Horizon: Soldier-Led Adaptation in Iraq and Vietnam. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 38*(4), p. 548-550.

hindered the coherent application of lessons and the sharing of knowledge beyond units or rotations.[206] Naturally, operational challenges are most pressing for deployed service members; as such, they will be inclined to implement changes that seek to mitigate deficiencies. By contrast, the institution cannot solely focus on the current operations but also maintain readiness for future contingencies at varying levels of threat.

The attempts to adapt to operational challenges were by no means exclusive to American forces.[207] As a result, comparative case studies on how national militaries learned from operations emerged.[208] By comparing these cases, differences and similarities in adaptation processes can be identified.

This segues into the second current that is discernible in recent literature on military change: the central role awarded to cultural factors.[209] In his book on how armed forces handle doctrinal and technological surprise, Meir Finkel asserts that cultural traits are crucial for explaining how militaries seek to overcome such strategic and tactical jolts.[210] An imperative for successful adaptation is that the organization accepts "uncertainty as a given condition", and is open "to study the possibilities that might develop in wartime".[211] Additionally, the institutional enthusiasm (or lack thereof) to learn lessons from the past or recent operations is another cultural attribute with significant influence on how armed forces recover from surprise on the battlefield.[212]

Dima Adamsky further elaborates on the influence of cultural traits in military change. He studied how the United States, Israel, and the Soviet Union managed transformation in warfare based on technological developments. The differences in their approaches

206 See Janine Davidson, *Lifting the Fog of Peace*, p. 175-177.; Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation under Fire*, 142-155; Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, 219-220.

207 See for example: Robert Egnell (2011). Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan: what now for British counterinsurgency? *International Affairs, 87*(2), pp. 297-315; Torunn Laugen Haaland (2016). The Limits to Learning in Military Operations: Bottom-up Adaptation in the Norwegian Army in Northern Afghanistan, 2007–2012. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 39*(7), pp. 999-1022; Raphael D. Marcus (2019). Learning 'Under Fire': Israel's improvised military adaptation to Hamas tunnel warfare. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 42*(3-4), pp. 344-370.

208 For recent counterinsurgency operations some comparative studies have been published such as: John Nagl and Richard Weitz (2015). Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: The UK, Dutch, German, and French Cases. In G. A. Mattox, & S. M. Grenier (Eds.), *Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan* (pp. 170-182). Stanford: Stanford University Press: Olivier Schmitt (2017). French Military Adaptation in the Afghan War: Looking Inward or Outward. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 40*(4), pp. 577-599. For a historical comparison see: Robert Foley (2014). Dumb donkeys or cunning foxes? Learning in the British and German armies during the Great War. *International Affairs, 90*(2), pp. 279-298.

209 See for example: Dima Adamsky and Kjell Inge Bjerga. (Eds.). (2012). *Contemporary Military Innovation: Between anticipation and adaptation.* Abingdon: Routledge; Robert Foley, Stuart Griffin and Helen McCartney (2011). 'Transformation in contact': learning the lessons of modern war. *International Affairs, 87*(2), 253-270. Furthermore, see the edited volume by Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga and James Russell (Eds.). (2013). *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan.* Stanford: Stanford Universty Press. In this book different national perspectives are shown. Although it does not explicitly compare these perspectives, cultural factors permeate the case studies.

210 Finkel (2011). *On Flexibility*, p. 5.

211 Ibidem, p. 227.

212 Ibidem, p. 230.

are, according to Adamsky, caused by cultural factors. For instance, the Soviet Union's General Staff generally searched for "discontinuities in military affairs". This led to the introduction of a holistic new conceptual framework that preceded the introduction of novel technologies.[213] Conversely, in the United States military, new concepts are most often initiated by the services. Furthermore, the predisposition of the American armed forces towards technology led to technological developments driving and shaping their new conceptual developments.[214]

Another insightful addition on the role of culture on learning is research by Aimee Fox into military innovation in the British Army during the First World War.[215] Firstly, the British Army was culturally disinclined to formalize its conceptual foundations in doctrine. British officers argued that formal doctrine would lead to a dangerous straitjacket. As the British Army had global responsibilities in policing the Empire, it could not afford to prepare for a specific threat or operational environment prior to the First World War.[216] A second attribute of the British Army influenced by culture was the homogenized nature of its officer corps. Most officers hailed from the same social milieu, which meant that the members knew each other prior to their service and also associated outside of the army. In turn, this entailed that officers could share news, knowledge, and skills in an informal way by use of their networks.[217]

Still other scholars have noted that efforts to enforce change can be stymied by lower tiers of a military organization when these changes are perceived as incompatible with the prevalent culture of the organization. Interestingly, these instances impede changes initiated for counterinsurgency operations, because the alterations are perceived to be detrimental to the combat readiness of the units or the services.[218]

A third trend in the recent literature is the analysis of adaptation by non-Western armed forces and irregular adversaries. In relation to the armed forces, the study of these institutions can provide interesting contrasting perspectives to Western militaries. Germane examples are the Iraqi and Afghan militaries. An interesting attribute of these armed forces is that they recently have been built from "scratch."[219] Moreover, these militaries received significant

213 Dima Adamsky (2010). *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 132.

214 Ibidem, p. 132-134.

215 Aimee Fox (2018). *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

216 Ibidem, p. 20-21.

217 Ibidem, p. 37-45.

218 See Austin Long (2016). *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press and Sergio Catignani (2012). 'Getting COIN' at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 35*(4), pp. 513-539.

219 Antonio Giustozzi (2015). *The Army of Afghanistan*. London: Hurst, p. 227-230.

assistance from Western states. Therefore, a pertinent topic in this regard is how security force assistance affects the learning processes of the recipient organization and, potentially, that of the provider. Furthermore, some non-Western militaries are engaged in intra-state conflicts that pose an existential threat to the state. The incentive to adapt to operational challenges in these cases will be even stronger.[220]

Studying the learning processes of non-state actors can potentially yield even more valuable insights. Clearly, insurgent groups are organized differently than their Western opponents. Much has been made of the networked organizations of the various insurgent groups that allowed them to adapt to challenges on the fly and share this knowledge quickly to other cells or networks.[221] Being unconstrained by "norms, organizational culture, and bureaucratic inertia," insurgents could experiment with new tactics and techniques.[222] This ability was augmented with unrestricted contemporary information and knowledge sharing capabilities, and good situational awareness.

For insurgencies to be ultimately successful, their organizational capabilities have to be adaptable.[223] At first, they need to withstand conventional capabilities from the incumbent regime (and its potential foreign partners) and wage a campaign of guerrilla warfare and political subversion. Eventually, insurgents generally have to build more conventional capabilities in order to defeat the regular military in the field as well as develop a viable governing organization.[224] In sum, studying non-Western actors can provide fresh perspectives on both battlefield adaptations and institutional change.

A fourth trend in recent literature on military change is the renewed influence of organizational learning theory.[225] A noteworthy application of organizational learning literature is Frank Hoffman's *Mars Adapting* (2021).[226] In his book, Hoffman analyzes how armed forces change during wartime, with an emphasis on adaptation initiated by tactical units. He distinguishes between *organizational learning* and *institutional learning*. The former concept

220 See for example: Maarten Broekhof, Martijn Kitzen and Frans Osinga (2019). A Tale of Two Mosuls: the resurrection of the Iraqi armed forces and the military defeat of ISIS. *Journal of Strategic Studies*; Douglas Porch (2020). An Incomplete Success: Security Assistance in Colombia. In T. Mahnken (Ed.), *Learning the Lessons of Modern War* (pp. 269-289). Stanford: Stanford University Press; Ahmed Hashimi (2020). Lessons of Modern War: A Case Study of the Sri Lankan War. In T. Mahnken (Ed.), *Learning the Lessons of Modern War* (pp. 181-196). Stanford: Stanford University Press

221 The quintessential article on the traits of insurgent groups in Iraq is that of: Stanley McChrystal (2011, February 21). It Takes A Network: The new frontline of modern warfare. *Foreign Policy*.

222 Abdulkader Sinno (2008). *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 82-84; Chad Serena (2014). *It Takes More than a Network*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 139.

223 Theo Farrell (2018). Unbeatable: Social Resources, Military Adaptation, and the Afghan Taliban. *Texas National Security Review*, 1(3), pp. 59-75; Sinno (2008). *Organizations at Wars*, p. 295-297.

224 Noriyuki Katagiri (2014). *Adapting to Win: How Insurgencies Fight and Defeat Foreign States in War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 169-170.

225 Griffin (2017). Military Innovation Studies, p. 208-210.

226 Frank Hoffman (2021). *Mars Adapting: Military Change During War*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

pertains to learning at the unit-level in theatre, while the latter occurs when these lessons are institutionalized within the military at large. With institutional learning, the wider organization can disseminate the lessons from the operational theatre, and accordingly help prepare successive units.[227]

Hoffman captures this process of learning in an analytical model that consists of four steps (see figure 2.2).[228] First of all is the *inquiry* step, in which individuals at the tactical level observe gaps between their expectations and the actual experiences during operations. These gaps are then subject to inquiry. The second step in the process is *interpretation*, in which the empirical data on the perceived is analyzed and given meaning. This can lead to adjustments within the units that do not require assistance or support by the wider organization. Subsequently, the third step, *investigation*, sees experimentation, enabled by higher commands or even the entire institution, for addressing the identified performance gaps. It is in this step that decisions are made whether the proposed solutions must be enacted by the institution or not. If this is the case, the fourth and last step, *integrate and institutionalize*, can take place. Remedial action is undertaken to improve the performance of the institution during operations by enacting organizational changes, acquisition of new materiel, and publishing and disseminating new doctrine.[229]

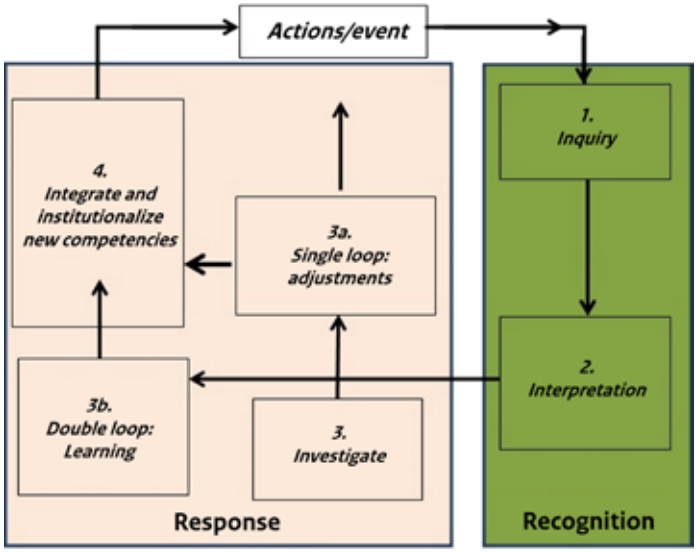


Figure 2.2: Frank Hoffman's model for "Organizational Adaptation"

227 Ibidem, p. 34-35.

228 Ibidem, p. 42.

229 Ibidem, p. 40-41.

The salient contribution of this model is that captures the agency of deployed units in adapting, and the dialectic between the "bottom-up" adjustments and the institutional response. Still, close study of the model shows that it has an important limitation, as Hoffman only considers change during conflict. While his model explicitly incorporates *institutionalization*, it does not consider how adaptations are retained within a military organization beyond a given conflict. Given that some adaptations were only accepted by the institutions after overcoming reluctance, the question of whether these lessons have been institutionalized is relevant.

Another example organizational learning literature is the book by Tom Dyson *Organisational learning and the modern army* (2020). Dyson contends that organizational learning offers a more positive take on how militaries implement change based on their experiences. At the same time, the "military innovation" literature can provide insight in the factors influencing and impeding learning by military organizations.[230] Dyson further emphasizes the role of formal learning processes in effective learning because absorption by the organisation requires related processes and resources to develop the necessary absorptive capacity. However, the efficacy of such formal processes depends on the willingness of leadership to underwrite the importance of the new experience and translate it into organizational action. In large part, according to Dyson, this aspect is driven by organizational culture and bureaucratic politics.[231]

To conclude this subsection, the recent literature on how military organizations learn and adapt has enriched the field considerably. Empirical studies on how units learn from conflict have proliferated. Adam Grissom's call for studying "bottom-up" change was not for naught. Furthermore, the influence of culture has become pervasive in the writings on military change. Lastly, aspects of organizational learning theory have permeated the body of literature more extensively in the past years.

2.3.4: Aspects of military learning

A main impetus for learning is when operational experience shows deficiencies in the unit's performance. Such challenges include activities by the adversary, operating in austere environments, prolonged combat operations with the associated friction, sustainment of deployed units over long lines, and cooperating with external partner organizations.[232] Besides learning from their own experience, armed forces can learn from experiences of

230 Dyson (2020). *Organisational Learning and the Modern Army*, p. 68.

231 Ibidem, p. 40-44.

232 Theo Farrell (2013). Introduction: Military Adaptation in War. In T. Farrell, F. Osinga, & J. A. Russell (Eds.), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 8-10.

others and adopt new technologies and concepts. This form of learning is called emulation. Although emulation can provide a shortcut for developing new capabilities, the adopting organizations must accept and absorb the full implications of them to be effective. In literature on military change, this issue is identified as part of the challenge of knowledge transfer.[233]

Another cause for change can be the proliferation and incorporation of new technologies. Technological innovations fused with new operational concepts can have profound operational repercussions; both as opportunities, and as challenges. Adoption of a new technology can alter the way that armies fight and change how commanders conceive of operational concepts. Militaries must find a way to incorporate them throughout the organization to prevent being at a disadvantage relative to the enemy.[234]

Although operational challenges will often lead to the identification of performance gaps, and subsequently to potential solutions, this process of learning is influenced by several factors that shape its eventual manifestations. Moreover, these factors shape the way that performance during campaigns is evaluated, how deficiencies are analyzed, and how these can be mitigated. These factors originate both outside of the military organization as well as from within.

2.3.4.1: External factors of influence

How armed forces learn is shaped by (inter)national factors that bear on the political context in which they exist. As one starting point, Theo Farrell offers four types of "shapers" for the process of adaptation that are external to the armed forces: domestic politics, alliance politics, strategic culture, and civil-military relations.[235] First, domestic political considerations can affect how armed forces adapt in a conflict by the weight that the government awards to the mission. If an expeditionary mission is regarded as crucial, a government will be more likely to commit more resources to it, thereby enabling changes in how the military conducts an operation.[236] Moreover, political dynamics at home are often more influential than the (perceived) international threat.[237] When a mission is treated as an afterthought

233 See Emily Goldman (2002). The Spread of Western Military Models to Ottoman Turkey and Meiji Japan. In T. Farrell, & T. Terriff (Eds.), *The Sources of Military Change*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p. 61-62; Fabrizzio Cottichia and Francesco Moro (2016). Learning From Others? Emulation and Change in the Italian Armed Forces Since 2001. *Armed Forces & Society, 42*(4), p. 712-714.

234 See MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray (Eds.). (2001). *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Farrell (2013). *Military Adaptation*, p. 8.

235 Farrell (2013). Introduction, p. 10.

236 Ibidem, p. 12.

237 Elizabeth Kier (1997). *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 143.

in the domestic political discourse, conversely, the deployed troops will have to resort to improvisation, as additional resources will not be forthcoming.[238]

Alliance politics can be another shaping factor. Of course, domestic, and international political deliberations can interact. An example arises in the case of a senior partner in an alliance that can exert pressure on a junior partner to deploy a certain military capability to a mission, a capability that the junior partner does not possess at the time. This compels the junior partner to acquire the capability and necessary knowledge.[239] The influence of alliance politics was manifested in Afghanistan in 2009, when the United States opted to deploy additional forces to Afghanistan and implement its counterinsurgency approach. The U.S. asked its allies to adopt the population-centric counterinsurgency approach as well and commit the additional resources required to implement this approach, in order to align the efforts by the various national contingents.[240] Smaller nations are thus influenced by how their senior allies conduct a war.[241]

The third factor of influence that Farrell identifies is the relationship between the military and its civilian leadership. Whereas domestic politics and alliance politics point to why civilian leadership intervenes regarding change in its armed forces, the civil-military relations help explain the extent of civilians' ability to do so. If the political leadership of a state has firm control over its armed forces, it can more readily initiate strategic change within the military.[242] When the armed forces have a more independent position, the military leadership will be less likely to acquiesce to civilian initiatives for change.[243]

A fourth shaping factor is the strategic culture of a country. Farrell defines strategic culture as "the sum of beliefs about the use of force that are shared by the military and policy communities of a state. Such beliefs, or norms, prescribe when and how military force may be used".[244] More succinctly, strategic culture can be equated with a "national way of war", and

238 See Kristen Harkness and Michael Hunzeker (2015). Military Maladaptation: Counterinsurgency and the Politics of Failure. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 38*(6), pp. 777-800.

239 See Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga (2010). Military Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in the Netherlands. In T. Terriff, F. Osinga, & T. Farrell (Eds.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 133-134.

240 Howard Coombs (2015). Canada: The Evolution of a New Canadian Way of War. In S. Grenier, & G. Mattox (Eds.), *The Politics of Alliance: Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan* (pp. 65-79). Redford City: Stanford University Press, p. 69.

241 Mikkel Rasmussen (2013). The Military Metier: Second Order Adaptation and the Danish Experience in Task Force Helmand. In T. Farrell, F. Osinga, & J. A. Russell (Eds.), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (pp. 136-158). Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 138-139.

242 Farrell (2013). Introduction, p. 17-18.

243 See Debora Avant (1993). The Institutional Sources of Military Doctrine: Hegemons in Peripheral Wars. *International Studies Quarterly, 37*(4), pp. 409-430.

244 Farrell (2013). Introduction, p. 14.

is therefore not just beholden to the military but also to the government and the society.[245] While Farrel conflates organizational and strategic culture, this is a different concept, which will be elaborated upon in the next section.[246]

Strategic culture supersedes organizational culture, and is formed by enduring aspects such as geography, history, and demography.[247] Therefore, change in strategic culture is often slow, if discernible at all. Exceptions to this assertion are that of Germany and Japan. After these countries lost the Second World War, the use of their militaries for foreign policy objectives was heavily curtailed. This represented a dramatic departure for both countries, as in the preceding decades their strategic culture considered the armed forces as the primary foreign policy instrument.[248] Of course, this dramatic change in strategic was imposed on these vanquished states by their conquerors, rather than initiated internally.

Beyond the external factors as listed by Farrell, further sources of influence can be identified. First of all, the perception of (external) threat by a state influences how its armed forces must be calibrated.[249] A clear and present threat, such as the Warsaw Pact for Western European countries during the Cold War, can serve as a focal point for the formation of armed forces. Any military advantage held by a rival power must be offset through mirroring the adversaries' capabilities, alliance formation, or by negating it with an asymmetrical approach.[250] As such, threat perception can guide the search for new relevant knowledge in how to build the national military. Lessons from previous and current operations are to be weighed against the primary threats that are identified by the national strategic making process.[251] To be sure, accumulated knowledge from previous wars can differ markedly from perceived future threats, which complicates the balancing strategic balancing in required military capabilities.

A seminal example of this dynamic is the purging of lessons from the Vietnam War by the U.S. military, as they were deemed irrelevant to the threat posed by Warsaw Pact forces in Central Europe.[252] Although external threats are the prime reason for the existence of national armed forces, the perception of these threats cannot be considered as a sufficient

245 David Kilcullen (2019). Strategic Culture. In P. R. Mansoor, & W. Murray (Eds.), *The Culture of Military Organizations* (pp. 33-52). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 35.

246 Farrell (2013). Introduction, p. 14.

247 Kilcullen (2019). Strategic Culture, p. 36- 44.

248 An example of dramatic change in strategic culture is that of Germany after 1945. Previously, German leadership considered the aggressive use of force as a valid instrument of foreign policy. After the Second World War, this notion was dispelled in German politics and society. See David Kilcullen (2019). Strategic Culture, p. 36- 44.

249 Sally Stoecker (1998). *Forging Stalin's Army: Marchal Tukhachevsky and the Politics of Military Innovation.* Boulder: Westview Press, p. 18.

250 Posen (1984). *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 61-62.

251 Kier (1997). *Imagining War*, p. 146.

252 Andrew Krepinevich (1986). *The Army and Vietnam.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 270-271.

explanation for change in these military institutions. Political and institutional factors shape how "realist" concerns are translated into (new) military capabilities.[253]

A final external factor that can be identified is defense policy, which offers guidance for the structuring and procurement for a state's military. The incumbent government's policy for its armed forces is generally valid for the course of its period in office. It is shaped by the current threat perception and by political considerations, both international and domestic. Besides these elements, the resources that a government has available (and is willing) to spend will have a profound influence on the content and ambition of these plans. Furthermore, resources that have already been committed to a certain project, such as equipment procurement, will also shape decision-making in this regard. All aspects will interact in drafting a political program for the national military.[254]

Defense policy will affect how knowledge from previous conflicts is incorporated within the military. If implementation of lessons will result in organizational restructuring or materiel acquisition that is at odds with the prevailing policy, institutionalization of knowledge will naturally be impeded. Of course, the defense policy will contain insights from previous conflicts and other path-dependencies, and can as such be a by-product of learning. However, the drafting of policy is a prerogative of politicians, so the role of the military is limited to offering advice.

Aside from the adversary and the operational environment, armed forces have to content with a volatile political context that is largely beyond their control. Therefore, how militaries interpret and incorporate new knowledge is subject to multiple external influencing factors. Most organizations, such as business enterprises and bureaucracies, will be affected by (international) political considerations and regulations. Nevertheless, aspects such as strategic culture, threat perception, civil-military relations and defense policy apply (almost) exclusively to military organizations. This means that, for examining how armed forces learn, these external factors and their effects on operationalization must all be taken into account (see Table 2.2).

253 Goldman (2002). The Spread of Western Military Models, p. 61-62.

254 See De Wijk and Osinga (2010). Military Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field, p.141-143.

External influencing factors	Operationalization
Domestic politics	What domestic political considerations affect the organization, and processes of the armed forces?
Alliance politics	What are the requirements of allies (deployments, capabilities, doctrine) of the national armed forces?
Civil-military relations	To what extent can policy makers intervene in the internal processes of the military?
Strategic culture	What is the dominant strategic culture, and how does it affect the armed forces?
Threat perception	What are the perceived threats to the state's security?
Defense policy	What are the government's plans, and resources for the armed forces?

Table 2.2: External influencing factors of learning

2.3.4.2: Internal factors of influence

Although the preceding subsection identifies several external factors of influence, armed forces themselves have considerable agency to shape their learning processes. Various internal factors influence how militaries learn; taken together, these factors form the learning capacity of an organization. Frank Hoffman defines this learning capacity as "the aggregate ability of a military organization to recognize and respond to performance gaps generated by campaign pressures, unexpected adversary actions or unanticipated aspects of the operating environment via adaptation or innovation".[255] This notion echoes "absorptive capacity" as espoused by the literature on organizational learning.[256] According to Hoffman, the learning capacity of an organization is shaped by four attributes: leadership, organizational culture, learning mechanisms, and dissemination mechanisms.

Almost self-evidently, the leadership of individual commanders has significant impact on the conduct of operations by their units or formations. The examples of U.S. officers McMaster (Tal Afar) and Petraeus (Mosul) in Iraq show that units can perform admirably in counterinsurgency under adequate guidance, even while the larger organization seems to fail.[257] This perception is reinforced by further examples as given by James Russell.[258] Intrinsically, leadership, on all levels, is an important factor influencing how military

255 Hoffman (2015). *Learning While Under Fire*, p. 42.

256 See for example: Zahra and George (2002). Absorptive Capacity, pp. 185-203; Dyson (2020). *Organisational learning*, p. 19-21.

257 Burton and Nagl (2008). Learning as we go, pp. 303-327; Mark Moyar (2009). *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

258 Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War.*

organizations adapt or learn; leadership that is open to new ideas and promotes initiative at the tactical level, can form an important enabling factor for learning.[259] Conversely, commanders or other individuals that do not attend to identified performance gaps and proposed remedies, can obstruct the process of learning.[260] To analyze the impact of leadership on learning from conflict, the influence of individuals on the learning process must be assessed.

Likewise, the culture of a military organization can enable and impede the process of learning, as it creates expectations of how members of the organization will act in a certain situation.[261] Organizational culture can be dissected into four categories: identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens. Identity pertains to how an organization sees itself, what attributes it possesses, and what its role is in relation to its environment.[262] With regard to identity in armed forces, it should be noted that they are comprised of different services that have distinct identities, built up through shared experiences over long histories. Generally, this identity is far stronger than that of the collective "military identity". Moreover, distinct subcultures can exist between the various branches that constitute a service.[263]

The norms of an organization point to accepted and expected behavior by its members. Some norms are upheld because doing so confers benefits to the individual, for example commendation or the absence of punishment. Others are internalized and maintained without the need of enforcement, because the organization members adhere to them intrinsically.[264] Organizational values are linked to norms and consist of ideas and character traits that "elevate one's status in the relevant society."[265]

The final element of organizational culture is the perceptual lens with which the organization views its environment. Elizabeth Kier states that organizational culture provides a military (or service) with a finite range of options to deal with changes in the environment. Courses of action that fall outside of the mental model provided by the organizational culture are generally not considered. Therefore, if either deficiencies or solutions are incongruent with the organizational culture, armed forces are often unable to learn from them.[266]

259 Rafaella Di Schiena, Geert Letens, Eileen Van Aken and Jennifer Farris (2013). Relationship between Leadership and Characteristics of Learning Organizations in Deployed Military Units: An Exploratory Study. *Administrative Sciences*(3), p. 156-161.

260 Adam Jungdahl and Julia Macdonald (2015). Innovation Inhibitors in War: Overcoming Obstacles in the Pursuit of Military Effectiveness. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 38*(4), p. 495-496.

261 Mansoor and Murray (Eds.). (2019). *The Culture of Military Organizations*, p. 2.

262 Jeannie Johnson (2018). *The Marines, Counterinsurgency and Strategic Culture.* Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, p. 24-25.

263 Mansoor and Murray (Eds.). (2019). *The Culture of Military Organizations*, p. 11-13.

264 Johnson (2018). *The Marines, Counterinsurgency and Strategic Culture*, p. 26-28.

265 Ibidem, p. 28.

266 Kier (1997). *Imagining War*, p. 144.

Other, more practical factors influencing organizational learning are the availability and quality of the learning and dissemination mechanisms. Without such organizational arrangements in place, battlefield adaptations cannot be transferred in a coherent manner to other units or the wider organization.[267] Institutionalization of knowledge requires clear and candid information on how the military organization performs in operational circumstances by way of evaluations, debriefs and patrol reports.[268] Such processes and documents capture the experiences of individual soldiers and units, and help to make tacit knowledge explicit.[269]

From the point of knowledge acquisition, irrespective of its source the new knowledge has to be shared and stored throughout the organization. This is acknowledged by scholars on organizational learning by armed forces who argue that this requires institutional resources that exceed the capabilities of single units.[270] Organizational instruments, such as an adequately staffed organizational components that collect, analyze and store lessons encountered, are crucial for the institutionalizing of lessons from the battlefield.[271] An American example of a learning establishment is the Center for Army Lesson Lessons Learned" (CALL). Its task is to collect and analyze specific operational challenges, to seek potential solutions, and to disseminate the knowledge throughout the organization.[272] Another example is NATO's "Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre" (JALLC).[273]

Ultimately, dissemination of acquired knowledge is important in order to allow the organization to reap the benefits of the hard-won experiences. To internalize new knowledge, it must be instilled at the individual level. Where learning mechanisms are predominantly meant to make tacit knowledge explicit, dissemination mechanisms must help making the knowledge part of the tacit mental model of the organization and its members.[274] Still, the sharing of knowledge is not always straightforward. For instance, units must be willing to

267 Nina Kollars (2015). Organising Adaptation in War. *Survival*, *57*(6), p. 115-117.

268 Kathleen Carley and John Harrald (1997). Organizational Learning Under Fire: Theory and Practice. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, *40*(3), p. 326-327. Andrzej Lis (2014). Knowledge Creation and Conversion in Military Organizations: How the SECI Model is Applied Within Armed Forces. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Management and Innovation*, *10*(1), p. 66-67.

269 Nory Jones and John Mahon (2012). Nimble knowledge transfer in high velocity/turbulent environments. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *16*(5), p. 777.

270 Dyson (2019). The military as learning organisation, p. 2.; Byrne and Barrister (2013). Knowledge Management in Defence, p 115.

271 Robert T. Foley, Stuart Griffin, and Helen McCartney (2011). 'Transformation in contact': learning the lessons of modern war. *International Affairs*, *87*(2), p. 261; Tim Causey (2020, June 22). *War is a Learning Competition: How a Culture of Debrief Can Improve Multi-Domain Operations.* Retrieved from: Over the Horizon Journal: https://othjournal.com/2020/06/22/war-is-a-learning-competition/amp/?__twitter_impression=true#

272 Janine Davidson (2010). *Lifting the Fog of Peace: How Americans Learned to Fight Modern War.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 102-110; Steven Mains and Gil Ad Ariely (2011). Learning While Fighting: Operational Knowledge Management That Makes a Difference. *PRISM*, *2*(3), p. 177-178; Meir Finkel (2011). *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 114-118.

273 Dyson (2019). The military as learning organisation, p. 6.

274 Andrzej Lis (2014). Knowledge Creation and Conversion in Military Organizations: How the SECI Model is Applied Within Armed Forces. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Management and Innovation*, *10*(1), p. 71.

share their experiences.[275] Furthermore, issues of classification can hinder information-sharing.[276]

Formal dissemination mechanisms include doctrine, education, training, and exercises. Despite its limitations as an instrument for enacting change, doctrine helps to provide agreed-upon concepts and ideas in communicable form. The knowledge within these tomes must however be effectively propagated if individual service members are to internalize it. This starts with the education of personnel at, for instance, military academies and staff colleges. Moreover, the acquired knowledge and the concomitant skills must be practiced in training and evaluated in exercises.[277] By incorporating recent experiences in training scenarios, units can evaluate new concepts and procedures in simulated settings. To function correctly this requires the training institutions and their scenarios to be attuned to the institutional knowledge repositories.[278] Particular instances in which new knowledge can quickly be incorporated are predeployment exercises and tactical bulletins that must be implemented in a way that ensure that the latest experiences are disseminated throughout the organization. In other words, it requires investment in time, resources and attention.[279] More informal sharing arrangements, such as military journals and (online) fora can help facilitate the sharing of knowledge as well.[280]

Another internal factor that can be identified is the allocation of resources. For instance, institutional arrangements for learning and budget to experiment often have to compete with operational demands. In times of tight budgets or time constraints, such crucial entities for the organizational learning process are often understaffed or scrapped in its entirety.[281]

A final, related factor that affects the way military organizations learn is internal politics. This was reflected upon in discussing the early literature on military innovation studies, where interservice and intraservice rivalries were regarded as catalysts for innovation.[282]

275 Andrzej Lis (2012). How to Strengthen Positive Organizational Behaviors Fostering Experential Learning? The Case of Military Organizations. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation, 8*(4), p. 24-26.

276 See for one research on the problem of classification in knowledge sharing: Barry Byrne and Frank Bannister (2013). Knowledge Management in Defence. *Defence Forces Review*, pp. 71-93

277 O'Toole and Talbot (2011). Fighting for Knowledge, p. 51-52.

278 Davidson (2010). *Lifting the Fog of Peace*, p. 110-114.

279 Kitzen, et al. (2013). Soft Power, the Hard Way, p. 176-183. The authors note that while in this case a bulletin was written it was not formally disseminated, hence undercutting institutionalization of the lessons. See for a more successful example: Steven Mains and Gil Ad Ariely (2011). Learning While Fighting: Operational Knowledge Management That Makes a Difference. *PRISM*, 2(3), p. 176.

280 Hoffman (2015). *Learning While Under Fire*, p. 233-240.

281 Mains and Ad Ariely (2011). Learning While Fighting, p. 174-175.

282 See Adam Grissom's overview of this literature in his seminal article: (2006), p. 910-916.

Although competition between and within services have distinct attributes, the dynamics of politics are essentially similar.[283]

The struggle between services and branches is often driven by the need to procure scarce resources. Acquisition and implementation of new knowledge can thus be regarded as an opportunity, because new capabilities can raise the profile of the service or branch so that it gains additional funds.[284] This positive influence on developing new capabilities can be offset by institutional apprehension towards new knowledge. Adjustments to core competencies that do not challenge the values and norms of the organization are less prone to meet political obstruction. On the other hand, new knowledge that does challenge these fundamental organizational traits will be more controversial. Questioning or even altering the organization's strategy, mission and culture will upset the status quo and the organization's power arrangements. As such, militaries are apprehensive to question their norms, as this will potentially degrade their core capabilities.[285]

Stephen Rosen contends that in military organizations, due to their relative distance from the rest of society, this political dimension is even more prominent.[286] Rosen understands that in military organizations power is distributed through influence over who is promoted to positions of senior command. Invariably, senior commanders control these career paths, so personnel that advocate innovative ideas must ensure sponsorship by the relevant actors within the organization.[287] Although the internal workings of armed forces may appear opaque to an external observer, internal debates on new theories of warfare and changes in career paths can shed light on how military politicking influences learning processes. These various internal factors are summarized in table 2.3.

283 Ganz (2018). Ignorant Decision Making, pp. 39-57; Lawrence, et al. (2005). The Politics of Organizational Learning, pp. 180-191.

284 For a case study on inter service cooperation see: Phil Haun (2019). Peacetime military innovation through inter-service cooperation: The unique case of the U.S. Air Force and Battlefield Air Interdiction. *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, *42*(1), pp. 1-27. For an appreciation of inter service cooperation in the U.S. military and how this affects military change see: S. Rebecca Zimmerman, et al. (2019). *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

285 Hasselbladh and Yden (2019). Why Military Organizations Are Cautious About Learning?, p. 15-16.

286 Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War*, p. 19.

287 Ibidem, p. 20-21.

Internal influencing factors	Operationalization
Leadership	To what extent do individuals promote or stymie learning processes?
Organizational culture	To what extent is new knowledge congruent with the organizational culture?
Learning mechanisms	What organizational arrangements are in place to capture and analyze knowledge? How do they function?
Dissemination mechanisms	How is knowledge shared throughout the organization?
Resource allocation	To what extent are the learning processes supported by staff and funds?
Organizational politics	To what extent does internal politicking influence the acceptance and implementation of new knowledge? What is the effect of new knowledge on the internal power distribution?

Table 2.3: Internal influencing factors of learning

2.3.4.3: Impediments

Whereas the described external and internal factors can influence how military learning processes work to generate learning, organizational attributes can be identified that solely function as an impediment to learning. As noted in the literature, bureaucratic hindrances can hinder the implementation of change. [288]

For instance, William Fuller asserts that learning lessons from previous conflicts can be hindered by a lack of receptivity within the institution. Fuller identifies two fallacies that can cause decreased receptivity: the fallacy of linear projection, and the fallacy of the significant exception. The fallacy of linear projection entails a military organization expecting that a future war will closely resemble the previous war, and that while armed forces will adapt incrementally, they are apprehensive to discard the current paradigm. Conversely, the fallacy of the significant exception means that the experience of a previous conflict holds no lessons for future wars, as it is assumed to be an aberration to the dominant paradigm.[289]

Further impediments to learning can occur when the knowledge is questioned because it does not conform to the institutional norms. Often, this leads to "dysfunctional organizational responses, or *systems of denial* [italics in original], to strategic anomalies -

288 See for example Adam Jungdahl and Julia Macdonald (2015). Innovation Inhibitors in War: Overcoming Obstacles in the Pursuit of Military Effectiveness. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 38*(4), p. 467-468; Downie (1998). *Learning from Conflict*, p. 181-182; Davidson, *The Fog of Peace*, p. 173-175.

289 William Fuller (2008) 'What is a military lesson?', in Thomas Mahnken, *Strategic Studies, A Reader*, Routledge, p. 41-44.

inconvenient information - that contradict assumptions."[290] Consequently, the sources or validity of knowledge are questioned or even rejected by the institution.[291]

2.3.4.4: Manifestations

Most manifestations of learning by military organizations are relatively straightforward to study, if not to implement. A list of manifestations is provided in table 2.4 based on the works of Theo Farrell and Rob Sinterniklaas;[292] as seen, for example, in a change in strategy or plans and operations. Of course, changing strategy will generally require consent by civilian leadership; as such, implementing change at the strategic level is harder than at the tactical or technical levels.[293]

Manifestations of military change
Tactics, Techniques and Procedures
Plans and operations
Military strategy
Education and training
Force levels and resources
Doctrine and concepts
Organizational structures
Equipment

Table 2.4: Manifestations of learning

Whether such changes lead to enhanced performance is of course another question entirely. For example, the same applies to force levels and resources. For instance, the acquisition of armored vehicles to withstand blasts by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and making these available to deployed troops in the field is a clear-cut example of the latter.[294]

290 Andrew Hill and Stephen Gerras (2016). Systems of Denial: Strategic Resistance to Military Innovation, *Naval War College Review;* 69(1), p. 110.

291 Hill and Gerras (2016). Systems of Denial, p. 115.

292 Farrell (2013). Introduction, p. 7-8; Sinterniklaas (2018). *Military Innovation*, p.31.

293 Justin Lynch (2019, July 30). *The Three Types of Organizational Learning*. Retrieved January 2, 2020, from The Strategy Bridge: https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/7/30/the-three-types-of-organizational-learning?rq=lynch

294 See David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 142.-155.

Changes in organizational structures include, for example, the establishment of a unit for civil-military cooperation, structurally augmenting the intelligence staff sections within battalions or brigades, or disbanding certain units as they are deemed obsolete. Changes in education and training to instill new concepts, tactics, techniques, and procedures will be visible in revised curricula. In sum, these manifestations of change in military organizations are comparatively practical in nature.

Military doctrine is a more contentious manifestation of change. Doctrine can be defined as "an approved set of principles and methods, intended to provide large military organizations with a common outlook and a uniform basis of action."[295] It should be noted that doctrine is, and should be, subject to change. Therefore, the principles and concepts in doctrine are not set in stone but are valid for a certain amount of time. The contention on doctrine arises in part from a distinction between formal and informal doctrine. Informal doctrine comprises the concepts and ideas that soldiers abide to within a unit or collective of associated units. Often, this type of doctrine is not written down.[296] Formal doctrine is, by default, that which is accepted and propagated by the military organization. Ideally, informal, and formal doctrine are closely aligned, and at least compatible. In a particularly illuminating research, Austin Long posits that despite the development of doctrine for counterinsurgency operations, units in Iraq and Afghanistan defaulted to other approaches when this doctrine was perceived as incompatible with the organizational culture and informal doctrine.[297]

While enshrining lessons and insights from operations in doctrine is a crucial component of the institutionalization of knowledge in a military organization, it is by no means sufficient. Improving doctrine is futile when it is not internalized by service members who may or may not read doctrine, let alone understand it. Thus, doctrinal change is both a manifestation of, as well as a necessary condition for, learning in military organizations. Doctrine should serve as a conceptual foundation for change in strategy, operations, procedures, and integrating innovative technologies and materiel. It is not, however, a sufficient condition for institutionalizing knowledge. [298] These changes can be enacted through education, training, and altering organizational structures.[299]

295 Richard Holmes (Ed.) (2001). *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 262.

296 See for example Keith Bickel (2001). *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940*. Boulder: Westview Press. Bickel studies how knowledge on counterinsurgency was retained and shared throughout the United States Marine Corps in the interbellum despite a lack of attention to this type of operations on behalf of the Marine Corps' leadership.

297 Long (2016). *The Soul of Armies*.

298 See for example: Austin Long (2008). *Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine, 1960-1970 and 2003-2006*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 2-3; Harald Hoiback (2011). What is Doctrine? *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 34*(6), pp. 879-900.

299 Crane (2016). *Cassandra in Oz*, p. 48.

2.3.5: Sub conclusion

As this section shows, the field of military innovation studies offers a broad view of how armed forces change, both in times of war and peace. Furthermore, the literature helps to identify factors that drive, influence, and impede the learning process by military organizations. Still, the processes underpinning how armed forces learn from experience are not sufficiently understood. Therefore, the interaction of these factors in combination with the insights from organizational learning literature can offer an improved understanding of how militaries learn and implement change.

2.4: Synthesis

The current section aims to build a synthesis from the discourses on organizational learning and military innovation. Its objective is to produce a comprehensive theoretical framework on how militaries learn in relation to conflict. Furthermore, an analytical model is provided to assess the process of learning. In turn, these theoretical contributions help to analyze the empirical findings on the experiences by the Dutch (chapter 4) and British (chapter 5) armed forces in Southern Afghanistan in ways that better explain the learning processes and experiences revealed in the cases.

2.4.1: Three strands of learning

In any examination of the vast body of literatures on organizational learning and military change, a shared and recurring theme is the distinction between two modes of learning. First, the informal learning by individuals or units that seeks to address performance gaps encountered during operations; a seemingly objective, rational enterprise. The second mode of learning is more invasive as it can affect the strategy, structure, or the processes of the organization. Evidently, such changes require the attention, resources, and above all, the acceptance of the institution's leadership.

In addition to these modes of learning during conflict, this research hypothesizes that the lessons learned are perceived and managed differently after the conflict has ended, with a potentially altered understanding of the strategic environment relative to what was encountered during the conflict itself. Consequently, this research postulates that there are essentially three strands of learning in military organizations: informal adaptation by deployed units during conflict; formal organizational adaptation during conflict; and the institutional learning from the previous experiences after the conflict has ended. In

the following subsections, the three strands of learning and their characteristics will be described.

2.4.1.1: Informal organizational learning in conflict

The first identified strand of informal learning by units invariably takes place during operations.[300] This is necessary, as units in the field must learn to cope with the operational environment and the adversaries in it. The cycle of competitive adaptation is often too fast for the organizational processes to keep up with it. Moreover, due to the typically dispersed nature of operations, local units have the best knowledge of the operational environment and are therefore best suited for overcoming obstacles.[301] Thus, deployed units and their commanders should be empowered to experiment with battlefield solutions to overcome tactical problems. Ideally, this acquired knowledge is horizontally shared with other units currently in theatre, or to subsequent rotations that can encounter similar challenges.[302] From an organizational learning perspective, this strand of learning can be compared with group learning. Knowledge is shared between group members with the objective to enhance the group's performance. While the knowledge can be shared with other groups, even those from other organizations, the wider organization is not necessarily affected by this learning process.[303]

The notion of informal learning does not mean that organizational arrangements are irrelevant.[304] When the military organization allows individuals such as unit commanders sufficient latitude to improvise and adapt, this can instill an atmosphere in which innovative ideas can thrive. James Russell provides several examples of how local commanders experimented within their units with adaptations, without being hindered by institutional obstructions.[305] Another telling example of informal learning as a result of the operational environment is that of a U.S. Marine battalion in Iraq in 2006 that reinforced its intelligence section from four officers to over 30 analysts to keep abreast of the vast amount of information coming from the field.[306] This decision was entirely within the purview of the battalion

300 Evidently, units and individual service members learn during training and exercises as well.

301 Murray. *Military Adaptation*, p. 13-15.

302 On horizontal knowledge sharing in armed forces see for example: Robert Foley (2014). Dumb donkeys or cunning foxes? Learning in the British and German armies during the Great War. *International Affairs, 90*(2), pp. 279-298; Bruce Gudmunsson (1989). *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918*. New York: Praeger; Nina Kollars (2015). War's Horizon: Soldier-Led Adaptation in Iraq and Vietnam. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 38*(4), pp. 529-553.

303 See for example Jeanne Wilson, Paul Goodman, and Matthew Cronin (2007). Group Learning. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(4), pp. 1041-1059.

304 Dirk Basten and Thilo Haamann (2018). Approaches for Organizational Learning: A Literature Review. *SAGE Open*, p. 1.

305 James Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 70-71.

306 Ibidem, p. 69.

commander. Yet he would not have taken this decision lightly, as this additional intelligence personnel had to come from within the battalion and therefore could not perform their organic tasks, such as conducting patrols.[307] While this approach yielded results, it was not institutionalized; it did not lead to augmented intelligence sections within all Marine and Army battalions or brigades. Of course, commanders should retain sufficient leeway to deploy their personnel as they see fit, but in this case the decision for additional intelligence analysis capacity was in support of units engaged in a counterinsurgency operation. Structurally augmenting the intelligence sections with trained personnel, whether just for the units participating in a given campaign or for all similar units, requires institutional intervention and resources.

When such instruments are not in place, informal learning proves to be insufficient to institutionalize lessons from a previous deployment, even within the confines of a single unit. When the experience from past campaigns is not formally incorporated and shared, the acquired knowledge proves to be ephemeral.[308] A survey conducted among Dutch infantry officers in 2015 shows that the experience acquired by them on missions to Afghanistan had largely evaporated by then, as their unit recalibrated towards conventional warfare.[309]

Still, research on special operations forces suggests that some units can be capable of institutionalizing knowledge acquired on missions on their own. Such units have greater continuity in personnel and often form communities of practice, even internationally. Moreover, these highly specialized units do not only execute operations, but they are also responsible for concept development, knowledge retention and training their own personnel. Individual members alternate between those roles, thereby ensuring the retention of lessons for future operations.[310] As such, these units can function as "anchor points" to store knowledge that is relevant for their tasks, in particular when these tasks are central to the units' culture. Presumably, other specialized units that have their own structures for training and doctrinal development will be able to form such anchor points.

307 E-mail correspondence by the author with James Russell, 8 March 2019.

308 David Fitzgerald (2013). *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p.5-9; Catignani (2014). Coping with Knowledge, p. 58-59; De Winter (2015). *The Army after Afghanistan*, p. 47-49; Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, p. 254-256; Murray, *Military Adaptation*, p. 18-23.

309 Sjoerd de Winter (2015). *The Army after Afghanistan: A Case Study on Military Adaptation to Counterinsurgency Warfare within 12 Infantry Battalion Air Assault the Regiment Van Heutsz*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy (Master Thesis), p. 47-49.

310 See George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). Formative Years: Military Adaptation of Dutch Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, *Special Operations Journal, 2*(2), pp. 146-166; Tessa Melkonian and Thierry Picq (2010). Opening the "Black Box" of Collective Competence in Extreme Projects: Lessons from the French Special Forces. *Project Management Journal, 41*(3), 79-90; Tessa Melkonian and Thierry Picq (2011). Building Project Capabilities in PBOs: Lessons from the French Special Forces. *International Journal of Project Management, 29*, 455-467.

2.4.1.2: Formal organizational learning in conflict

The second strand is composed of lessons from the conflict that lead to adaptations that are sanctioned by the wider organization for the duration of the conflict. When the armed forces as a whole acknowledges the value of adaptations, these can be disseminated and implemented in a more coherent and systemic fashion. The adaptations implemented pertain to the theatre of operations and the support to the mission within the armed forces. Conceptually, this strand of learning can be compared with the learning process within projects. The acquired knowledge here can help the organization to reach its objectives of a project. Still, lessons from a mission or project can be deemed only relevant to that specific context, which will lead to the evaporation of knowledge, prohibiting future use.[311]

In the literature on how militaries learn from conflict, the dialectic between newly acquired knowledge and the perceived core competences of the organization is a common theme. In Western armed forces, this tension is manifested by the practice of irregular warfare during missions concurrently with the perceived importance of preparing for interstate conventional war.[312] Some scholars and officers see experience in irregular war as detrimental to the ability of fighting conventional adversaries.[313] This is a reflection of the theme of those organizational learning theories which problematize how organizations cope with the inherent tension between exploiting knowledge to refine their routine operations, and exploring knowledge to redefine their mission, strategy and structure in order to increase their chance for success or even survival in the long run. Somewhat paradoxically in this analogy to the military context, 'routine operations' tangentially equate with conventional warfare while the practice of irregular warfare corresponds with exploring new competencies that lie beyond normal tasks.

To a certain extent, the apprehension by armed forces to adapt to irregular war is understandable when a dichotomous distinction between "irregular war" and "conventional war" is upheld as the mental model. Military organizations have to operate in lethal, complex, and chaotic environments and have established mechanisms to deal with the uncertainties of war through making calculated assumptions. According to Hasselbladh and Yden, the notion of conventional war is ingrained in Western armed forces and helps them to render "complex situations actionable from a military, instrumental perspective."[314] Furthermore, they contend that this penchant towards conventional war cannot be wished

311 See for example Anna Wiewiora, Michelle Smidt and Artemis Chang, (2019). The 'How' of Multilevel Learning Dynamics: A Systemic Literature Review Exploring How Mechanisms Bridge Learning Between Individuals, Teams/Projects and the Organization. *European Management Review*, *16*, pp. 93-115; Lundin and Soderholm, Temporary organizations, p. 591-592.

312 See for example: Hasselbladh and Yden (2019). Why Military Organizations Are Cautious About Learning?; Long (2008). *Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence*; Kitzen (2012). Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency.

313 See Douglas Porch (2011). The dangerous myths and dubious promise of COIN. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22(2), pp. 239-257; Gian Gentile (2010). Freeing the Army from the Counterinsurgency Straitjacket. *Joint Forces Quarterly*, *58*(3), pp. 121-122.

314 Hasselbladh and Yden (2019). Why Military Organizations Are Cautious About Learning?, p. 15.

away. Thus, on this view, when change is forced on military organizations, this will erode basic capabilities.[315] Yet, this distinction between irregular war and conventional war is not only unhelpful for analyzing conflicts, but also false. Contemporary warfare requires Western militaries to be ambidextrous; they must be able to fight conventional wars and employ more non-kinetic instruments in support of civil authorities or during stabilization operations.

A telling example of the underlying tension concerns both the U.S. Army and Marine Corps in Iraq (2003-2007); the acquisition of Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected-vehicles (MRAPs) to provide mobility while mitigating the threat posed by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). While the need for MRAPs was identified early on by units in the field, the procurement was delayed because the services favored other solutions to the scourge of IEDs. Although the deployed units had recognized the dire need for these vehicles, they had to rely on the wider organization to implement the response. Eventually, the MRAPs were procured and deployed through political intervention.[316]

Often, this kind of change to operational performance is thus informed by tactical adaptation by deployed units; but it can also be initiated by the leadership of the organization or even external sources. A further example of this latter phenomenon is the engagement by the U.S. Marine Corps of law enforcement agencies in order to learn from the latter's experience of collecting intelligence and providing security in urban environments. With the help of this knowledge, a software database was developed that helped to process and analyze the intelligence data acquired by the military units.[317]

The described American organizational responses were shaped by the pressures that the war in Iraq exerted on the U.S. military and its political leadership. By default, such changes require resources and organizational support in varying degrees. However, when the conflict ends, the military can revert back to the old organizational and conceptual arrangements. For instance, if augmentations to intelligence sections as learned in Iraq are not substantiated in organization tables of battalions and brigades, the experience will dissipate. When the previous conflict is regarded as an aberration, there will be little incentive to retain the acquired knowledge for future wars. In the case of the recent counterinsurgency campaigns this risk is palpable, as other strategic challenges have arisen and the lessons are deemed as being detrimental to the core competencies of fighting conventional opponents.[318]

315 Ibidem, p. 15-16.

316 David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 142-155.

317 James Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, p.69-71.

318 See for example: Gian Gentile (2013). *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency.* New York: The New Press; Douglas Porch (2013). *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War.* New York: Cambridge University Press;

2.4.1.3: Institutional interconflict learning

The third, and final, strand of learning arises when armed forces retain lessons beyond a conflict. When the strategic context of a military organization has, or is perceived to be, changed, the hard-won experience of the previous war can be viewed from a distinct perspective. The lessons from the most recent conflict can inspire new technology, procedures, organizational structures, and concepts. Of course, new strategic challenges can arise that usurp the interests of military and political leaders. In the last decade, ascending revisionist powers such as Russia and China, and the threat posed by the Islamic State, have clearly commanded the interest of the Western armed forces. At the same time, Western militaries continue to be engaged in irregular intrastate wars. Moreover, the American disentanglement from Iraq in 2011 turned out to be premature even prior to the most recent events. Knowledge pertaining to these theatres will likely remain relevant for the foreseeable future.[319] Thus, while a thorough analysis of the strategic environment is periodically necessary to prepare for future conflicts, militaries should not discard the lessons from previous wars.[320] This is indeed a central element of this research.

The main question here is how an altered strategic environment shapes the perception, and consequently, retention of the acquired knowledge of previous conflicts. This knowledge can both originate from the informal learning by tactical units, or from organizational adaptation. Officers who are contemplating how to respond to the current and future threats will often be influenced by their own experiences in previous wars. These experiences have to be weighed against the current context and can consequently be discarded, retained or refined, and may lead to new insights. Preferably, as a foundational step, military organizations conduct thorough evaluations of their experiences of the past conflict to assess their performance, contemplate shortcomings and identify potential solutions. For academic reasons, such evaluations are ideally unclassified, but this should not be the prime consideration for armed forces.[321]

Edward Luttwak (2007). Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice. *Harper's Magazine, 314*(1881), pp. 33-42

319 See for example: David Ucko (2019). Systems Failure: the US way of irregular warfare. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 30*(1), pp. 223-254.

320 Williamson Murray (2011). *Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change.* New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 38; Elliot Chohen and John Gooch (2006). *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War.* New York: Free Press, p. 20-25.

321 For an unclassified example of such an evaluation see the two-volumed U.S. Army evaluation on its performance in the Iraq War: Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak (Eds.). (2019). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume I: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War, 2003-2006.* Carlisle: United States Army War College Press; Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak (Eds.). (2019). The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume II: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011. Carlisle: United States Army War College Press. Other examples are the British Army evaluation of its campaign in Helmand and the Israeli report on the 2006 war in Lebanon. See respectively: British Army *Operation HERRICK Campaign Study.* Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare; Raphael Marcus (2018). *Israel's Long War With Hezbollah: Military Innovation and Adaptation Under Fire.* Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, p. 1-2.

To preserve this hard-won knowledge for posterity, it must be institutionalized. This requires dissemination of the knowledge beyond evaluations or doctrinal publications. For instance, the knowledge can, and should, be reflected in the curricula of military academies and of command and staff colleges. Furthermore, the knowledge should be put into practice in training scenarios, so officers and enlisted personnel can get acquainted with it in controlled environments.[322] Institutionalization of lessons learned can be manifested through the procurement of new materiel and the implementation of associated concepts and organizational structures.

This third strand of learning by military organizations elevates the knowledge beyond the context of a specific conflict. By institutionalizing knowledge, the organization improves its durability, and retains the availability of the knowledge in future wars. However, institutionalization of knowledge is not a normative prescription in the sense that institutional learning is not always beneficial to military organizations. Institutionalization of prior experiences does not absolve armed forces from analysis of whether this knowledge is still relevant in the current strategic environment. The analogy of the French Army during the interbellum, and its emphasis on defensive operations based on its experiences in the First World War resulting in the Maginot Line, asserts itself. Armed forces should retain their flexibility and capacity to learn, in order to overcome the challenges posed by the next conflict. However, at the same time, it would be wasteful to relearn forgotten knowledge from previous wars while under fire. This harkens back to the dialectic between exploitation of institutional knowledge and the exploration for new knowledge in which organizations should strive to preserve a delicate equilibrium.

2.4.2: Towards an analytical model

The objective of this chapter is to develop a suitable theoretical framework and analytical model for understanding the learning process in military organizations in relation to their environment. Whereas the preceding section identifies three strands of learning, this section identifies the steps of the process and seeks to synthesize both aspects in a comprehensive analytical model. A detailed discussion on the working of this model is provided as well.

322 Paddy O'Toole and Steven Talbot (2011). Fighting for Knowledge: Developing Learning Systems in the Australian Army. *Armed Forces & Society, 37*(1), pp. 42-67; Harald Hoiback (2016). The Anatomy of Doctrine and Ways to Keep It Fit. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 39*(2), p. 192.

2.4.2.1: Steps of learning

In the first and second sections of this chapter several models have been introduced that are derived from organizational learning theory. These are typically comprised of several steps; it will already be evident that these models have inspired the ideas underpinning this chapter to a large extent. Dissecting the process of learning into discrete steps can help analyzing learning in military organizations. Nevertheless, I propose that some modifications in these steps are necessary in order to incorporate the three strands of learning. In total, six steps are identified in this new synthesis: *evaluation, identification, response, adaptation, contemplation, and institutionalization* (see table 2.5).

Synthesis	**Crossan**	**Downie**	**Hoffman**
Evaluation	Intuit	Individual action/ attention to events	Inquiry
Identification	Interpret	Identification of performance gap	Interpretation
Reaction	Integrate	Search for alternatives	Investigation
Adaptation	Institutionalization	Sustained consensus	Integrate & institutionalize
Contemplation	-	Transmit interpretation	
Institutionalization	-	Change in organizational behavior	

Table 2.5: Synthesized steps in military learning process compared with other models

The first step, *evaluation*, incorporates individual observations of the conflict and the environment by individual members through the formal evaluation mechanisms that are in place during missions. As such, this step explicates the experiences and knowledge held by individuals. In the subsequent steps, *identification* and *reaction*, elements of the organization respectively recognize performance gaps and seek to address them. These activities can occur at the level of deployed units (informally), but also in the wider institution (formally).[323] The adaptation step implements and integrates the solutions for the duration of the conflict.[324]

323 David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 26-27.

324 Mary Crossan, et al. (1999). An Organizational Learning Framework: From Intuition to Institution. *Academy of Management Review*, *24*(3), p. 528-529.

The main contribution of the model introduced here is that it adds the two additional steps: *contemplation* and *institutionalization* after the conflict has ended. The former evaluates the lessons post-conflict and weighs their relevance against the assessment of the current and future strategic environment. Subsequently, the latter ensures that the knowledge is stored and used for organizational change. In the following subsections these steps will be described into more detail. Furthermore, the way these separate steps fit into the three strands of learning and how they can be influenced will be explored.

2.4.2.1.1: Evaluation

In contrast to most models, this step is not concerned with the individual acquiring knowledge from experience in the field, but rather how the collective experiences are evaluated. This is not to deny the individuals agency in acquiring and disseminating knowledge. Rather, it is a reflection of military practice in which any action or mission is collectively evaluated during deployments to conflict theatres. After a patrol or operation is concluded, an "after action review" will be held to assess whether the activity has met its objectives and to identify any salient aspects during the preparation or conduct of this activity.[325] The perception of these experiences will be shaped by the tacit knowledge that resides in the organization and its members.

At the higher levels, such as a regional command or a national task force, the development of the conflict is routinely evaluated through campaign assessments. With these assessments the effects of operations on the environment can be gauged in order to assist operational decision making. In other words, assessment can help the commander and staff to determine how to adjust their plans and operations.[326] Obviously, this requires clear objectives that are to be reached, and identification of indicators that signify the progress (or lack thereof) towards these goals. Allowing for some oversimplification, measuring progress in conventional war is relatively straightforward. Relevant metrics here can be casualties (friend or foe), territory that changed hands, and destroyed materiel.[327] A complicating variable can be the domestic support for the war effort of the belligerents.

In stabilization or counterinsurgency operations, often fused with state building efforts, identification of relevant metrics and interpreting those correctly is far more complex.[328]

325 Tim Causey (2020, June 22). *War is a Learning Competition: How a Culture of Debrief Can Improve Multi-Domain Operations*. Retrieved from: Over the Horizon Journal: https://othjournal.com/2020/06/22/war-is-a-learning-competition/amp/?__twitter_impression=true#

326 Ben Connable (2012). *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 2-4. Connable provides a helpful distinction between campaign assessment and intelligence on p. 3.

327 Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 30-31.

328 Scott Gartner. (2015). Wartime Strategic Assessment: Concepts and challenges. In L. Blanken, H. Rothstein, & J. Lepore (Eds.), *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and failure*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press p. 35-37.

In such missions, the objectives can include stabilization, economic reconstruction, security sector reform, humanitarian aid, and assisting host-nation governance.[329] To assess the progress towards these multiple objectives requires a myriad of indicators. Pure military considerations such as the destruction of the adversaries combat power can be relevant but are just one indication of the developments in theatre. Moreover, they could be counterproductive to the overall objective. Furthermore, commanders must be aware of the distinction between measuring progress in the campaign and evaluating unit performance in combat.[330]

Beyond fighting, many of the other objectives can be considered to be beyond the routine tasks of the military, and this means it can be hard to assess the developments in these non-military spheres.[331] A further complicating factor in this regard is that modern conflicts generate overwhelming amounts of data. Although this can enhance the understanding of conflicts, analyzing all possible information in a timely fashion will be beyond operational staffs.[332]

Even more fundamentally, indicators of developments may well not be quantifiable. A predilection for statistics, without due consideration of what they convey about the situation in an area of operations, will distort the understanding of the environment. Ultimately, this makes an assessment of the mission and redressing performance deficiencies near-impossible.[333] Therefore, quantitative metrics must be grounded in a qualitative understanding of the conflict and the environment.[334]

The complexity of assessing counterinsurgency campaigns is illustrated by the American efforts in Vietnam.[335] Well-known instruments used by the U.S. were the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) and the infamous "body-count." The HES sought to comprehensively assess the security of the South-Vietnamese population. A multitude of indicators were used to generate massive amounts of quantitative data that were aggregated and analyzed centrally.

329 Sebastiaan Rietjens, Joseph Soeters and Willem Klumper (2011). Measuring the Immeasurable? The Effects-Based Approach in Comprehensive Peace Operations. *International Journal of Public Administration, 34*, p. 334-335.

330 See Gregory Daddis (2011). *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 14-17.

331 Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 35.

332 See for an optimistic take on data in conflict: Eli Berman, Joseph Felter and Jacob Shapiro (2018). *Small Wars, Big Data: The Information Revolution in Modern Conflict.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 16-18.

333 See Sebastiaan Rietjens, Joseph Soeters and Willem Klumper (2011). Measuring the Immeasurable? The Effects-Based Approach in Comprehensive Peace Operations. *International Journal of Public Administration, 34*, p. 336-337

334 Eli Berman, Joseph Felter and Jacob Shapiro (2018). *Small Wars, Big Data: The Information Revolution in Modern Conflict.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.33-43; Sebastiaan Rietjens, Joseph Soeters and Willem Klumper (2011). Measuring the Immeasurable? The Effects-Based Approach in Comprehensive Peace Operations. *International Journal of Public Administration, 34*, p. 336-337.

335 See for an overview of these struggles: Gregory Daddis (2011), *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War.* New York: Oxford University Press

A fundamental flaw was that this data was devoid of any qualitative context; in essence, HES provided troves of data that were irrelevant for the understanding of the conflict and informed decision making.[336] Concerning the "body-count", this metric had by itself relatively little informative value regarding the development of the war. More problematic even was that the veracity of the numbers of enemies killed was flawed and that it was used as the "primary gauge of success in [..] combat operations promotions."[337] From an ethical perspective, this created a perverse incentive to inflate enemy casualties. More recently, the assessments of the war in Afghanistan were routinely used in the United States (and beyond) to maintain public support for those missions. Metrics that supposedly conveyed progress without qualitative context gave an overoptimistic account of the conflict. Essentially such metrics were affected by political considerations and held little operational value.[338]

Despite the challenges of producing valid assessments on campaigns and operations, the evaluation step is a crucial first element of learning in conflict. To understand this step, evaluation, the indicators, and data that are used to measure progress must be examined.[339] If the data derived from evaluations and progress reports is valid, it can help to establish an understanding of whether the objectives of the campaign are being attained in relation to the operational environment. This is however subject to both internal influences, such as organizational culture, and external influences such as domestic politics. After action reviews on the unit level are routinely conducted and are somewhat more straightforward, as these are predominantly focused on the unit's performance.

2.4.2.1.2: Identification

By assessing the effects of tactical activities, operations or a campaign, commanders can obtain insight whether their organizations are performing in accordance with expectations. Furthermore, the *evaluation* step can indicate whether the organization, ranging from a squad to the entire coalition or military organization (including the non-deployed elements), can be expected to reach its objectives. If the results of the activities and campaign are less encouraging than envisioned, the organization must look to its own operations to find out where its performance is lacking. Evidently, if operations and campaigns are to be successful, the organization that conducts them must learn to overcome the performance gaps.

336 Ben Connable (2012). *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 111-131.

337 Ibidem, p. 107-108.

338 Craig Whitlock (2019, December 9). At War With the Truth. *The Washington Post*.

339 Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 36.

For this to occur, it is crucial to identify what exact deficiencies are hindering the accomplishment of the stated objectives, and what causes them. For instance, a unit can find that it uses invalid concepts or tactics in relation to the operational environment. Another cause of lack of success can be inadequate resources, such as insufficient troops or the unavailability of equipment. A fundamental deficiency is when the deployed unit simply lacks the competencies that are needed to attain its objectives, such as the knowledge on how to perform non-military functions in a stabilization operation.[340] One related and commonly recognized deficiency is when the organization does not sufficiently understand the operational environment as its intelligence is inadequate.[341]

Identifying performance gaps informs the units and organization of whether units can address these deficiencies themselves, or whether organizational assistance is required. Procuring equipment and raising troop levels are generally beyond the capability of a deployed unit, thus organizational assistance is necessary. On the other hand, adjusting tactics or experimenting with new concepts can be done in the field if the involved units possess the knowledge and latitude to do so. If not, it falls to the higher echelons of the organization. Formal organizational learning mechanisms such as knowledge centers can then assist in analysis of the problem and subsequently search for a response. The organization's capabilities and capacities are brought to bear on the problem, and the process takes on a more formal character.

It should be noted that this implies that the various levels within the organization are in concurrence on what the performance gap is, and where it resides in the organization. In practice, the analysis of performance deficiencies will often diverge between different organizational levels.[342] Naturally, this impedes the learning process, as it will lead to formulating different responses.

Another potential hindrance to identifying performance deficiencies is that it can be subject to biases. When the level of violence in the area of operations increases, the unit responsible for that area can conclude that it is failing in taking on the enemy. As a result, the unit will potentially seek the solution in more aggressive operations or by applying more firepower. However, the causes of the violence may be different than those identified, and therefore require a different organizational response. Thus, the interpretation of what the evaluation indicates about the organization's performance affects the learning process. For research purposes, examining this *identification* step can help bridge the assessment of the organization's activities and its efforts to overcome operational challenges.

340 James Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 41-42.

341 Eliot Cohen and John Gooch (2006). *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*. New York: Free Press, p. 40-43.

342 Richard Downie (1998). *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War*. Westport: Praeger, p. 6.

2.4.2.1.3: Reaction

In this stage, the deployed unit or the organization at large seeks to address the identified performance deficiency (or exploit a recognized opportunity). The reaction can include adjusting existing concepts, organization structures and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).[343] At the same time, entirely novel approaches might be experimented with. This reaction can lead to embracing new competencies that normally lay outside the unit's purview.

How an organization, or its constituent elements, react to an identified performance gap can be influenced by several factors. As such, the responses sought can diverge across national armed forces and between units. For example, a penchant for technological solutions rooted in the organizational or strategic culture can impede the search for response of an unconventional character. Moreover, exploring measures that challenge the organization's norms, values and power arrangements can instigate internal political obstruction. Exploiting existing competencies is therefore often more straightforward. Other potential responses, such as increasing the levels of troops in theatre, can be prohibited by civilian leadership due to political considerations.

To a certain extent, a deployed unit can seek to address the identified deficiencies in an informal fashion without assistance from the institutional level. When the organization is unwilling or unable to support a response, the units in the field must seek to cope with the operational challenges independently. This is of course dependent on the commander's and subordinates' creativity but can also be abetted or stymied by the organization's culture. If the dominant culture promotes risk aversion and is prone to centralized power structures, the perceived opportunities for experimentation will be curtailed.[344] Conversely, if experimentation and risk taking is rewarded, and authority is devolved to the lower levels, both individuals and units will be keener to try-out novel approaches.

If a performance gap is acknowledged at the institutional level, the organization can help rectify this deficiency through a more formal process.[345] This can occur both in the theatre of operations, or within the bounds of the wider organization. Beyond inquiring what an operational commander needs to address the problem, the organization can establish teams that search for responses through experimentation. Furthermore, responses to operational challenges can be sought in the experiences of other armed forces. This form of emulation

343 Frank Hoffman (2015). *Learning While Under Fire: Military Change in Wartime.* London: King's College (Doctoral Dissertation), p. 53.

344 Meir Finkel (2011). *On Flexibility: Recovery from Technological and Doctrinal Surprise on the Battlefield.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 101-110.

345 Tom Dyson (2020). *Organisational Learning and the Modern Army: a new model for lessons-learned processes.* Abingdon: Routledge, p. 25.

can help bypass a part of trial-and-error experimentation, as the response generally has been applied and tested in wartime. However, the new knowledge must be transferred with due regard for the specifics of one's own operational environment and the attributes of the organization. If this knowledge is not congruent with, for instance, the organizational culture, or is objected to by the civilian leadership on the basis of political considerations, it will not be implemented in the organization.[346]

Another source of inspiration can be lessons from historical cases. The risks associated with this approach are however considerable. Historical analogies are susceptible to myth-building and misrepresentation. As a result, implementing historical "lessons" to a contemporary problem is liable to produce negative results. This does not mean that history does not hold valuable insight for military professionals, but rather that it cannot serve as a repository of "quick fixes".[347]

Just as deployed units and organizations can grapple with more than one deficiency, they also seek multiple responses for a recognized performance gap. These processes can occur simultaneously, reiterating that there often distinct learning processes working concurrently, and potentially influencing, one another. If a potential response fails to solve the problem, the unit or organization can revert to the identification step to conduct further analysis of the deficiency.

2.4.2.1.4: Adaptation

In this step, the outcomes of the learning process during the conflict will be implemented. This means that the changes in the organization, whether informally at the unit level or formally at the institutional level, will be manifested through a change in the organization's behavior. As noted in the previous chapter, these manifestations can be instantiated in strategy, doctrine, operations, organizational structure, and resources.

For implementation of the response to change the organization's behavior, the knowledge underpinning it must be disseminated. If this knowledge pertains to informal adaptations, it can be transferred to adjacent or successive units. Whether this horizontal diffusion works is subject to the extent that the organizational culture fosters informal knowledge dissemination, and the willingness of personnel to share lessons. Formal adaptations must be implemented through the organization's dissemination mechanisms, such as

346 Fabrizzio Cottichia and Francesco Moro (2016). Learning From Others? Emulation and Change in the Italian Armed Forces Since 2001. *Armed Forces & Society, 42*(4), p. 701.

347 John Kiszely (2006). The relevance of history to the military profession: a British view. In W. Murray, & R. Hart Sinnreich (Eds.), *The Past as Prologue* (pp. 23-33). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 25-28.

pre-deployment training, doctrinal publications or establishing new organizational structures.[348]
The formal and informal learning processes towards adaptation in conflict can be concurrent and independent, reflecting the coexistence of the first two strands of learning as established in this chapter. The outcomes of these processes can of course affect one another. An informal adaptation initiated and implemented in the field can be accepted by the wider organization, which may subsequently disseminate it formally to other units that participate in the current campaign, thereby implementing it throughout the institution. Conversely, as formal adaptations are diffused, they will affect the deployed units who may also have made informal changes to their operations. These formal adaptations can, if they are compatible, enhance and reinforce the informal adaptations. If they are not, the formal lessons can replace the informal knowledge, provided that the lower echelons accept them. As shown by Catignani and Long, such formal adaptations can be rejected by units in the field as impractical or as incongruent with their normal mission.[349]

The adaptations will subsequently affect the subsequent *evaluation* step. As changes have been made to the unit's (or organization's) behavior, the evaluation will take these adaptations into account to see whether they influence the environment. Ideally, the adaptations lead to more effective activities by the organization. Of course, events in the environment may well have other causes than adaptations. If the effects of the changes on the conflict are indeed observable, this can help in making further adaptations, spurring another cycle of learning. A prominent effect can be that the adversary is forced to react to one's own adaptations. When, on the other hand, no impact on the adversary is discernible, this warrants making further adjustments to the performance of both the organization and the deployed units. In sum, this underwrites the primacy of the *evaluation* step.

2.4.2.1.5: Contemplation

Where the previous four steps have dealt with the learning process during a specific conflict, the subsequent two steps signify what happens with these lessons beyond this conflict. If the knowledge is to be genuinely institutionalized, in the sense that it will be available in other contexts, this outcome requires conscious contemplation on account of the organization. This step essentially consists of two elements: evaluation of the previous conflict, and analysis of the current strategic environment.

348 John Nagl (2002). *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 7.

349 See Sergio Catignani (2012). 'Getting COIN' at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *35*(4), pp. 513-539; Austin Long (2016). *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

After the conflict has ended, military organizations can look at their experiences in a more comprehensive manner. Such post-facto evaluations can help appraise the organization's performance and its learning process throughout the campaign. Deficiencies that were not acknowledged previously can come to light through a thorough reappraisal of the conflict.[350] Furthermore, new potential responses to similar responses may be found. Finally, a campaign evaluation can assess the effect that the adaptations had during conflict.[351] Theoretically, a thorough and candid evaluation also benefits from the absence of operational pressures.[352] In practice, other considerations such as new campaigns or reorganizations will often form distractions to such evaluations. Ultimately, however, a campaign evaluation can yield an array of lessons from the last conflict for the organization.

Unquestionably, implementing knowledge from the latest conflict is of course not enough; lessons from recent experiences might not be relevant and should thus be unlearned.[353] Instead, the relevance of lessons and concepts must be weighed against a thorough examination of the current and future strategic context.[354] States, and their armed forces, often engage in strategic analysis, and forecasts.[355] Such strategic assessments often include threat perceptions and guidance for defense policy, in which the perceived threats in the strategic environment will shape the vision on what military capabilities are required to meet them.[356] Evidently, predicting the future of warfare is a tall order. Nevertheless, the keen observer can discern trends and developments.

Recent changes to the strategic environment have been perceived as profound; no longer are large-scale expeditionary counterinsurgency missions the norm. Instead, the resurgence of the Russian Federation, and the growing assertiveness of China dominates the attention of Western strategists. In practical terms, this results in a recalibration of Western armed forces towards fighting high-intensity conventional wars against state competitors.[357] Some

350 Willamson Murray (2011). *Military Adaptation in War: With Fear of Change.* New York: Cambridge University Press, p.5.

351 See for instance Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak (Eds.). (2019). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume I & II.* Carlisle: United States Army War College Press.

352 See Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 261; Eliot Cohen and John Gooch (2006). *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War.* New York: Free Press, p. 236-237.

353 See Karen Becker (2019). Organizational Unlearning: The Challenges of A developing Phenomenon. *The Learning Organization, 26*(5), p. 534-536.

354 Michael Howard (1963). The Use and Abuse of Military History. *RUSI Journal, 107*(625), p.7.

355 See for example: HM Government. (2015). *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom.* London; UK Ministry of Defence. (2015). *Strategic Trends Programme: Future Operating Environment 2035.* Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre; Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2016). *Joint Operating Environment 2035.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense; United States Department of Defense (2018). *National Defense Strategy.* Washington D.C.

356 Williamson Murray. „Innovation: Past and Future." In *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, Editor: Williamson Murray en Allan R. Millet, 300-328. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 304-306.

357 See for example: United States Department of Defense. *National Defense Strategy 2018.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2018; HM Government. "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom". London, 2015; Department of Defence. *2016 Defence White Paper.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016.

scholars and practitioners have argued that this development is overdue, as the recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have degraded the Western ability to fight conventional wars. Consequently, these armed forces recalibrate towards conventional warfare and the associated skills.[358] This does not augur well for retaining the lessons from the previous conflicts, however, as Western militaries are prone to revert back to their normal concepts and organizational structures.[359]

In a more general sense, Western armed forces prepare for the most dangerous strategic scenarios and seek to prevent surprise attacks that result in an instantaneous defeat.[360] At the same time, military planners have a predilection to prepare for short decisive campaigns in which the adversary is to be paralyzed through a combination of speed, deft maneuvering, and technological advantages. This should prevent protracted and inconclusive wars.[361] As such, counterinsurgency operations with elusive adversaries, long commitments and strategically unsatisfying results go against the grain of Western military thought.

While analyzing the strategic environment, armed forces must explore what capabilities they need for addressing future threats. Western strategists do habitually explore new technologies and their potential impact on warfare. This leads to assertions about the changing character of war, while tending to neglect the continuities. Furthermore, this exploration is usually focused on exploiting their core competency: fighting conventional wars.[362] Emphasizing technological developments tends to disregard explorations in other competencies that are needed for peacekeeping and stabilization operations.[363] Moreover, exploiting the routine core competency of conventional war fighting is often detrimental to the performance in counterinsurgency or stabilization operations, as those require different approaches.[364]

2.4.2.1.6: Institutionalization

The sixth and ultimate step of the process is *institutionalization* of the knowledge when it is assessed to be of continuing relevance to the organization. In essence, the knowledge must

358 Douglas Porch. *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013 318-345; Otto van Wiggen and Robbert-Jan Aarten. "Oefening Bison Drawsko 2017: Een essentiële nulmeting voor de Landmacht". *Militaire Spectator* 186, nr. 12 (2017): 581-596.

359 Hans Hasselbladh and Karl Yden. "Why Military Organizations Are Cautious About Learning?" *Armed Forces & Society*, 2019: p. 15-17.

360 Lawrence Freedman. *The Future of War: A History.* London: Penguin, 2017, p. 277-279.

361 Cathal Nolan. *The Allure of Battle.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 572-577.

362 H.R. McMaster (2017). Learning from Contemporary Conflicts to Prepare for Future War. *Orbis, 61*(3), 314-315.

363 Tim Sweijs and Frans Osinga (2019). VII: Maintaining NATO's Technological Edge. *Whitehall Papers, 95*(1), p. 115-116.

364 John Vrolyk (2019, December 19). *Insurgency, not war is China's most likely course of action.* Retrieved December 19, 2019, from War on the Rocks: https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/insurgency-not-war-is-chinas-most-likely-course-of-action

lead to change in organizational behavior. As detailed previously, this change can result in different manifestations. For example, institutionalization can lead to new organizational structures, modifications in education and training, novel capabilities, and equipment, altered, and new concepts and doctrine. By itself, incorporating knowledge into doctrinal publications is insufficient to bring about such change. Without more practical manifestations of this knowledge, the military organization risks only ostensibly institutionalizing the knowledge without it being internalized by its members, hence losing its value.[365]

The main difference with adaptation (step 4) is that the knowledge retained in the contemplation step is assessed as being of enduring relevance. Doing so leads to structural reforms that are relevant beyond the context in which the experiences were initially acquired. Ultimately, this knowledge must be internalized by the individual members so that it shapes their mental model.[366] Explicit knowledge then becomes tacit knowledge and ensures its availability in other contexts such as new missions. This organizational knowledge will shape how the experiences in new operational context are perceived and form a new cycle of organizational learning. The notion of accumulating knowledge warrants a reiteration of the qualification that this process says little, by itself, about the quality of the lessons learned, and potentially less about the resulting military performance.

365 Andrew Hill and Stephen Gerras (2016). Systems of Denial: Strategic Resistance to Military Innovation, *Naval War College Review;* 69(1), p. 115.

366 See Ikujiro Nonaka and Noboru Konno (1998). The Concept of "Ba": Building a Foundation for Knowledge Creation. *California Management Review, 40*(3), 40-54.

2.4.2.2: An analytical model

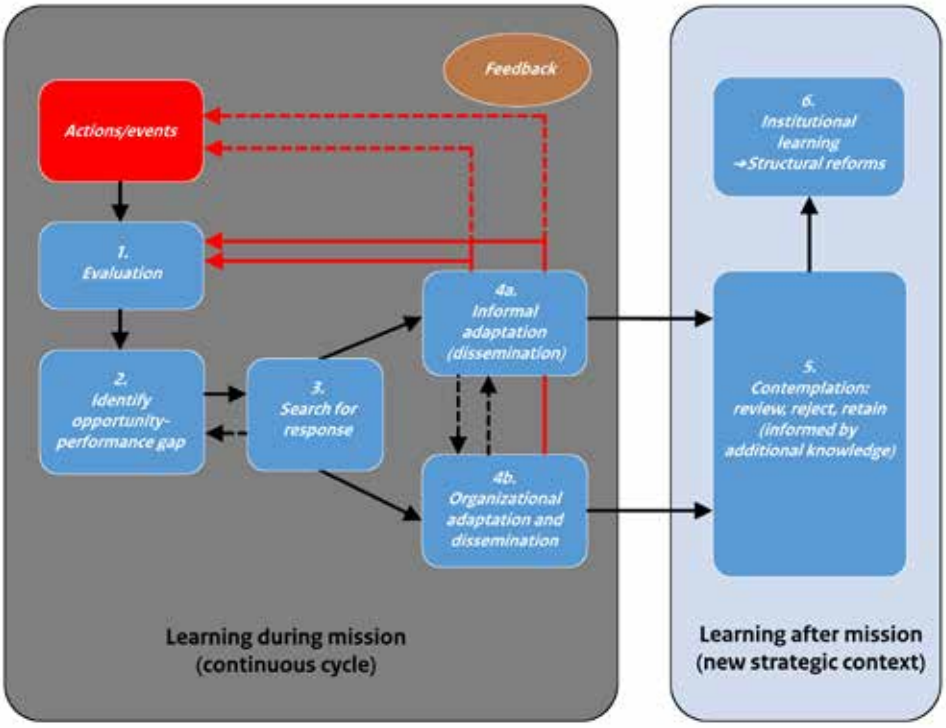


Figure 2.3: The proposed comprehensive model for institutional learning

The combination of the three strands of learning and the six distinct steps of the learning process are visualized in the analytical model in figure 2.3. The model is not an end in itself but can serve as an analytical tool to help trace the process of learning in a military organization. It depicts the hypothesized three strands of learning, and their constituent steps. For a thorough analysis of the process of learning by military organizations, the model should be used in conjunction with the influencing factors as described in chapter 3. Furthermore, the obstructions to learning as described in this chapter will serve as a contextualized frame of reference when the learning processes of the armed forces under study are found to have been impeded. Although for the sake of readability this frame of reference is not included in the model, the influencing factors, impediments, and manifestations can be used as tools of analysis to dissect learning processes in relation to conflict.

The main addition of this model to the study of change in military organizations is that it recognizes the distinct dynamics of learning in conflict and retaining those lessons afterwards, while at the same time it also shows that these processes are inherently related. Evidently, the use of an analytical model such as this has its limitations. First of all, it can be construed as being deterministic, and without taking adequate regard to the dynamics of learning in relation to conflict. What the model cannot convey is therefore that multiple learning processes can occur simultaneously, whether by means of formal or informal modes. Furthermore, learning processes can be interdicted by negative influences or outright inhibitors.

A further qualification of this model is that the depicted bifurcation of learning in conflict and post-conflict is somewhat artificial. Consider the case of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF); following its end in 2014, the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) succeeded it. This new mission focused on Security Force Assistance, rather than direct population-centric counterinsurgency operations. The majority of the lessons learned during ISAF were understood to be relevant to the operations of RSM, as the conflict for all practical purposes remained the same. Moreover, the Western dichotomy of the missions would probably have been lost on the Afghan population in general, and the adversaries in particular. A final consideration was that the post-conflict phase merely shows a different strategic environment. The end of one conflict does not mean that the military organization is not engaged in other conflicts. In the 21st century, Western armed forces have generally continuously been deployed to one expeditionary mission or another.

Despite the inherent limitations of this analytical model, it helps visualize the learning process of military organizations in relation to conflict. It shows the links between the steps and how the process feeds back into organizational activities. For a comprehensive understanding of a specific learning process, it should be viewed in conjunction with the frames of reference that list the manifestations of learning, the influencing factors, and the potential impediments, discussed in this chapter.

2.4.3: Sub conclusion

By fusing organizational leaning theory with relevant knowledge on military organizations, a synthesis of learning by armed forces can be established. This leads to the identification of three strands of learning. The first two, informal and formal adaptation during conflict, have been established by other scholars. It is the third strand of learning, institutionalization after conflict, which forms a new contribution. The underpinning argument is that formal organizational adaptation in conflict, by itself, is insufficient for knowledge retention after conflict. To retain this knowledge, additional evaluations and strategic analysis are necessary.

2.5: Conclusion

The academic attention towards how militaries change has yielded a wealth of empirical studies. These works contribute to explain the specific attributes of armed forces and their environment that influence these processes of change. Still, the process of learning in and from conflict requires additional theoretical grounding. Increasingly, organizational learning literature has been applied towards research on military case studies. Still, it can be argued that this field has neither been explored nor exploited to its full potential. Moreover, a relevant question is whether learning processes in relation to combat operations have unique attributes, compared to those in other types of organizations. This chapter's objective is to provide a synthesis between organizational learning theory and military innovation study, in order to contribute to the understanding of learning processes in military organizations.

The literature on organizational learning theory provides a good starting point to study how armed forces learn in relation to conflict. First of all, it depicts learning as an experiential process that seeks to enhance the organization's performance in relation to its environment. A second important aspect is that it examines how knowledge is utilized to enact change, and how it is transferred between the various levels throughout the organization. Thirdly, it views learning as a highly dynamic social process that has a decided political aspect to it. Furthermore, concepts such as double-loop learning and the trade-off between *exploitation* and *exploration* show the inherent tension within learning as a process of change. Finally, the literature examines factors influencing the process of learning beyond political considerations, such as culture, organizational structures, and leadership. In this regard, the critique by those scholars who contend that organizational learning is too deterministic and technocratic seems to be a misrepresentation of a broad and rich academic field. Moreover, it overemphasizes the uniqueness of armed forces as opposed to other organizations.

To be sure, armed forces have idiosyncratic attributes, but they remain a subset of organizations rather than a discrete category. The second section elaborates on the specific traits of armed forces with regard to learning from experience. Of course, challenges posed by the operational environment, and the adversaries therein, form the most compelling driving factors to learn and adapt. The militaries' processes of learning can result in multiple manifestations, such as strategy, doctrine, and concepts, plans and operations, organizational structures, force levels and equipment, training and education, and tactics, techniques and procedures.

The eventual manifestations of learning are shaped by a multitude of factors. External factors are predominantly a reflection of the political environment of armed forces. These factors include civil-military relations, domestic politics, alliance politics, strategic culture, defense policy, and threat perception. Internal factors are in principle not exceptional to military

organizations but have a distinct character. Such internal factors of influence consist of leadership, organizational culture, internal politics, resource allocation, and learning and dissemination mechanisms. The identified internal and external factors of influence form a frame of reference that can be applied to studying processes of learning. Admittedly, the wide array of factors does not provide a straightforward explanation for how armed forces learn from conflict. However, this frame of reference helps to reconstruct processes of learning by including the several factors, avoiding the abstract nature of any model. Moreover, the influencing factors have a dynamic interplay, making isolation of one shaper artificial.

In establishing a synthesis of organizational learning and military innovation studies, this research posits that there are essentially three related strands of learning in relation to conflict. Informal adaptation in conflict occurs at the level of unit or national contingent to overcome operational challenges and does not require organizational resources or attention. Formal organizational adaptation seeks to address performance deficiencies with the support of the institutional level. Both strands of learning can influence each other by initiating adaptations at the formal and informal levels. These adaptations are valid for the course of the current conflict. After the conflict, the acquired knowledge must be assessed on its relevance for retention in a new strategic environment. If the new knowledge is congruent with the core competencies and prevalent culture of the organization, retaining it will be straightforward. Conversely, if the lessons learned question the organization's mission, task and culture, the risk of reverting back to the status quo is palpable. The third strand, institutional learning, examines the dynamics of knowledge retention and strategic analysis.

To study these strands holistically, this chapter establishes an analytical model comprising six steps: *evaluation, identification, reaction, adaptation, contemplation* and institutionalization. The first four steps occur during a given conflict if a unit or an institution seeks to enhance its performance. Multiple adaptation processes, both formal and informal, can be initiated simultaneously; concurrent processes can even seek to address the same perceived performance gap. Regardless of the efficacy of the adaptations or the outcome of the campaign, the lessons of the conflict must be assessed and weighed against the strategic context if they are to be institutionalized. These elements of strategic analysis beyond conflict occur in the fifth step, *contemplation*. Finally, when lessons from the previous conflict are refined, and retained, this leads to structural reforms in the organization. This sixth step, *institutionalization*, ensures that the acquired knowledge is available for future wars. Furthermore, the knowledge becomes part of the mental models of the organization's members, thereby forming the foundations of new learning processes.

The acquired insights from this chapter will be used to analyze *how* learning processes work and *why*. To focus the empirical case studies on learning during Dutch and British operations

in Afghanistan, the next chapter provides a frame of reference for counterinsurgency prescriptions. In other words, it establishes themes of *what* the militaries can (or should) learn in counterinsurgency conflicts. In these case studies in chapters 4 and 5, the presented analytical model will help identify which stages the various manifestations are attained, and this enables the interplay between informal and formal learning in conflict and eventual institutionalization to be analyzed. Additionally, for each manifestation the relevant influencing factors will be identified. Finally, at a more fundamental level, the impact of underlying dynamics from organizational learning literature will be assessed. As such, the current chapter provides a theoretical lens through which military learning can be analyzed.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: Counterinsurgency theory

3.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter, the process of learning from conflict by military organizations has been examined. Here, the focus shifts towards the substance of the lessons that armed forces can glean from counterinsurgency missions specifically. The objective of this chapter is to build a frame of reference of counterinsurgency prescriptions pertaining to the employment of armed forces. With an, albeit abridged, overview of the theoretical discourse on the role of the military in these conflicts, the manifestations of learning in the case studies can be assessed.[367] Naturally, any counterinsurgency practitioner will do well to take note of the concepts his foes use, however analysis of insurgency manuals or practices is beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, this chapter does not examine works that describe the dynamics of (irregular) conflicts in general.[368]

Of course, most theorists on countering insurgencies emphasize the political dimension in such conflicts, arguing that armed forces can only play a subsidiary role in a comprehensive governmental effort.[369] This chapter does not argue otherwise, but within this context it seeks to identify the competencies, skills and knowledge armed forces should possess or acquire to contribute to resolving an insurgency. After all, in most counterinsurgencies, military forces are often heavily involved, if not coordinating the overall effort.[370] In expeditionary counterinsurgency operations, such as those by the Dutch and British forces in Afghanistan, the armed forces may represent the main instrument of state power that can be deployed in strength to assist foreign partners. At the very least, this means that the conduct of military forces is crucial to the outcome of the conflict. While good military performance will not be sufficient for defeating the insurgency in lieu of a political solution, operations marred by incompetence and lack of knowledge will have an adverse effect on the security situation.

The lessons described in this chapter are those that are considered to be generally applicable for counterinsurgency campaigns. Specific knowledge that is more narrowly applicable to the Afghan conflict or even to local dynamics will be touched upon in the case studies of

367 The best-known example of such works is of course Mao's treatise on guerrilla warfare.

368 See for this subject important works as: Rupert Smith (2006). *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*. London: Penguin; Mary Kaldor (2012). *New and Old Wars: Organizaed Violence in a Global Era* (3 ed.). Cambridge: Polity; Stathis Kalyvas (2006). *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

369 See Robert Thompson (1966). *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. St Petersburg: Hailer Publishing, p.50-52.; David Galula (1964). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport: Praeger Security International, p. 4-5.; David Kilcullen (2006). Counter-insurgency Redux. *Survival*, *48*(4), p. 123.

370 See for example: Ian Beckett (2001). *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750*. London: Routledge, p. vii-ix; see also Sarah Sewall's introduction of Field Manual 3-24: United States Department of the Army. (2007). *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. xxii-xxiv.

this dissertation. A further consideration is that the cited lessons apply to the armed forces rather than other state institutions. While some of these lessons are specific to a certain place and time, others are thought to have a more widespread application. To provide an overview of theoretical literature on counterinsurgency, this chapter will summarize the main prescriptions from three such counterinsurgency eras. In the first section, the literature on colonial conquest and imperial policing will be examined, roughly spanning the 19th Century and the early 20th century. The second section surveys the 'classical era' of counterinsurgency, that of imperial retreat and other 'small wars' in the context of the Cold War. In the third section the theoretical discourse on counterinsurgency after the Cold War is assessed. The findings of these three sections are analyzed in a fourth, concluding, section to gauge the extent to which the theoretical prescriptions have changed over time and whether the body of literature represents a coherent theoretical frame that armed forces can turn to for insight.

3.2: Establishing control: the colonial experience

The roots of modern counterinsurgency concepts can be found in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although the conquest, pacification and administration of colonies required use of military force, application of this instrument was in itself insufficient. In essence, the economic potential of a colony had to be exploited which presumed that a modicum of governance and development activities were necessary.[371] Consequently, expeditionary small wars of conquest and subsequent pacification were established "as a discrete category of warfare [...]".[372] As Western powers grappled with the challenge of imposing control on the restive populations of conquered territories, colonial officers and officials pondered the ways to apply military force and political action to this end. Various French, British and Dutch practitioners disseminated their musings on colonial warfare.

One of the earliest French thinkers is Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, who gained notoriety during his tenure in Algeria in the 1840's. As a commander, he advocated the use of mobile forces in punitive raids against indigenous rebels. This was a departure from the garrisons in static fortification, beyond which the French troops had little influence, which had been the common approach until then. At face value, force protection was traded for mobility and aggressiveness. Bugeaud further emphasized intelligence, acquired by employing local informers and intensive scouting, on the whereabouts of the insurgents and their supporters. With this information, the French troops sought to strike at the rebels' sanctuaries. This approach was deemed necessary as the rebel forces declined to offer battle to the French troops. Often, these punitive raids (or *razzia's*) were aimed at the general populace rather

371 Martijn Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 108-109.

372 Douglas Porch (2013). *Counterinsurgency*. p. 1.

than the resistance fighters. The raids terrorized the local population and destroyed its livelihood.[373]

Beyond the military operations, Bugeaud recognized that the administration and pacification of areas were the main objective, rather than their conquest. To this end, he employed so-called *Bureaux Arabes*[374] whose task was to build relationships with tribal leaders and bring them into the French fold through persuasion. Furthermore, the *Bureaux* could serve as a conduit for intelligence, given their ties with local population. The *Bureaux* were staffed by French officers and troops who spoke Arabic and had experience; consequently, the local administration was a military affair. Development of these areas beyond economic exploitation was not a consideration for wooing the populace.[375] In the end, Bugeaud largely succeeded in conquering Algeria, yet as the methods did little to ingratiate the population to French rule, occasional uprisings continued. From a military perspective, the diverging approach from continental warfare stands out. The French troops' dispersed operations, lack of artillery support and raids on the local population were (theoretical) anathemas for the European conduct of war.[376] As such, the colonial army increasingly had a different outlook than the 'metropolitan' army.

Later on, French discourse on colonial warfare was continued by officers including Joseph Simon Gallieni and Hubert Lyautey. In 1892, Gallieni was tasked with pacifying Tonkin (modern day northern Vietnam), for which he initiated an approach that as called "progressive occupation". Starting from their posts, troops would conduct patrols that expanded over time, ultimately linking its area of control with that of another post. Concurrently, the post was to serve as a marketplace for the local population where they could trade. This had the benefit of making contacts with the local population and gathering intelligence. More importantly, this displayed the benevolent effects of French occupation, provided the local population would cooperate.[377]

In 1894, Gallieni was joined in Indochina by Hubert Lyautey. A vocal critic of the French metropolitan army, Lyautey found a new purpose in the service of France's overseas ambitions. Lyautey embraced Gallieni's approach and expanded upon it. Their cooperation was reprised in 1896 when Gallieni summoned Lyautey to Madagascar. The latter officer conducted an ultimately successful campaign to subdue the population in his area of responsibility. He employed *razzia's* to separate the population from insurgents and subsequently tried to

373 Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency*. p. 18-25; Christopher Griffin, Revolution in colonial military affairs, p. 16-18.

374 Thomas Rid, (2010). The Nineteeth Century Origins of Counterinsurgency Doctrine. *Journal of Startegic Studies*, *33*(5), p. 735-737.

375 Christopher Griffin (2009). A Revolution in Colonial Military Affairs: Gallieni, Lyautey and the "Tache d'Huile". *British International Studies Association Conference*. Leicester. p, 18-19.

376 Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p. 29.

377 Porch, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, p. 388.

address the needs of the population. Another important aspect of his approach was his ability in co-opting the main insurgent leader and his followers. The combination of these factors contributed to the French success in pacifying Madagascar.[378]

Lyautey put his experiences into writing. In an article published in 1900: "*Du role colonial de l'Armee*" he advocated how the army should conduct operations in the overseas colonies. He favorably described Gallieni's gradual approach of "progressive occupation". Lyautey rebranded this as a "*tache d'huile*", a slow spreading oil spot of control over the population. Furthermore, Lyautey advocated the role of administration over the populace beyond pure military efforts.[379] Often, political, and military authority was combined within French officers.[380] As such, if an officer was to develop the region under his command, he must be an "administrator, farmer, architect, engineer" instead of just a warrior. In the colonies, Lyautey contended, war was a constructive force. He also campaigned for an autonomous colonial army, due to the distinct roles and requirements for each institution.

Yet, despite this seemingly benevolent intent of colonialism, in practice the effects were more prosaic and brutal. The French army imposed a foreign administration and culture on new subjects, whose patterns of life were subsequently uprooted. When this ostensible progress was lost on the local beneficiaries and they rebelled against French rule, the latter were capable of applying indiscriminate force for pacification. Although Lyautey himself tried to adhere to his principles in later postings in Algeria and Morocco, his theories on the role of the military in colonial context was not universally accepted by other French officers and did not help to enamor the local populations' feelings towards French rules. Ultimately, Morocco and other territories were subjugated through the use of force, not by acquiescence of the populations. As such, the theories of the "tache d'huile" and the constructive force of colonialism generally did little to persuade indigenous people.[381] Still, Bugeaud, Gallieni and Lyautey professed that the military contribution to colonial conquest stood in stark contrast to conventional warfare in Europe. Military force should be used discriminately, with more emphasis on mobility rather than force protection. Additionally, officers should be able to assume roles beyond commanding troops, in order to administer and pacify their regions of responsibility.

As the largest colonial empire, Britain accumulated experience in colonial warfare throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This ranged from wars of conquest, interventions to enact 'regime change', and punitive expeditions, to quelling rebellions and policing. Again, this led to the publication of prescriptions by practitioners. For instance, Charles

378 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 125-127.

379 Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p. 40.

380 Robert Asprey (2002). *War In The Shadows*. Lincoln: iUniverse, p. 154.

381 Porch, Makers of Modern Strategy, p. 394-399.

Callwell published a treatise "Small Wars: Their Principles & Practice". This book extensively explored the considerations for the employment of armed force "[...] against savages and semi-civilized races by disciplined soldiers, campaigns undertaken to suppress rebellious and guerrilla warfare in all parts of the world where organized armies are struggling against opponents who will not meet them in the open field."[382] As such, Callwell distinguished 'small wars' from conventional wars against regularly organized armies.[383] Callwell saw the exemplary use of force as instrumental for success against 'uncivilized' enemies. In theory, military operations against selected targets would dissuade the local population to rise up against the British.[384] Thus, the main objective in quelling resistance was moral effect so that the rebellious subjects would cease their hostilities.[385] Still, Callwell acceded that victory in small wars was often elusive.[386] In contrast to his French contemporaries, Callwell had little consideration for the political and developmental aspects in small wars.

A generation later in 1934, major-general Charles Gwynn showed a broader view of irregular warfare in his book "Imperial Policing". By now, the context of the British Empire had evolved in the sense that it focused on preserving or restoring order in the overseas territories.[387] Gwynn recognized this and as the title of his book attests, in his mind the military contribution to suppressing civil unrest was rather more in policing than normal combat operations. Even so, he acknowledged that the manifestations of malcontent could be diverse, ranging from full-blown insurgencies to "communal disturbances".[388]

Gwynn identified four main principles for the military on colonial duty. First, he emphasized the primacy of civil authority.[389] It was the civil government that set out the policy objectives, which the military should execute. Furthermore, officers should offer advice to the civil authorities to the effect of force employment. The second principle was the application of minimum force. Gwynn stressed that the objective was restoration of civil order and the eventual acceptance by the population. Harsh punitive measures could therefore be counterproductive as these might arouse sympathy among the population for the rebels. The third principle was of the need for firm and timely action. Gwynn asserted that the failure to act will be "interpreted as weakness, encourage further disorder and eventually necessitate measures more severe than those which would suffice in the first instance." The final principle is the need for close cooperation between civil and military instruments. In

382 Charles Callwell (1899). *Small Wars: Their Principles & Practice.* London: War Office, p. 1.

383 Asprey, *War in the Shadows*, p. 137-138.

384 Daniel Whittingham (2012). 'Savage warfare': C.E. Callwell, the roots of counter-insurgency, and the nineteenth century context. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 23*(4-5), p 593-594.

385 Ibidem, p. 600.

386 Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 7.

387 Asprey, War in the Shadows, p. 282-283.

388 Charles Gwynn (1939). *Imperial Policing*. London: MacMillan & Co, p. 10-11.

389 Gwynn, *Imperial Policing*, p. 3-4.

essence, this is an acknowledgement that coercive (military) measures alone do not suffice for regaining control over the population.[390] Although not included as principle, Gwynn placed a premium on intelligence without which the troops would be relegated to "aimless wandering".

Beyond the French and British empires, other European countries had to establish and retain control over their colonial territories. For its empire in modern day Indonesia, the Netherlands had created a colonial army (*Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger*, KNIL) and was tasked with expansion through conquest, pacification, and policing. Although this army saw much action, officers and NCOs lamented the lack of central guidance in the form of doctrine. To a certain extent, this was remedied by officers and officials who wrote in a private capacity on the subject.[391] In particular, the protracted Dutch pacification campaign in Aceh (Northern Sumatra, 1873-1909) inspired some salient lessons.

The Dutch exertions to pacify Aceh were unsuccessful for the first twenty years of the conflict. Dutch forces were unable to expand their writ beyond their bases and came under frequent attack. In reaction to this situation, the KNIL mounted punitive expeditions against the population that were counterproductive.[392] Only at the end of the nineteenth century did the KNIL take another approach. With small, aggressive patrols the Dutch forces took a more measured employment of force with the objective of controlling rather than terrorizing the population. Although Dutch intelligence efforts had gradually improved throughout the war, this received a boost by the involvement of Christiaan Snouck Hurgonje, a prominent scholar on Islam (the insurgents' religion) with knowledge about Aceh's political landscape. His study and subsequent report on the causes of the resistance and the internal political divisions in Aceh offered the Dutch authorities' inroads to pacify the province.[393]

Snouck Hurgonje suggested that the Dutch should co-opt local chiefs that were undermined by the Islamist resistance. By empowering these traditional leaders, the Dutch could exploit local fissures and cooperation with them to establish security. Secondly, as the Dutch sought the collaboration of the local population, military force should only be directed at active members or supporters of the resistance. Of course, this required fine-grained intelligence. Finally, the Dutch would offer benefits to the Acehnese population by stimulating trade, agriculture, and industry.[394] After an area was pacified a civil administration was established

390 Ibidem, p. 13-15.

391 Ger Teitler. (2001). Voorlopers van het VPTL, 19828-1829. *Militaire Spectator*, *170*(5), p. 268-269.

392 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2008). 'The roots of Dutch Counter-Insurgency, Balancing and integrating Military and civilian efforts from Aceh to Uruzgan. In R. G. Davis (Red.), *The U.S. army and irregular warfare 1775-2007: Selected papers from the 2007 Conference of Army Historians*. Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, p. 122-123.

393 Montgomery McFate, 2018). A Military Anthropologist Looks at Islamic Insurgency in Aceh. *Orbis*, p. 632-634.

394 Kitzen, *The Course of Cooption*, p.208-209.

in which civil servants, officers and local leaders closely collaborated.[395] Ultimately, this approach as adopted by the commanding general, Jo van Heutsz in 1898. Although these measures were successful after prolonged and bloody campaigning, the Aceh War as not concluded until 1912 and the animus against Dutch rule remained.[396]

Certainly, the colonial era and its wars hold scant examples to emulate. Using military force to subjugate and exploit foreign territories and their inhabitants should obviously not pass ethical muster. Yet, the experiences of these small wars have inspired prescriptions such as the abovementioned examples. When summarizing the various recommendations from colonial officers, an uneven picture arises (see table 3.1). For instance, the use of measured force against civilians that supported rebels was generally deemed to be acceptable, although excessive force was regarded as counterproductive. With the exception of the Aceh War, intelligence was mainly used to find the enemy. In most of the wars described, the armed forces were dominant in fighting the insurgents. Yet, in the French examples, officers had to conduct a variety of tasks such as administration and economic development. Alternatively, in British and Dutch publications, the cooperation with civilian officials was awarded more prominence. Finally, non-kinetic efforts were advocated by some of the thinkers to complement the use of military force in order to establish control over restive populations. In sum, some hallmarks of later counterinsurgency theories can be seen in these prescriptions. Nevertheless, while some of the more benevolent prescriptions have been embraced by later theorists, these small colonial wars were brutal affairs that had devastating effects on the local societies. Therefore, current counterinsurgency students should be aware of the historical reality of the colonial when perusing the theories of that era.

395 Mcfate, A Military Anthropologist, p. 634.

396 Kitzen, *The Course of Cooption*, p. 297-303.

	Bugeaud	**Gallieni/ Lyautey**	**Callwell**	**Gwynn**	**Snouck Hurgonje/ Van Heutsz**
Campaign plan/objective	Pacification/ administration	Pacification/ administration	Conquest/ pacification/ maintaining order	Maintaining order	Pacification/ administration
Role of military/ civil military cooperation	Exclusive, including administrative tasks	Exclusive, including administrative tasks	Exclusive	Constabulary Operations in support of civilian authorities	Dominant
Use of Intelligence	Identification of enemy	Enemy/ political	Identification of enemy	Identification of enemy	Ethnographic/ political
Use of force/ actions against insurgents	Punitive operations	Punitive operations	Exemplary force	Minimum	Minimum/ exemplary
Non-kinetic effects/ persuasion	Providing governance and development	Providing governance and development (Tache d'Huile)	-	-	Providing governance and development

Table 3.1: Prescriptions on the military contribution to small wars in the colonial era

3.3: "The counterinsurgency era"

In the decades after the Second World War, Western armed forces became intensively embroiled in various irregular conflicts. Two international developments served as a catalyst to the Western involvement in these 'small wars.' First of all, the European colonial powers largely lost their overseas empires. This process of decolonization was in many cases accompanied by intense violence.[397] Secondly, the advent of the Cold War imposed an ideological layer over many internal conflicts in which the sides sought support from either the West or the Communist bloc. This was exacerbated by the success by Mao Tse-Tung in the Chinese civil war, his writings on revolutionary war inspired other insurgents to copy the Chinese model for overthrowing incumbent governments; among others, in Vietnam and Malaya.[398]

This prevalence of potent insurgencies prompted interest in this phenomenon from both practitioners and scholars. As a result, prescriptions by revolutionaries such as Mao, Vo

397 Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies*, p. 109-115.

398 John Mackinlay (2009). *The Insurgent Archipelago*. London: Hurts, p. 35-36; Kitzen, *The Course of Cooption*, p. 110.

Nguyen Giap and Che Guevara were studied by Western armed forces. Moreover, Western officers began to write theoretical works with recommendations based on their experiences in fighting in these revolutionary wars.[399] Five of these authors and their works will be studied in this section. Of course, this selection of authors and their experiences does not capture a comprehensive overview of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies during the Cold War. However, these works are among the most influential for Western counterinsurgency doctrine and later theoretical works. Yet, it warrants consideration that these publications were products of their time when communist(-inspired) insurgencies were wracking the European former colonies within the context of the Cold War.

One of the chief writers on counterinsurgency was the French officer, David Galula, who saw service in the Second World War and in the Algerian War. In his work *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Galula argued that in conventional war, both sides of the conflict generally adhered to the same principles. In contrast, revolutionary war saw two types of warfare: the revolutionary's and the counterrevolutionary's, as both worked under different rules. Galula compared this to a "[...] fight between a fly and a lion, the fly cannot deliver a knockout blow and the lion cannot fly."[400] The main thrust of Galula's work was then to offer the rules of counterinsurgent warfare.

In many ways, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* is a reaction to Mao's work. Galula acknowledges that the population is the objective for both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents. Consequently, the political aspect of the war is paramount as opposed to conventional wars and is an "[...] active instrument of operation."[401] Weighing political effects of military actions becomes even more prominent in counterinsurgency, which adds to the challenge for the military as this organization is often not attuned to do this. Galula thus subscribes to the notion that counterinsurgency "[...] is 20 per cent military action and 80 per cent political".[402] Even so, he saw a crucial role for the use of the military in such conflicts.

In counterinsurgency, victory cannot be attained by destruction of the insurgent's forces and their political organization. Instead, Galula asserts, the counterinsurgent should strive to "the permanent isolation from the population [...], maintained by and with the population."[403] While armed forces can play a crucial role in this approach, they should refrain from large-scale conventional operations.[404] Galula translated this approach into a phased strategy in which the role of military force progressively diminishes with each sequential phase. For

399 Ian Beckett (2012). The Historiography of Insurgency. In P. B. Duyvesteyn, *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (pp. 23-31). London : Routledge, p. 25.

400 David Galula, (1964). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice.* Westport: Praeger Security International, p. xii-xiii

401 Ibidem, p.4-5.

402 Ibid, p. 63.

403 Ibid, p. 54.

404 Ibid, p. 50-51.

instance, the first phase consists of clearing operations from a given area. This step should be followed by detaching troops to hold this area by billeting them among the population. From here, the next step of establishing contacts with and control over the population can be taken. The role of troops now comes to resemble that of a police force that is tasked with maintaining order, protection of the population and intelligence collection.[405]

After a sufficient level of control is established and enough intelligence is analyzed, the neutralization of the insurgent's political organization can be undertaken. In the subsequent phases, the role of the military becomes less pronounced. Yet, while Galula emphasized that military activities should be subservient to civilian control, he acknowledged that a strict bifurcation between civilian and military tasks is often impractical. Indeed, military personnel have to assume different roles because civilian authorities are incapable of delivering them. In Galula's words: "[t]he soldier must be prepared to become a propagandist, a social worker, a civil engineer, a schoolteacher, a nurse [...] as long as he cannot be replaced, for it is better to entrust civilian tasks to civilians."[406] This requires adaptability on the part of the military and its personnel as they have to conduct other activities than in conventional war.[407] A further central aspect of Galula's strategy is the importance of information operations (propaganda). He saw three main audiences for these efforts: the population, the insurgents, and the counterinsurgent forces. The latter identified audience must be made to understand what their role in the campaign and phases is. In sum, military operations in counterinsurgency require more than the application of force and are distinct from conventional warfare.

Roger Trinquier, a contemporary of David Galula, also distilled prescriptions on counterinsurgency based on his experience. His book *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (1964) evoked controversy due to Trinquier's condonement of torture for intelligence purposes.[408] Trinquier lamented the French army's lack of attention to the realities of modern warfare (counterinsurgency). Instead, the army stubbornly continued to prepare for conventional warfare, which he saw as obsolete.[409] In counterinsurgency, "military operations, as combat actions [...] against opposing forces, are of only limited importance and are never the total conflict." With his book, Trinquier aimed to study effective countermeasures against insurgency. Central to victory in this type of warfare is control over the population. This can be achieved by the destruction of the enemy's "armed clandestine organization". [410]

405 Ibid, p. 75-84.

406 Ibid, p.61-62.

407 Ibid, p. 66-67.

408 See Eliot Cohen's foreword to the 2006 edition of Trinquier's book, p. viii-ix.

409 Trinquier (1964). *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency.* London: Pall Mall Press Ltd., p. 3.

410 Ibidem, p. 5-7.

Key elements in defense against insurgents identified by Trinquier are the protection of the population and collection of intelligence on the enemy. Acquiring intelligence hinges in large part on the support of the population as they can identify the insurgents. The main weapon of the insurgents to prevent this is employing terrorism so that the population is cowed into acquiescence and will not cooperate with the counterinsurgent forces.[411]

Therefore, Trinquier advocated a gradual, concentric approach. First, the towns and cities have to be controlled as the bulk of the population lives there. Here, troops assist the police force and the civilian administration. To be effective, troops have to live among the population to deny insurgent influence and to acquire relevant intelligence.[412] After the population centers are secured, the *intermediate area*, which is contested by both sides must be brought under control, based on the intelligence provided by the population. Again, the objective here is to bring the inhabitants of the outlying villages under control and thereby destroy the insurgents' organization there. Consequently, this would weaken the insurgents as they would progressively be deprived of intelligence and support. Additionally, Trinquier suggested the use of development projects to improve the populations welfare.[413] Finally, the insurgents' sanctuaries can be attacked and destroyed after careful planning and intelligence preparation. This operation should only be concluded when no insurgent remained in the region. When successful, the military operation is followed by a return of civilian administration of the area.

As in the nineteenth century, the British armed forces also acquired substantial experience in counterinsurgency. These wars were fought both in the shrinking empire and in the British Isles themselves when the conflict in Northern Ireland commanded attention for several decades. As with the French, British writers with first-hand experiences published books about this type of warfare and its prescriptions. The most well-known of these authors are Robert Thompson and Frank Kitson.

Robert Thompson had served during the Malayan insurgency and was later asked by the Americans to advise their growing entanglements in Vietnam. His book, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (1966) enumerated five principles that have become the hallmark of counterinsurgency warfare. First, the government must have clear political aim of what it wants to achieve. The second principle is that the government must act in accordance with the law in order to retain legitimacy. A third rule is that the government must coordinate its various instruments of power, balancing military and civilian efforts under an overall plan. The fourth principle emphasized the defeat of political subversion rather than destroying

411 Ibid, p. 31-32.

412 Ibid, p. 60-62.

413 Ibid, p. 64-65.

the insurgents. Finally, the government should secure its base area first in the guerrilla phase of the conflict, and from there wrest control back from the insurgents.[414]

On this account, the role of the military is subservient to civilian authorities and as an instrument within a general plan. According to Thompson, this requires a highly trained, mobile army with light equipment that is adequately supported by a navy and air force. He contends that small unit actions with delegated authority to junior commanders are more prone to success against insurgent than large scale conventional operations.[415] Furthermore, in case of an insurgency, the armed forces present should retrain and reorganize rather than expand. Its primary role is to support the government to regain control of disputed areas by evicting the insurgents from them. Holding the area is a task of the police force and civil authorities. The secondary role is to deny the insurgents freedom of movement in other areas in order to keep them off balance. However, the military should avoid the employment of heavy weaponry in populated areas as this would create more insurgents than kill them.[416] Interestingly. Thompson is apprehensive of the establishment of informal militias beyond self-defense purposes, arguing that such militias are prone to prolong violence.[417]

A further central tenet to the eradication of an insurgency is intelligence, preferably under responsibility of a single organization. Thompson asserts that the police force should be responsible rather than the armed forces, as the former is more attuned to the population. However, the army is one of the primary consumers of intelligence for its operational direction.[418] Another element that Thompson identified is the use of information operations, based on intelligence, directed at the insurgents and the population. With regard to the insurgents, messaging aims to: induce surrenders among the insurgents; sow dissension in their ranks; and create an image of a firm but just government.[419]

At the level of military operations, Thompson asserts these should be aimed at isolating the insurgents from the population. Ultimately, these "clear-and-hold" operations are aimed at destroying the insurgent's organization and infrastructure rather than killing insurgents. Thompson was wary about the efficacy of the large "search-and-clear" operations that he saw in Vietnam. Conversely, he saw value in small scale operations that aimed to disrupt the enemy's freedom of movement.[420] Although strategic hamlets were used in Vietnam, Thompson was critical as he found that their establishment was an end rather than serving

414 Robert Thompson (1966). *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. St Petersburg: Hailer Publishing, p. 50-58.

415 Ibidem, p. 61-62.

416 Ibid, p. 105-106.

417 Ibid, p. 108.

418 Ibid, 84-86.

419 Ibid, p. 90-91.

420 Ibid, P. 116-117.

the purpose of isolating the insurgents (Viet Cong).[421] In the end, Thompson's advice in Vietnam was to little strategic effect. Yet, his principles and operational phases would have a lasting impact on counterinsurgency theorists.

Another important British thinker on counterinsurgency of this era is Frank Kitson. As an army officer, he served in Kenya, Malaya, Oman, and Cyprus. His book, *Low Intensity Operations* (1971) aimed to prepare the British army "to deal with subversion, insurrection, and peacekeeping operations [...]".[422] Kitson observed that to defeat an insurgency, the government must employ a combination of political, economic, psychological, and military measures. He noted that although military commanders will regard the non-military measures as beyond their responsibility, civilian authorities will expect them to conduct these roles. As a result, soldiers must be prepared to use these instruments in their operational plan.[423]

Central to defeating an insurgency is gaining control over the population. A crucial condition for control is that the government clearly communicates its goal of defeating the insurgency. If the resolve of the government is questionable, the population will not be inclined to support it. Furthermore, the government must draw up an overall plan designed to "regain and retain the allegiance of the population."[424] Beyond dismantling the insurgency, this plan must seek to address legitimate grievances and maintain the prosperity of the country. For the military contribution to such a plan, Kitson contends that officers must know the interdependency of the various state instruments within a program. To coordinate effectively with other agencies, this knowledge must be available throughout every level of the military as "even in the operational sphere civil and military measures are inextricably intertwined."[425]

Kitson railed against the assertion that any good soldier is capable of fighting insurgents. He argued that conventional military operations call for distinct qualities than counterinsurgency activities or peacekeeping. Although Kitson recognized that these two sets of tasks provided a conundrum for the armed forces, he stressed that the military should prepare for both eventualities while acknowledging the differences between these types of conflict.[426]

In case of subversion, the military should be involved at the earliest stage possible in an advisory role. At this point, military personnel can familiarize themselves with the situation, augment intelligence efforts or assist in psychological operations.[427] If and when subversion

421 Ibid, p. 141-144.

422 Frank Kitson, (1971). *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping.* London: Faber and Faber, p. 2.

423 Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, p. 7.

424 Ibidem, p. 49-50.

425 Ibidem, p. 50-51.

426 Ibidem, p. 200-201.

427 Ibidem, p. 67-81.

evolves into a violent insurgency, the role of the military becomes more prominent. Here, the military can contribute in three ways. First, it can help perform protective tasks towards the population and other elements of the government. Second, it can assist in separating the population from the insurgency. Third, it can provide background information from captured documents or through interrogation which contributes to the overall intelligence position. Such background information can then be developed into contact information (or actionable intelligence) that is instrumental in finding the generally elusive enemy and bring the fight to him. Kitson envisaged this as a self-reinforcing mechanism. Intelligence-led operations would yield more intelligence that in turn drove new actions.[428] Such a methodical approach requires patience, perseverance, and the ability to manage information. As such, units have to be attuned to collecting information and analyzing it to become actionable.

For better or worse, prescriptions from the colonial era, such as the principles by Gwynn or the 'tache d'huile', have clearly influenced these guidelines from the Cold War era. In general, the mentioned books in this section reinforced the idea that counterinsurgency forms a distinct category of warfare from conventional conflicts.[429] Still, crucial differences stand out between the works of the two eras. First of all, the insurgents of the Cold War are respected as more capable adversaries than the indigenous rebels contesting imposition of colonial rule. Secondly, although the military is required to conduct many non-organic tasks, the primacy of civilian command is clearly established in the modern texts. While employment of the military was regarded as crucial, the thinkers of the Cold War universally acknowledged that this was insufficient on its own.

To conclude, the described works from the Cold War-era have many similarities (see table 3.2). Indeed, Kitson extensively refers to Thompson, Galula and Trinquier. The principles as espoused by Thompson and Galula are largely present in the other works. All authors acknowledge that the military contribution to counterinsurgency must be subservient to civilian authorities. Furthermore, the population forms the objective rather than the adversary. Another point of consensus is that successful campaigns should be initiated gradually from secure base areas, from which the government's writ can be expanded and the insurgent's organization can be defeated. To be sure, some differences exist between the prescriptions such as the willingness to employ force, the efficacy of good governance, the practical implications to separating insurgents from the population and the use of mobile forces to harass insurgents in their sanctuaries. Perhaps the most original thinker is Kitson with his relentless focus on intelligence for the armed forces, not only as consumer but also as a primary producer. Despite all these prescriptions, success in counterinsurgency proved hard to attain for Western states. Moreover, the conventionally calibrated armed forces struggled to adapt to the prescribed requirements of counterinsurgency. Firepower and

428 Kitson, p. 95-98,

429 Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies*, p. 44.

conventional tactics were used as a substitute for understanding the conflict and the need for a gradual, persistent engagement that required the integration of non-kinetic activities. Salient exceptions such as the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland notwithstanding, the interest in counterinsurgency, and its prescriptions, declined throughout the 1980's. However, the texts would be rediscovered in a new counterinsurgency era at the start of the 21st century.

	Galula	**Trinquier**	**Thompson**	**Kitson**
Campaign plan/objective	Defeating political subversion. Separating the population from the insurgents, gradual approach	Establishing control over the population, gradual approach	Defeating political subversion, gradual approach	Separating insurgents from the population and gathering intelligence, gradual approach (military contribution)
Role of military/ civil military cooperation	Shifting roles throughout the campaign, under civilian authority	Military assists civilian authorities	Military used for clearance operations. By integrated committee under civilian authority, coordinating all instruments	Civilian control of all instruments of power
Adaptability	Military must be ready to assume other roles	Fundamental call for adapting military for modern warfare (counterinsurgency)	Reorganization and retraining of troops in case of insurgency	Adaptation from conventional warfare. Military must assume broader responsibilities in the absence of civilian capacity
Use of Intelligence	Paramount to destroy insurgent organization	Paramount, albeit with the use of illegal methods	Paramount, preferably by a single organization	Paramount, primary consideration for the armed forces. Contextual intelligence as well as 'contact' information
Use of force/ actions against insurgents	Decreasing use of force as campaign progresses	Securing the population by clearing insurgent presence, eventual destruction of insurgent sanctuaries	Isolate insurgents through small unit actions. Warned against search and destroy operations	Small unit targeted actions, based on intelligence
Non-kinetic effects/ persuasion	Vital: military must prepare for these tasks	Use of development projects to enhance the population's welfare	Information/ psychological operations but are responsibility of government	Increasingly important, armed forces must prepare for this task

Table 3.2: Counterinsurgency prescriptions and principles by authors during the Cold War

3.4: The rediscovery of counterinsurgency

After the end of the Cold War and at the outset of the 21st century insurgencies and the efforts to combat them were not much in vogue, both in Western academic and in military environments. During the 1990's, these militaries saw a large number of deployments in stabilization, peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations. For these types of operations, conventional war fighting capabilities were insufficient.[430] Indeed, some observers argued that the nature of war had even changed.[431] As a result, new theories and prescriptions were developed for these new wars.[432] In spite of these apparent paradigm shifts in war and warfare, some inspiration for tackling the modern problems was drawn from the counterinsurgency texts of the Cold War era.[433] Of course, this approach risked the conflation of these types of conflicts for the intervening Western forces. In particular, the notions of minimum force, winning over the population and the need for a comprehensive approach as espoused by earlier prescriptions were thought to be applicable to the interventions of the 1990's.[434]

In the United States the political leadership was wary of committing the military to "low intensity conflicts" such as counterinsurgency and stabilization operations. Such missions were regarded as distractions for which the U.S. armed forces were ill-suited. Protracted, open-ended conflicts that placed a premium on use of minimum force and reconstruction efforts were to be avoided.[435] For the United States military, the most salient memory of a counterinsurgency campaign was that of Vietnam. From the early 1960's to 1973, the United States deployed its military in support of South Vietnam against insurgents and incursions from communist North Vietnam. Despite the large commitment of forces, over 500,000 troops were present at its height in 1968, the United States was unable to sustain the South Vietnamese government, which collapsed in 1975. The technological and military advantage the U.S. military held over its opponents proved irrelevant as the Americans were unable to attain their political objectives. According to contemporary and later critics, the U.S. armed forces, with notable exceptions, suffered from a conventional mindset and were unable to apply proper counterinsurgency tactics.[436] The conflict was prosecuted as a conventional war with little regard for the political dimensions. Political pressure to prepare

430 Martijn Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 111.

431 See for instance: Mary Kaldor (2012). *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (3 ed.). Cambridge: Polity; Martin van Creveld, (1991). *The Transformation of War.* New York: Simon & Schuster; T.X. Hammes, (2004). *The Sling and The Stone: On War in The 21st Century.* Minneapolis: Zenith Press.

432 See for example: Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 306.

433 David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith (2010). Whose Hearts and Whose Minds? The Curious Case of Global Counter-Insurgency. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *33*(1), p. 85-87.

434 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2012). Counterinsurgency and Peace Operations. In P. B. Rich, & I. Duyvesteyn (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency.* London: Routledge, p. 85-86.

435 Keith Shimko (2010) *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 131-133.

436 See: Neil Sheehan (1988). *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam.* New York: Vintage; Andrew Krepinevich (1986). *The Army and Vietnam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

for counterinsurgency operations by the Kennedy administration were actively resisted by the U.S. military on an institutional level.[437]

In his 1998 book, Richard Downie shows that the lessons of Vietnam were not institutionalized but discarded soon afterwards.[438] Instead, the experience of Vietnam reinforced the idea that the United States should either employ its overwhelming firepower or better still, refrain from intervention with substantial amounts of troops at all. In short, the lessons that the United States Army took away from Vietnam did nothing to help it prepare for future counterinsurgency campaigns. Subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns in Latin America during the 1970's and 1980's were mostly small advisory missions with a small footprint where the fighting was done by local forces.[439] Like their European allies, the American armed forces focused on conventional warfare in the European theatre. Previous lessons from counterinsurgency were consequently repeatedly forgotten, willfully ignored, or purged outright from military curricula.[440]

Instead, the United States military was to exploit its technological advantages that had been displayed in the lopsided victory over Iraq in 1991. According to some observers, the experience of *Operation Desert Storm* heralded a *Revolution in Military Affairs* (RMA).[441] This RMA would enable the United States military to fuse optimal situational awareness through information dominance and precise stand-off weapons. Combined with sophisticated, real-time, command and control, this would build a highly mobile and nimble lethal force. This force was to fight wars characterized by swiftness, decisiveness, few casualties (on the American side at least) and with little influence of geographical factors or even friction.[442]

Such sterile high-intensity warfare would certainly be preferable over protracted wars against irregular foes, both for the military as for politicians. Still, critics as Colin Gray contended that the advocates of the RMA overvalued the technological factor in warfare while disregarding the human aspect. Moreover, the ability to strike targets with precision would be irrelevant if this failed to coerce the adversary, who by default would seek to negate this military prowess by employing asymmetrical countermeasures.[443]

437 Stephen Rosen (1991). *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 100-105.

438 Richard D. Downie (1998). Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War. Westport: Praeger, p. 55-57.

439 Richard D. Downie (1998). Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War. Westport: Praeger, p. 183.

440 Eliot Cohen, Conrad Crane, Jan Horvath & John Nagl (2006). Principles, Imperatives and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency, *Military Review, 86*(2), p. 53; Austin Long (2008). *Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine, 1960-1970 and 2003-2006.* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 19-20.

441 Mahnken, T. G., & Watts, B. D. (1997). What the Gulf War Can (and Cannot) Tell Us about the Future of Warfare. *International Security, 22*(2)

442 David Gompert, Richard Kugler and Martin Libicki (2015). *Thucydides was right: Defining the future threat.* Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, p. 34.

443 Colin Gray (2001). The RMA and intervention: A sceptical view. *Contemporary Security Policy, 22*(3), p. 54-55.

The attacks of September 11th, 2001, proved to form a watershed in the foreign policy advocated by the administration of U.S. president George W. Bush with profound repercussions for both its allies and its opponents. In response to the terrorist attacks, the United States found itself compelled to unleash its military to proactively combat terrorism, first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq.[444] The initial military successes in Iraq and Afghanistan seemed to vindicate the proponents of the RMA. Indeed, the victories in Iraq and Afghanistan heralded a "New American Way of War". No longer was the deployment of large numbers in men and materiel necessary to apply overwhelming firepower, long the hallmark of American warfare. Wars of attrition, which resulted in heavy casualties on both sides, were obsolete for the U.S. military. Instead, modern information technology enabled operations that attained quick victories with "speed, maneuver (sic), flexibility and surprise".[445]

The primary catalyst for the resurgence of interest in counterinsurgency after the Cold War was the war in Iraq. While the initial invasion to topple Saddam Hussein's regime was conducted with impressive speed, the coalition forces were ill-prepared for a stabilization role and overstretched to provide security. This was exacerbated by the ill-conceived measures to disband the Iraqi security forces and to purge the Iraqi government from members of the Baath-party by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). In the resulting power vacuum, multiple armed groups sprang up to fight the Western occupation forces, the new Iraqi government and each other. Observers recognized the coalition troops faced an insurgency that required a different approach than combat operations against terrorists.[446] In this context, American forces started to improvise and adapt to the realities of counterinsurgency operations.[447] Officers shared their experiences through professional media and scholarly articles.[448]

In the case of Iraq, the United States military's path towards adaptation proved tortuous but led to major changes.[449] As described in the introduction, the publication of *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (FM 3-24), was one of the most significant manifestations of this process. Inspiration for this doctrinal document was drawn from a combination of classical counterinsurgency theories, the battlefield adaptations and expertise from other

444 Benjamin Lambeth (2010). Operation Enduring Freedom, 2001. In J. A. Olsen (Ed.), *A History of Air Warfare* (pp. 255-277). Dulles: Potomac Books.

445 Max Boot (2003). The New American Way of War. *Foreign Affairs, 82*(4), pp. 41-58

446 See for example: Stephen Biddle, (2006). Seeing Baghdad, Thinking Saigon. *Foreign Affairs, 85*(2), 2-14; Steven Metz and Raymond Millen (2004). *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st century: Reconceptualising Threat and Respons.* Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, p. 18.

447 See for example: James Russell (2011). *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007.* Stanford: Stanford University Press; Chad Serena (2011). *A Revolution in Military Adaptation: The US Army in Iraq.* Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

448 David Ucko (2009). *The New Counterinsurgency Era.* Washington DC: Georgetown, p. 76-78.

449 See for example David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime.* New York: Oxford University Press; David Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era.*

academic disciplines such as anthropology.[450] The public edition by Chicago University Press contained an annotated bibliography which included the works of Galula, Kitson, Thompson and Trinquier, as well as more contemporary works.[451]

The main objective for American efforts in counterinsurgency is "to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government [...] by the balanced application of both military and non-military means". Legitimacy is achieved when a regime can govern with the consent of the population. In the case of an insurgency, this legitimacy is challenged through subversion and violence by a portion of the population. Thus, counterinsurgents must seek to enhance to the legitimacy of the (host nation) government in the eyes of the population. In essence, the popular support for the regime must be improved through, for instance provision of security, basic services and the rule of law.[452]

The influence of the classical prescriptive texts in FM 3-24 is apparent in its "historical principles". Beyond legitimacy as the main objective, FM 3-24 further lists: unity of effort is essential; political factors are primary; counterinsurgents must understand the environment; intelligence drives operations; insurgents must be isolated from their cause and support; security under the rule of law is essential; and counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment.[453]

While these historical principles can be traced to those of the Cold War-era, FM 3-24 also included "imperatives" based on the context of the 21st century: manage information and expectations; use the appropriate level of force; learn and adapt; empower the lowest levels; and support the host nation.[454] The emphasis on learning and adaptation is interesting in light of this research. FM 3-24 posits that the adversaries are in a competition of adaptation. Therefore, an effective counterinsurgent force must be a learning organization that assess progress, share lessons, and implement changes.[455]

For the execution of a counterinsurgency campaign, FM 3-24 envisages multiple "Logical Lines of Operations" that must be pursued concurrently and are mutually reinforcing. For instance, lines of operations can include conducting combat operations, train end employ host-nation security forces, support development of better governance and support economic development.[456] The main line of operation is that of conducting information

450 See Conrad Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*.

451 United States Department of the Army. (2007). *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 391-395.

452 US Army, *FM 3-24*, p 37-39.

453 Ibidem, p. 36-43.

454 Ibidem, p. 44-47.

455 Ibidem, p. 46, 196.

456 Ibid, p. 154-158.

operations. Information operations can help shape the perceptions of the population and thereby support the other activities. At the same time, success in the other operational activities can shape the substance and validity of information operations.[457] Of course, the converse is also true: failure in these activities will have an adverse effect on the perception of the population. Moreover, lack of consistent messaging will undercut tactical successes.

Further on in the field manual, significant emphasis is placed on the role of intelligence (chapter 3) and the developing the host-nation's security forces (chapter 6). Although the function of intelligence is crucial in any conflict, FM 3-24 states that it is even more important in counterinsurgency.[458] Although acquiring actionable intelligence on the adversary forms an indispensable part of the overall intelligence activities, insight in the operational environment in a broader sense than terrain is also considered crucial. An expeditionary counterinsurgent force must possess a working understanding of the culture, history and value system of the area and its inhabitants in which it operates.[459]

Thus, FM 3-24 emphasizes that counterinsurgency operations require other competencies from armed forces than in conventional warfare. As such, armed forces generally have to perform tasks that are normally in the remit of civilian agencies. In this sense, the field manual fits within the earlier prescriptions on counterinsurgency.

In January 2007, the champion of the field manual, David Petraeus, was promoted and appointed to the overall commander in Iraq. He was to implement the proposed new approach and received significant additional troops and resources. When subsequently violence in Iraq decreased, this suggested that this population centric approach to counterinsurgency worked. Later research shows that this effort, colloquially known as "the Surge", concurrently reinforced and benefitted from prevailing local conditions such as the co-option of Sunni tribes and a truce with Shia militias.[460] At the time, following the apparent success of "the Surge" in Iraq, population centric counterinsurgency seemed to provide an adequate and palatable answer to the intractable conflicts in which Western militaries found themselves mired in.

Despite the apparent success of the new counterinsurgency approach in Iraq, the concept was by no means uncontroversial. The criticism ranged from questioning the intellectual underpinnings of *FM 3-24* and the applicability to modern insurgencies, to the cautioning

457 Ibid, p. 160-167.

458 Ibid, p. 79.

459 Ibid, p. 80-92.

460 Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro (2012), "Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?" *International Security*, 37 (3), p. 36-40.

against counterinsurgency as a "dangerous myth".[461] Among the most vocal critics of the counterinsurgency approach applied in Iraq are Gian Gentile and Douglas Porch.[462] These detractors of counterinsurgency shared some arguments against the concept. A prime argument of Gentile and Porch is that the U.S. military had overemphasized counterinsurgency operations, which in turn had diminished the U.S. military's ability to fight conventional wars. Indeed, according to Gentile and Porch, an army that is well prepared for conventional combat, will adapt more easily to the challenges of counterinsurgency than *vice versa*. This means that the American military (and by extension other Western armed forces) should focus on conventional capabilities to ensure they are ready for any contingencies.[463]

Furthermore, Gentile and Porch contend that population centric counterinsurgency is an assortment of tactics that has been sold as a strategy. According to them, the advocates of population centric counterinsurgency promise success when these tactics are applied. The inherent danger is that counterinsurgency falsely poses as a winning strategy, providing incentives to engage in foreign adventures.[464] This argument is disingenuous, as the proponents of counterinsurgency have lamented the lack of strategic and have explicitly warned that doctrine can never be a substitute.[465] Another argument by Gentile and Porch is that modern counterinsurgency theory is based on a misrepresentation of counterinsurgency campaigns from the colonial and Cold War eras. They argue that current doctrine overstates the importance of benevolent, non-kinetic tactics, while in reality brutal coercive measures were more prevalent.[466] While this analysis of previous counterinsurgency campaigns is historically correct, this does not invalidate the aspiration to curtail the use of force by counterinsurgents. Rather, it is an indication that counterinsurgents often predominantly rely on the use of military force to address a political problem.

The skeptical view regarding the applicability of classical counterinsurgency theory from the Cold War in contemporary operations was not beholden to the detractors of counterinsurgency. Proponents of population centric counterinsurgency questioned the relevance of experiences from the Cold War to contemporary conflicts as well. Given

461 For the latter qualification, see: Douglas Porch (2011). The dangerous myths and dubious promise of COIN. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22(2), pp. 239-257.

462 Their arguments against counterinsurgency have been offered in various articles and are available in their books: Gian Gentile (2013). *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency.* New York: The New Press; Douglas Porch (2013). *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War.* New York: Cambridge University Press. See for a critical review of these books: David Ucko (2014). Critics gone wild: Counterinsurgency as the root of all evil. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 25(1), pp. 161-179.

463 Gian Gentile, (2010). Freeing the Army from the Counterinsurgency Straitjacket. *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 58(3), 121-122 ; Douglas Porch (2013). *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War.* New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 318-320.

464 Douglas Porch (2013). *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War.* New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 9; Gian Gentile (2009). A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army. *Parameters*, 39(3), p. 6-7.

465 Sara Sewall (2007). Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition, *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. xl-xli.

466 Douglas Porch (2011). The dangerous myths and dubious promise of COIN. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22(2), p. 252-253; Gian Gentile (2009). A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army. *Parameters*, 39(3), p. 8-9.

the apparent roots from classical counterinsurgency theories, FM 3-24 was considered as a manifestation 'neo-classical' counterinsurgency. It adapted historical principles and imperatives to the 21st century. Yet, scholars like John Mackinlay, Frank Hoffman, and T.X Hammes contend that the insurgencies of the 21st century differ considerably from those during the Cold War. For instance, the adversaries are no longer Maoist revolutions inspired by secular or nationalistic ideals, but rather local Islamic insurgencies that are unified by religious motives. Therefore, these scholars argue, the analysis underpinning FM 3-24 is outdated, and the proposed measures are insufficient for addressing the contemporary challenges. Rather than dusting off classical texts, Western armed forces should prepare to fight a global insurgency.[467]

The most influential thinker of this 'global insurgency school' is David Kilcullen, a former Australian infantry officer with experience as a company commander in East-Timor. Later on, he served as a counterinsurgency adviser for the American Department of Defense and in various positions across the Middle East. Kilcullen has written extensively on counterinsurgency based on his academic knowledge and his practical experiences. In his 2005 article "Countering global insurgency", he posited that the American-led 'Global War on Terror' was in fact a campaign against a global Islamist insurgency. Kilcullen lamented the US' strategy of aggregation "lumping together all terrorism", as this risked the creation of new enemies, overstretch and strategic failure.[468] A main premise of his thinking was that the adversaries in Iraq, Afghanistan and other theaters of this war should be regarded as insurgents rather than terrorists. By shifting the lens through which the West saw its enemies, it could adopt a more appropriate strategy. Instead of fighting a monolithic transnational organization consisting of psychopathic terrorists, Western forces were fighting local insurgencies who shared a common ideological outlook and operational styles. The methods employed by the insurgent groups, such as terrorism, are unacceptable, but their objectives could be grounded in legitimate grievances.[469] As such, Al Qaeda acted more as an inspiration than as a central insurgent headquarters.[470]

Consequently, Kilcullen argued, to defeat this global insurgency the application of classical counterinsurgency methods as prescribed in the 1960's was insufficient as these were intended to defeat an insurgency in a single country. As seen in the previous section, 'classical' counterinsurgency campaigns required a centrally directed overall plan in which the various instruments of power are used in concert. In a global insurgency, such an executive body does not exist. Furthermore, in the context of the 21st century, it is much harder to

467 John Mackinlay subscribes to this idea of a globalized insurgency with local nodes: *The Insurgent Archipelago*, p. 231-232; See also: T.X. Hammes (2012) The Future of Counterinsurgency, *Orbis*, *56*(4), pp. 565-587; F.G. Hoffman (2011-2012) Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency, *Parameters*, *41*(4), pp. 1-17.

468 David Kilcullen (2005). Countering Global Insurgency. *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, *28*(4), p. 608.

469 Kilcullen, 'Countering global insurgency', p. 605.

470 Ibidem, p. 598-600.

isolate insurgents from external support. Ungoverned spaces provide ample geographical sanctuaries, while the advent of internet provide 'cyber-sanctuaries' that can ensure the flow of information and finances.[471] Kilcullen advocated a strategy of 'disaggregation' by destroying the links between local insurgencies that allow them to function as a global insurgency. This does not mean the destruction of each local insurgency but rather isolating them from each other. Regional and local actors could then be neutralized through a mix of military and non-military measures, aimed at reducing popular support for the insurgencies.[472] To be successful in such diverse environments, counterinsurgents must be able to adapt and learn from experience.[473]

With these environmental changes, Kilcullen advocated to rethink the classical counterinsurgency principles.[474] Where classical counterinsurgency called for the destruction of the insurgent organization, Kilcullen states that in modern conflicts marginalization of insurgents will be more expedient as complete defeat will take decades. Time that is mostly not available to expeditionary counterinsurgency campaigns. [475] Later, Kilcullen expanded upon this by introducing the term "accelerated COIN". To reduce the level of violence in Iraq after 2006, Kilcullen saw a combination of coercive and persuasive methods. This approach was based on population centric counterinsurgency. The coercive element was an intense campaign of kinetic targeting of irreconcilable insurgents supported by a concentrated intelligence effort. The persuasive part was the cooption of other elements such as Sunni tribal militias. A further central element to this approach is the building of local security forces. As the Western commitment to expeditionary counterinsurgency is limited in time, the host-nation's security forces must be assisted to be able to bear the burden of combating the insurgency. As such, the training, mentoring, and advising the local forces is not only essential to eventual counterinsurgent success but also to the Western exit-strategy.[476]

Another hypothesis by Kilcullen is that counterinsurgency is 100 per cent political. By this he means that there are no purely military considerations. Even at the lowest tactical level, soldiers must be aware of political consequences of their actions.[477] This notion is elaborated upon in Kilcullen's "Twenty-Eight Articles," which provided prescriptions on how to conduct counterinsurgency operations at the company-level. It emphasized the centrality of understanding the environment and its inhabitants and the necessity of performing non-organic tasks such as liaising with local authorities, conducting information operations,

471 Ibid, p.606-608.

472 Ibid, p. 609-610; In later works Kilcullen recognized the limits of this strategy of disaggregation, see: David Kilcullen (2016). *Blood Year: The Unravelling of Western Counterterrorism.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 113-114.

473 David Kilcullen, (2010). *Counterinsurgency.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 19-20.

474 Kilcullen, 'Counterinsurgency redux,' p. 114-115.

475 Ibidem, p. 123

476 David Kilcullen. *Counterinsurgency*, p.42-43.

477 Kilcullen, 'Counterinsurgency redux,' p. 123

and policing the area.[478] Despite the notion of a globalized insurgency the prescriptions for military activity at the tactical level do not differ significantly from the classical era. Indeed, an adaptation of Kilcullen's "Twenty-Eight articles" features in FM 3-24.[479]

A final interesting work on counterinsurgency prescriptions is the study by RAND Corporation *Paths to Victory* (2013). Examining 71 insurgencies since the Second World War, the authors seek to distill the best practices to inform counterinsurgent responses. It evaluates counterinsurgency prescriptions against the outcomes of historical insurgencies to establish the correlation between the two. As opposed to other counterinsurgency texts, this study benefits from the wide array of case studies that goes beyond commonplace examples as Vietnam, Malaya, and Algeria. Furthermore, it is agnostic on counterinsurgency debates such as 'enemy-centric' versus 'population-centric' or the 'neo-classical' versus 'global insurgency' schools.[480]

Interestingly, the authors found that an exclusive enemy-centric approach by itself is historically far less successful than measures that are geared toward addressing the motives behind an insurgency (population-centric) or a mix of both.[481] In all the cases that the counterinsurgents were successful, the RAND-study found three practices were always implemented. First, the reduction of tangible support for the insurgency. By denying insurgents access to funds, intelligence, recruits, sanctuary and supplies, counterinsurgent forces will be successful. The report emphasizes that tangible support is different from popular support. For instance, external actors can supply insurgents. The second-best practice is "commitment and motivation" by the counterinsurgents to defeat the insurgency instead of narrow power retention or personal gains. The third and final factor found in every successful counterinsurgency case is "flexibility and adaptability". It recognizes that the insurgents have a say in the conflict. Therefore, the counterinsurgent forces must adapt to the insurgent tactics.[482]

For the military contribution to counterinsurgency, the RAND-study has further recommendations based on the case studies. First, it advocates a nuanced balance between population-centric and enemy-centric activities. Furthermore, the initial focus must be on denying the insurgents their conventional military capabilities and force them to fight as guerrillas. Additionally, identifying their sources of support to target them is deemed critical. Another prescription for expeditionary counterinsurgency is to build the host-nation's security force with a balance between quantity and quality. Still, the quality of these

478 See: David Kilcullen, (2006). Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency. *Small Wars Journal*.

479 US Army, *FM 3-24*, p. 287-303.

480 Christopher Paul, Colin Clarke, Bethany Grill and Molly Dunigan (2013). *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 1-11.

481 Paul, et. Al., *Paths to victory*, p. 180.

482 Ibidem, p. 181-183.

forces is more important than their numbers. The use of ill-trained militias to increase the volume of security forces is often detrimental to the counterinsurgency efforts. From a political perspective, enhancing the legitimacy, motivation and commitment of the host-nation's government is crucial to address the insurgency as external forces cannot form a substitute for this.[483] Beyond these highlighted recommendations, *Paths to Victory* offers other best practices, such as: coherent strategic communications, actionable intelligence, gradual pacification combined with fostering development and governance ("Clear-Hold-Build").[484] Interestingly, the study shows that cultural awareness is helpful in expeditionary counterinsurgency, it does not seem to be crucial.[485] The study emphasizes that these practices work best in conjunction, yet the implementation of these best practices require six years of consistent implementation to be successful.[486]

Overall, the 21st century's rediscovery of counterinsurgency saw some modest shifts from its theoretical lineage (see table 3.3). First, the Western perspective on counterinsurgency became that of expeditionary operations. In the new century, the United States and its allies had to support internally beleaguered regimes. In the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, these governments had of course been installed after Western interventions. A second apparent shift was that many of these modern insurgencies found their inspiration in religion rather than secular political ideology. In combination with globalization and the information revolution, this led to a globalized Islamist insurgency. Although not centrally directed, the links between local insurgencies helped in terms of finances, information operations, mobilization, and knowledge transfer. However, even the global insurgency school, as exemplified by Kilcullen, subscribes to most of the classical prescriptions at the tactical level.

483 Ibid., p. 188-190

484 See for an elaboration on each concept p. 86-137 and for a consolidated overview, p. 138.

485 Ibid., p. 125-127.

486 Ibid., p. 186-187

	FM 3-24	Kilcullen	RAND
Campaign plan/ objective	Comprehensive, interagency approach, legitimacy is main objective	Accelerated approach, control is key objective. Disaggregation of local insurgencies.	Gradual "clear-hold-build" approach. Legitimacy is main objective.
Role of military/ civil military cooperation	Limited in theory, yet often called to perform multitude of tasks in practice. Appropriate use of force. Fostering security. Interagency partners support governance and development	Coordination is crucial. Executive command in contemporary operations is virtually impossible. Militaries must adjust to other tasks.	Nuanced balance between enemy-centric and population-centric operations
Adaptability/learning	Counterinsurgents must adapt as fast as the insurgents and draw lessons	Counterinsurgency success depends on adaptability	Ability to learn and adapt is crucial to succeed.
Use of Intelligence	Both threat intelligence and broader understanding of the environment	Intelligence is part of information as the base for all other activities	Actionable intelligence is critical for targeting/ disrupting insurgents. Cultural awareness not deemed essential
Use of force/ actions against insurgents	"Appropriate use of force"	Targeting irreconcilables, severing links between areas/ insurgencies. Fostering security	Reducing tangible support for insurgents. Targeted disruption of insurgent activities
Non-kinetic effects/ persuasion	Information operations is the all-encompassing "logical line of operation". Grievances must be addressed through governance and development	Reconciliation and cooption, enhancing legitimacy. Information is the base for all other activities, perception of population is crucial	Development and perceived legitimacy are instrumental for success. Coherent strategic communication is important supporting activity

Table 3.3 Counterinsurgency prescriptions and principles in the 21st century

3.5: Conclusion

Examining the intellectual lineage of modern counterinsurgency concepts and comparing the different theoretical prescriptions can be perceived as an academic parlor game. Still, as shown in this chapter, many of the current counterinsurgency paradigms can be traced to the colonial era and subsequently to the Cold War. Admittedly, this selection of sages and their writings is limited in scope. Yet, to reiterate, these prescriptions have influenced later works and doctrine on counterinsurgency. Therefore, the evolutionary path and substance of counterinsurgency knowledge should be studied to examine to what extent modern armed forces have (re)discovered them in modern conflicts such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, by listing the "historical" prescriptions, novel best practices in counterinsurgencies that fall outside of this scope can be determined.

A fundamental aspect of these prescriptions is that counterinsurgencies form a distinct type of warfare. Consequently, counterinsurgency requires different skill sets than conventional warfare. Based on the prescriptions on counterinsurgency from three different eras, several common themes emerge (see table 3.4). In general, the counterinsurgency prescriptions point to the necessity of a comprehensive campaign plan. In these plans objectives are couched in terms as "pacification", "legitimacy", "defeating political subversion" or, "obtaining control over the population". Thus, as these objectives indicate, insurgencies are fundamentally political problems. As a result, the employment of the military in countering insurgencies forms a crucial but subsidiary contribution.

Recurring themes in counterinsurgency prescriptions
Integral campaign plan
Ability to learn and adapt
Interagency cooperation
Primacy of intelligence
Utility of non-kinetic activities
Countering adversarial activities

Table 3.4 Consolidated themes on counterinsurgency

This is reflected in the identified themes. Although the prescriptions were often written from a military perspective, the authors recognized that the military could not produce success on its own. Instead, a comprehensive plan under civilian authorities is needed to address insurgencies. Counterinsurgents must use all instruments of power in concert; in

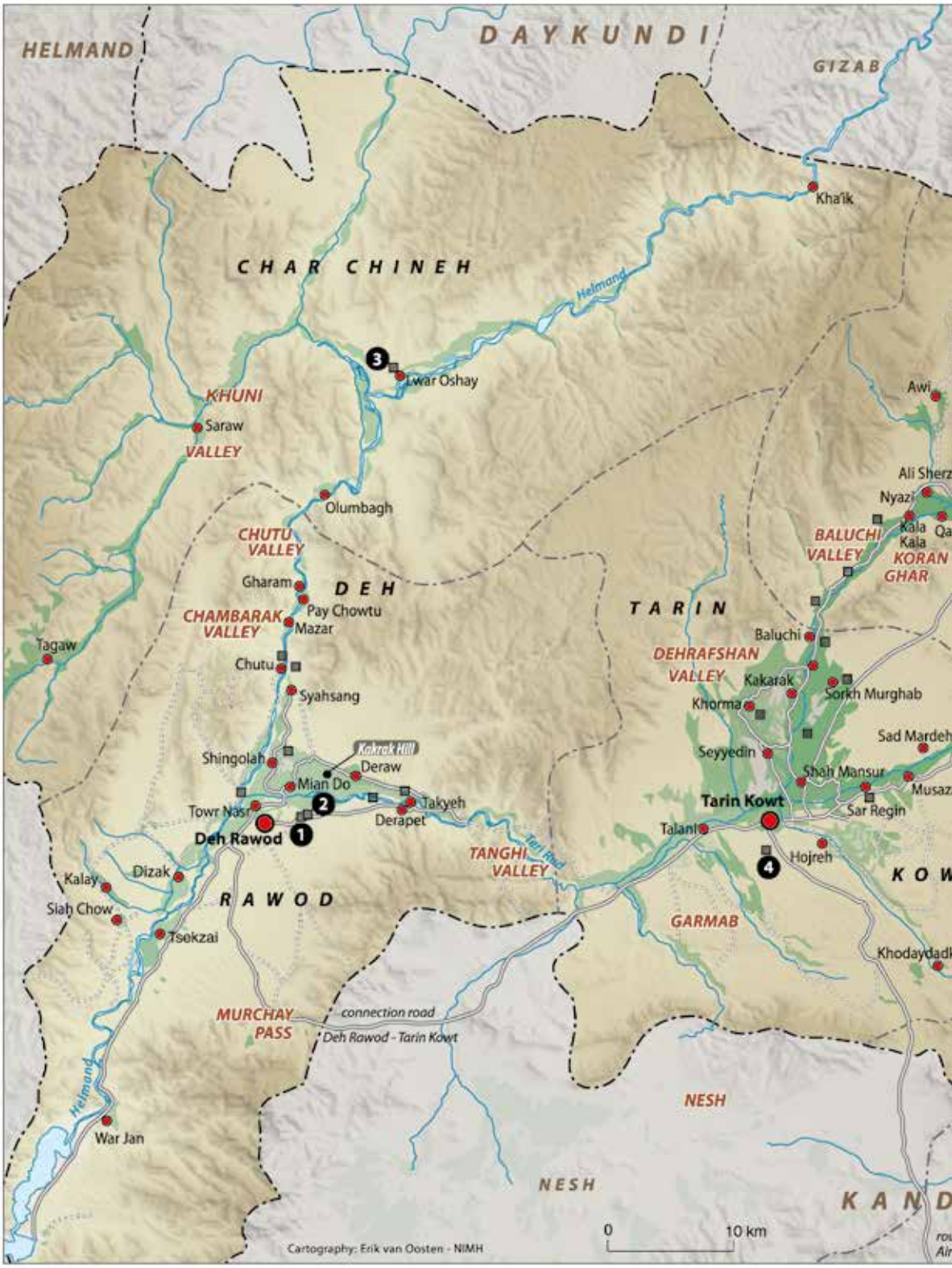
practice this means that various agencies must cooperate intimately to obtain control over the population. To win the population's support, counterinsurgents must employ persuasive methods such as fostering security, economic development, and improved governance. Although such tasks are not the primary responsibility of soldiers, in practice troops have often performed these non-kinetic activities during counterinsurgency operations. Still, military units must collaborate with a host of actors in counterinsurgency, ranging from other government agencies, host-nation officials, the local population, non-governmental organizations, and informal powerbrokers.

As for countering enemy activities, the prescriptions increasingly state that the excessive force aimed at destroying the insurgents and their support is counterproductive. Instead, the military should be focused on separating the insurgents from the population. This then denies the insurgents their base of support and hampers their activities. To be sure, the use of force is often required, but these kinetic activities should be highly discriminating. For this, intelligence on the identity and location of the insurgents is crucial. However, Kitson, Kilcullen and FM 3-24 argue that a thorough understanding of the human environment is essential to understand the dynamics of the conflict. These works advocate a profound knowledge on linguistic, social, cultural, historical, and other aspects of the area of operations. Not only can this help in acquiring intelligence on enemy activities, but this intelligence can also guide non-kinetic activities as information operations.

Newer counterinsurgency prescriptions as FM 3-24 continue to subscribe to the classical notions and differ mostly in emphasis. For Western armed forces, the expeditionary character of counterinsurgency operations is a salient aspect. This means that they must support a host-nation government and help build local security forces that can ultimately combat the insurgents by themselves. Of course, this cooperation with the host-nation provides additional challenges for counterinsurgent forces. Another aspect that has received increased attention in recent years is the centrality of information operations. This is a recognition that the perception of different audiences such as the local population, the insurgents and the domestic public is essential in counterinsurgency. Finally, the counterinsurgent's ability to learn and adapt is noticeable in the Cold War prescriptions. In the more recent works, this theme is even more pronounced as essential for counterinsurgency success.

For armed forces engaged in counterinsurgency campaigns these common themes do not form a checklist to which they must adhere, to attain success. Of course, following a set of prescriptions will not produce success in the absence of a viable strategy that is attuned to the specific dynamics of a given conflict. As the examined counterinsurgency prescriptions emphasize, employment of the military on its own is insufficient in these conflicts. Moreover, the enemy gets a vote; the insurgent will learn and adapt to mitigate the counterinsurgent's activities. Still, the identified themes form a frame of reference. Combined with the

theoretical framework of chapter 2 on how military learning processes work in relation to conflict, the dynamics of learning in counterinsurgency operations can be examined. In chapter 4 and 5, the Dutch and British learning processes in southern Afghanistan on the established themes are analyzed. Therefore, the case studies will look into the performance at the campaign level through, for example, the campaign plans and assessments. Furthermore, the ability to adapt will be examined through the learning processes in the Dutch and British militaries. Finally, more in-depth vignettes on interagency cooperation, intelligence, non-kinetic activities and mitigating efforts against enemy activities will help assess the extent of learning in southern Afghanistan and beyond.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Sarab
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Kala
Khas Uruzgan
Karlagho
Chalabey
Chenartu
CHORA
Teri Rud
MIRABAD
VALLEY
Charmestan
ZABUL
DAYCHOPAN
SHAH WALI KOT
1 Camp Hadrian
2 Firebase Tycz
3 FOB Cobra/ Tinsley
4 FOB Ripley - Kamp Holland - Multinational Base Tarin Kowt
5 White Compound en Brown Compound
6 FOB Anaconda

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: Uruzgan, the Dutch experience

4.1: Introduction

From 2002 to 2014, the Dutch armed forces were part of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. During the mission 25 service members lost their lives. The focal point of the Dutch contribution to the campaign in Afghanistan was its mission to Uruzgan province (2006-2010). From the outset, the deployment of the Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) was perceived to be the most intense mission since the Dutch participation in the Korean War.[487] In retrospect, Dutch service members indeed regard the TFU-mission as a formative experience for the Dutch military.[488]

This chapter examines the impact of the Uruzgan mission on the Dutch armed forces regarding learning processes and knowledge retention, analyzing both formal and informal processes of adaptation during the mission. Furthermore, the chapter scrutinizes the extent to which this knowledge has been institutionalized in the Dutch military afterwards. Throughout the chapter, the influence on the learning processes of the factors identified in chapter 2 will be examined, with observation of the additional aspects identified in chapter 3.

To describe the impact of the Uruzgan mission on the Dutch military, this chapter consists of three sections. In the first section the run-up to the mission in Uruzgan is outlined. It offers an overview of the Dutch strategic and organizational culture, recent military operations prior to Uruzgan, conceptual foundations, the political decision-making process, and the preparation for the mission. The second section focuses on the Dutch experiences in Uruzgan itself. This part offers an analysis of the campaign planning, execution, and evaluation from a perspective of learning. Furthermore, it examines several vignettes of manifestations of learning during the campaign such as: the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Counter-IED, intelligence and information operations. Finally, the third section examines how the Dutch armed forces tried to institutionalize the lessons from Uruzgan and the extent to which they succeeded in this endeavor.

487 George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21(3), p. 429.

488 Almost without exception, the Dutch service members interviewed for this dissertation stressed the impact of the mission, for better or worse, on the Dutch armed forces. By design, the military personnel interviewed were selected because of their experience in Uruzgan.

4.2: The run-up to Uruzgan

4.2.1: Strategic and organizational cultures

After the end of the Cold War, the Dutch strategic outlook for the use of its armed forces can be defined by two main considerations: exporting stability and being relevant to its allies.[489] The emphasis on the projection of international stability has its historical roots in the Dutch orientation on maritime commerce. Peace and general adherence to international institutions and regulations foster international trade. As such, international stability is beneficial to the Netherlands and a prime consideration for the use of its military. Yet, the Dutch focus on international order and stability entails more than just its own interests, it has a profound moral, or even idealist component to it.[490] As such the Netherlands has been willing to deploy its military to uphold the international rule of law. This is enshrined in article 97 of the Dutch constitution that states that the armed forces are "to defend and protect the interests of the kingdom and to support and promote the international rule of law".[491]

A key way the two aims above are expressed, beyond national defence, is that the Dutch armed forces are considered an instrument that can be utilized for enhancing its value to the international partners. By participating in international missions, the Netherlands wants to show itself as a reliable partner and aims to acquire additional political capital. In this calculation, the more risk (or responsibility) the Netherlands is willing to take on corresponds with more international clout.

These tenets are not mutually exclusive but require a balancing act for Dutch foreign policy. Although the weight distribution to the tenets can differ from case to case, both are given attention in the political decision-making process before (and during) military deployments. Habitually, the benevolent aspects of the missions for the local population or international stability are advertised. The 'realistic' approach to expeditionary operations is also discernible in the political discourse, albeit often in more couched words.[492] Moreover, while the Netherlands is willing to contribute to international missions, it requires a mandate that is sanctioned by international law to do so.

489 Rem Korteweg (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press. p. 233.

490 Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga (2010). Military Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in the Netherlands. In T. Terriff, F. Osinga, & T. Farrell (Eds.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press p. 112.

491 Dutch constitution, article 97

492 In official documents, the rationale to contributing to international missions is referred to as being a "reliable ally" and taking one's responsibility.

Additionally, these elements have been equated with the tension between the orientation to either its European continental neighbors (stability) or its Atlantic partners in the form of the United States and the United Kingdom.[493] Evidently, this tension does not represent a dichotomy either but reflects the Netherlands (cultivated) self-image as a link between continental Europe and the Anglo-Saxon countries.

These strategic considerations are both reflected and reinforced by the Dutch political structure. Governments in the Netherlands are invariably formed by coalitions of two, but often more, political parties. Consequently, the deployment of troops to international missions is a result of consensus building. The specific make-up of the government can shape the type of missions the Netherlands is willing to participate in. At face value, a center-left coalition will emphasize humanitarian objectives, while a center-right combination will be more prone to follow allied exhortations to contribute to missions. However, both considerations of stability projection and being a good ally are always present in the justifications for the deployments, regardless of the incumbent government.[494]

A further salient aspect of this strategic culture is the apparent lack of martial spirit of Dutch society. To be sure, history is replete with examples of Dutch willingness to employ military force to attain foreign policy objectives, especially in colonial contexts. Moreover, this label does not necessarily extend to the self-image of Dutch military.[495] However, in Dutch public and political discourse the use of military force in an instrumental fashion is either absent or discussed with negative connotations. Hence, military aspects of missions are often couched in euphemistic terms for public and political consumption.[496] This underpins the reality that pursuing foreign policy objectives by employing the military to prove itself a relevant ally is carefully laced with the idiom of promoting international order and adherence to humanitarian law.

These specific traits of Dutch strategic culture naturally shaped the employment of the Dutch armed forces in the early 21st century. The balancing act between idealistic and realistic motives for participation in expeditionary missions is a recurring theme in contemporary

493 See Alfred Pijpers (1996). The Netherlands: The weakening pull of atlanticism. In C. Hill (Ed.), *The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy* (pp. 247-267). London: Routledge, p. 259; Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press. p. 249-251

494 Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga (2010). Military Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in the Netherlands. In T. Terriff, F. Osinga, & T. Farrell (Eds.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 112. Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press., p 253-257.

495 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2013). The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counterinsurgency. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36(3), p. 870-872.

496 Wim Klinkert (2008). *Van Waterloo tot Uruzgan: De Nederlandse militaire identiteit*. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA p. 19-20; Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 240-241.

Dutch military history. How these aspects have affected the learning processes by the Dutch military in relation to the missions will be explored in the next chapters.

Beyond these structural influences, it is hard to overstate the impact of the Srebrenica-massacre on contemporary Dutch strategic and, to a lesser extent, organizational culture. When the lightly-armed Dutch troops were unable to protect the "safe-area" and prevent the subsequent killing of approximately eight thousand people, the Dutch political caste was rudely awakened to the realities and limitations of expeditionary operations by its armed forces. To prevent new debacles as Srebrenica, an "Evaluation Framework" was implemented to assist political deliberations on international missions.[497] This amounted to a frame of reference that the government must explicate to parliament before participation to an expeditionary mission. Crucial aspects of the framework are the availability of a clear and robust mandate, escalation dominance, cooperation with allies and broad political support. Although it should not be considered a formal checklist, the points enumerated in the framework has enabled the parliament to thoroughly influence the scope and guidelines of the mission.[498] This influence can range from political aspects as national mandate, caveats and personnel caps to technical characteristics as deploying certain capabilities and equipment.[499]

Like most militaries, the Dutch armed forces do not have a strong singular organizational culture. In works describing the Dutch military culture, the level of analysis comprises the services: the Royal Netherlands Navy, Royal Netherlands Army, Royal Netherlands Air Force, and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (gendarmerie).[500] Still, an important generic cultural trait of the Dutch armed forces is the deference by senior officers to civilian leadership in strategic thinking. Consequently, the military input in strategy formulation is limited. Instead, domestic political considerations, such as the support of party constituencies for military endeavors and coalition cohesion, often have more impact on strategic plans than military feasibility.[501] That this emphasis can infringe on military operations in the field has been documented by both evaluators and scholars.[502]

497 Kathleen McInnis (2020). *How and Why States Defect from Contemporary Military Coalitions*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 176-178.

498 Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.p. 259-262.

499 Christ Klep and Richard van Gils (2005). *Van Korea tot Kabul: De Nederlandse militaire deelname aan vredesoperaties sinds 1945*. Den Haag: Sdu uitgevers, p. 432.

500 Jan van der Meulen, Axel Rosendahl Huber and Joseph Soeters (2000). The Netherlands'Armed Forces: An Organization Preparing for the Next Century. In J. Kuhlmann, & J. Callaghan (Eds.), *Military and Society in 21st Century Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, p. 286-287; Roy de Ruiter(2018). *Breuklijn 1989: Continuiteit en verandering in het Nederlandse defensiebeleid 1989-1993*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, 80-87.

501 Lars Deijkers (2020). *Politieke zuinigheid en militaire volgzaamheid: De militaire strategie van Nederland in de periode 2000-2014*. Culemborg: Armex Special, p. 54-57.

502 Ministerie van Defensie. (2006). *Eindevaluatie Stabilisation Force Iraq (SFIR), 2003-2005*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p. 20-21; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2019). *Op zoek naar draagvlak: De geintegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan*. Den Haag: Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie, p. 36; Arthur ten Cate and Thijs Brocades

For the Dutch armed forces, the 1990's were marked by the conversion from preparing for the eventuality of a war with the Warsaw-pact towards an expeditionary stabilization mission in intrastate conflicts. The Royal Netherlands Army most intensely felt this development. Originally a force based on conscription with a small professional cadre, the army had to restructure and professionalize to ready itself for operations abroad.[503] The formative experience for the Dutch armed forces were undoubtedly the Balkan Wars that dominated the European security landscape in this decade. From 1992 to the early new millennium, Dutch military personnel participated in various roles: monitoring, humanitarian assistance, peace keeping, peace enforcement, stabilization and as part of the air campaign over Yugoslavia. For the Dutch armed forces, this period was defined most profoundly by its inability to prevent the Srebrenica massacre in 1995.[504]

As this research mainly examines land operations and the bulk of the Task Force Uruzgan was provided by the Dutch Army, its organizational culture is the most relevant for the current study. Yet, the army's culture is not monolithic, as it consists of various arms and branches. As such it emphasizes the orchestration of these elements for combined arms operations in conventional warfare. During the Cold War, the Dutch Army was focused on maintaining a deterrent posture against the Warsaw Pact.[505] In the last three decades, it has been extensively deployed to expeditionary stabilization missions that require different skill sets. Still, this effort has had to balance with readiness for conventional warfare and this has been challenging as the army's ability to conduct combined arms operations was diminished over time by successive budget cuts. Although the army culturally maintained a predilection for conventional warfare in training, it valued the stabilization missions to show its value to the political leadership and retain capabilities.[506] As such, the shrinking Dutch army had to seek a balance between the requirements of conventional warfare and stabilization operations.

4.2.2: Preambles in Iraq and Afghanistan

The 9/11-attacks of 2001 heralded a new era for the Dutch military in which it participated in the conflicts that followed from the American response. In several [theoretically] discrete

Zaalberg (2014). *A Gentle Occupation*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 68-70; Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Army Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 194-195.

503 See for an in-depth analysis of this period: Roy de Ruiter, (2018). *Breuklijn 1989: Continuiteit en verandering in het Nederlandse defensiebeleid 1989-1993*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy.

504 Jan van der Meulen, Axel Rosendahl Huber and Joseph Soeters (2000). The Netherlands'Armed Forces: An Organization Preparing for the Next Century. In J. Kuhlmann, & J. Callaghan (Eds.), *Military and Society in 21st Century Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, p. 287-289

505 De Ruiter, *Breuklijn 1989*, p. 93-99.

506 De Wijk and Osinga, *Innovating on a Shrinking Playing Field*, p. 128-129.

missions, the Netherlands contributed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[507] The subsequent subsections will examine these missions leading up to the deployment to Uruzgan.[508]

4.2.2.1: ISAF Kabul

A day after the 9/11 attacks, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), adopted resolution 1368 that sanctioned operations against the perpetrators of the attacks. At the same day, NATO's North Atlantic Council invoked the alliance's Article 5 by which the terrorist act was considered an attack on the allies as well.[509] As a result, there was a clear international mandate to provide military support. Shortly after the start of the American military response in October 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the Netherlands initiated military support to the operation. This support consisted mainly of naval and air force units. At this stage however, the Dutch troops and equipment were emphatically excluded from engaging in combat operations in (or over) Afghanistan. Rather, they served as a backfill, enabling American units to conduct counterterrorism operations.[510]

The Dutch involvement in Afghanistan started in January 2002 with a deployment to the capital Kabul under the auspices of the International Security Assistance Force. Sanctioned by the UN (Resolution 1386), the ISAF was to assist the fledgling Afghan government in securing Kabul and its surroundings and to help building Afghan security forces. As such, ISAF was a discrete but closely related mission to OEF which conducted combat operations across Afghanistan.

The Dutch contingent was primarily made up of an augmented infantry company and a special forces platoon. Its tasks amounted to reconnaissance missions, social patrols, and training recruits of the Afghan army. While the security situation in Kabul in 2002 and 2003 was quite permissive, the Dutch troops did experience that the calm was fragile. Although the contingent did not engage in combat, the presence of militias and the threat posed by IEDs contributed to the tension in the Afghan capital. The mission was concluded in the summer of 2003.

In addition to the augmented infantry company, the Netherlands and Germany provided the staffing for ISAF's headquarters from February to August 2003. Under the guidance of this

507 Of course, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were essentially part of the American led campaign against terror following the 9/11 attacks. The Netherlands contributed to these conflicts in distinct missions with different mandates and force configurations based on the interplay between domestic political will and pressure exerted by allies. As such, there was little strategic coherence between these missions during continuous conflicts.

508 The Dutch armed forces contributed to more missions than just these.

509 At the time, political support largely sufficed for the United States. Instead of direct military support, the US preferred to have a free hand to deal with Al Qaeda and associated entities.

510 Klep and Van Gils. *Van Korea tot Kabul*, p. 442-451.

joint headquarters, ISAF took on a more active role. It increased the number of patrols in the city to enhance its situational awareness. Moreover, it helped restructure the Afghan ministries of Interior and Defense (responsible for the Afghan security forces), initiated a demobilization program and helped in the preparations for the constitutional *Loyah Jirga* (grand assembly).[511] Consequently, a campaign plan was drafted with the support of operational analysts that were attached to the staff from the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO). This resulted in a plan that incorporated the mission objectives, lines of effort, influencing factors and effects to be achieved. A further benefit of adding the operational analysts to the staff was that they could assess the results of the operations by, for example, surveys among the population of Kabul on their support for ISAF. This allowed the headquarters to process these metrics and adjust its plans based on this data.[512]

The mission in Kabul in 2002-2003 marked the first experiences by Dutch forces in Afghanistan. Due to the relatively benign security situation, the deployment was regarded as a stabilization effort. Nevertheless, it gave Dutch service members a first feel of operations in the Afghan context.

4.2.2.2: PRT Baghlan

After the mission in Kabul, the Dutch armed forces extended their presence in Afghanistan to the northern province Baghlan. This was part of the gradual expansion of ISAF over the whole of Afghanistan. Between October 2004 and September 2006, The Netherlands deployed six rotations of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The PRT-concept was established by the United States in 2002 to assist Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In 2003 ISAF adopted the concept. By participating to this specific mission, the Netherlands emphasized its more principled outlook, as it was envisioned as a stabilization mission with concurrent development aspects.

Thus, the objectives of the PRT in Baghlan included monitoring local and regional developments, assisting the Afghan government with expanding and consolidating its authority, facilitating cooperation between the various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations (IOs). Additionally, it supported the local population with initiating development projects that were not supported by NGOs.[513]

511 Klep and Van Gils. *Van Korea tot Kabul*, p. 548.

512 Freek-Jan Toevank and Rudi Gouweleeuw (2004). Operationeel analisten bij ISAF-III. *Militaire Spectator*, 173(10), p. 475-480.

513 Klep en Van Gils, *Korea tot Kabul*, p. 461.

Based in the provincial capital Pol-e-Khomri, the Dutch PRT consisted of three mission teams under military leadership, a political advisor (POLAD) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a force protection element, and a logistical support element with a total of 150 personnel. Initially, the mission was led by service members from the Dutch Air Force. From September 2005, the Dutch Navy assumed a leading position in the PRT.

Although aspects such as Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Civilian-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) echoed the experiences of the Balkans-missions, the PRT-concept was new for both ISAF and the Dutch armed forces. Moreover, central guidance from the department level was sparse. As a result, the PRT-commanders, and their staffs (including the POLAD) had to formulate their own mission plan. This "Master Plan" incorporated a comprehensive approach of "Defence, Diplomacy and Development". The PRT-commanders appreciated the leeway, but nevertheless the lack of national guidance was identified as a point for evaluation for future missions.[514]

The PRT in Baghlan could operate in a benign environment. Local militias were generally cooperative when they had to be disbanded. Furthermore, the PRT had good relationships with the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan National Army (ANA). It also succeeded in improving the collaboration between the Afghan security forces in the province by establishing a "Provincial Coordination Centre". During the mission, the security situation in the province did deteriorate, as was manifested by attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These attacks led to several individuals being wounded and warranted an increased focus on force protection.[515]

This first Dutch experience with the PRT-concept led to several other observations that were incorporated in the mission design for Uruzgan. First, the official evaluation acknowledged that the PRT needed discretionary funds to help facilitate development projects. A second observation was that the PRT should have more civilian representation from other departments with specific skills in its organization. For Uruzgan, this meant including additional political advisors for development and a cultural specialist. With this enhanced civilian presence, the military personnel of the PRT could focus on CIMIC, SSR and other specific military tasks. A third observation was that the effects of the efforts by the PRT in Baghlan could not be assessed. To determine the efficacy of projects, the PRT in Uruzgan should report on its results to guide plans.[516]

514 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Eindevaluatie Provincial Reconstruction Team Baghlan*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p. 8.

515 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Eindevaluatie Provincial Reconstruction Team Baghlan.* Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p. 24-26.

516 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Eindevaluatie Provincial Reconstruction Team Baghlan*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p, 20-22.

Thus, the PRT in Baghlan provided a trial run for the PRT in Uruzgan. Of course, the environment in Afghanistan's northern provinces was at the time far more permissive than in the volatile south. It did result in several generic observations that could potentially benefit the PRT in Uruzgan. How this knowledge affected the efforts in Uruzgan will be discussed below.

4.2.2.3: Stabilization Force Iraq

When the United States and its small "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq in March 2003, the Netherlands remained in the background, providing only political support. In this instance, adherence to international law and humanitarian considerations prevailed over being a good ally.[517] Undoubtedly, the dubious American and British justifications for the invasion and the related adverse public opinion in the Netherlands contributed to the government's reluctance to offer practical assistance rather than a token endorsement.[518]

Yet, this calculus changed shortly after the initial conventional campaign. While the American and coalition forces occupied Iraq, the Dutch government felt it could contribute a troop contingent for a stabilization mission, preferably sanctioned by a UN mandate. In the event, the UN mandate was issued a few months after the Netherlands had deployed a battle group (augmented battalion of Marines) to the southern province Al Muthanna in the summer of 2003. Although the Dutch battle group became an integral part of the command structure of the occupying forces, the Netherlands sought to frame the mission as separate from the American and British allies. This posturing was translated into two caveats: the Dutch would not take on administrative tasks nor would they take the lead in law enforcement. Although this distinction made political sense, the caveats proved to be impractical from a military perspective as the Dutch troops were the primary foreign military presence in the province. Moreover, and understandably so, these nuances in the national mandate were lost on the local population and embryonic Iraqi authorities in the area.[519]

When the Dutch battle group deployed to Al Muthanna, it was called upon to provide security by the local population. The main problem proved to be criminal activities, rather than an insurgency. Given the ineptitude of the local police forces, the Dutch troops quickly had to assume a leading role, thereby contradicting the imposed caveats by The Hague. This led to instances where Dutch troops had to confront looters, disperse rioters, and even conduct arrest operations. In the meanwhile, the battle group strove to increase the

517 Ten Cate and Brocades Zaalberg. *A Gentle Occupation*, p. 30-34.

518 Regardless, the political support to mission later led to a political crisis after an independent investigative committee concluded that the Dutch government had been too uncritical towards the American and British rationales for initiating the war.

519 Ten Cate and Brocades Zaalberg. *A Gentle Occupation*, p. 252-258.

numbers of security forces and enhance their quality. As for the administrative tasks, the battle group commanders and the POLAD's found that they could not shun a leading role in the province. Al Muthanna was plagued by unemployment and governance vacuum. The Dutch helped establish a provincial council that subsequently elected a provincial governor, again circumventing the national caveats. Furthermore, the Dutch battle group engaged in reconstruction tasks such as repairing the cement factory, refurbishing schools, and road construction. The vast majority of costs were covered by the American occupational administration, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). While this enabled the Dutch to "buy consent" in Al Muthanna, this meant closer association with the occupation powers.[520]

Over the spring and summer of 2004, the security situation in the province deteriorated as it came under the influence of the Shi'ite revolt that was instigated by Moqtada al Sadr. This was exacerbated when the CPA transferred authority to Iraqi administrations and ceased to exist, meaning that the reconstruction funds largely dried up. Furthermore, the Dutch had to reconfigure their relationship to the provincial authorities.[521] Attacks on the local security forces and international troops intensified during this period. Two Dutch service members were killed by enemy action in May and August 2004. Although the Dutch battle group's hold on the province was ultimately not challenged by insurgents, the decreasing security added to the sense that the mission entailed far more than a peace operation.[522] The Dutch concluded their mission in early 2005.

The ostensible success of the Dutch contingent in Al Muthanna contrasted with the general deteriorating situation in Iraq. Eventually, this even gave rise to touting a distinct "Dutch Approach" in which Dutch forces proved more culturally adept in managing the stabilization challenges than their more heavy-handed American allies.[523] In reality, this success could be partly ascribed to the distinct contemporary dynamics of Al Muthanna in which insurgent groups held little sway over the province. The relatively low level of violence in the Dutch sector was certainly not the result of a carefully designed campaign plan at the outset of the mission. This is not to say that the rotations of Dutch Marine and Army battalions had not acquitted themselves commendably. Ironically, the relative successes by the commanders and their troops on the ground were possible because they operated at, and even beyond, the constraints imposed on them by the national mandate.

520 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate (2012). A Gentle Occupation: unravelling the Dutch approach in Iraq, 2003-2005. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *23*(1), p. 124-126.

521 Ibidem, p. 130-131

522 Ten Cate and Brocades Zaalberg (2014). *A Gentle Occupation*, p. 171-195.

523 See Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2013). The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counterinsurgency. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *36*(3), 867-897. The success was also noted by the Americans that sought to use Al Muthanna as a model to transfer authority to local governance across Iraq.

The mission in Al Muthanna thus formed an experience in assuming a leading role in an under-governed province. It showed that, despite various national caveats, the ability to opt out of certain tasks was proven impractical by events on the ground. Governance, reconstruction, and law enforcement fell to the battle group, regardless of whether it was mandated or designed to do so. One of the main findings in subsequent evaluations was that a battalion-staff was inadequate level to coordinate all these aspects of the mission. Furthermore, the militaries capabilities related to intelligence and civil-military cooperation were underdeveloped, yet critical in a stabilization or counterinsurgency mission.[524]

4.2.2.4: Task Group Orange in Kandahar

A final preamble to Uruzgan was formed by the deployment of the Dutch Special Forces Task Group-Afghanistan (SFTG-A, later rechristened to Task Group Orange) to Kandahar from May 2005 to March 2006. Its area of operations were two sparsely populated districts of Kandahar province bordering on Pakistan. As opposed to the PRT in Baghlan, the deployment of SFTG-A was in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The mission of the SFTG-A was to dismantle the infrastructure of "Opposing Militant Forces", interdicting logistical lines and support the establishment of local Afghan government. To this end, the special forces were to conduct combat operations and special reconnaissance missions.[525]

For this mission, a Special Forces Task Group was thus organized around a company of army Commando's, reinforced by teams of the Dutch Marine Corps. In addition to various enabling and logistical elements, these operators were supported by a detachment of Chinook helicopters that allowed them to extend their operational range in the desert of southern Kandahar. A further notable aspect of this deployment was that the Dutch government declared that the Task Group would operate under the legal provisions for wartime operations. The purpose of this announcement was to take away any confusion regarding the rules of engagement within the robust - to Dutch standards - mandate of SFTG-A.[526] In this regard the deployment to Kandahar can be considered as an atypical mission for the Dutch armed forces. Uncharacteristically, the mission was engendered for the more 'realistic' objective of proving to be a dependable ally.[527]

While its organization, command structure and mandate indicated a mission with high probability of confronting adversaries, SFTG-A encountered no resistance in its area of

524 Defensie. *Eindevaluatie SFIR*, p. 20-26.

525 Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Army Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p, 171-174.

526 Ibidem, p. 174.

527 This aspect was emphasized in the official evaluation, see: Ministerie van Defensie. (2006). *Evaluatie Nederlandse Special Forces Taakgroep in Operation Enduring Freedom, April 2005 - April 2006*. Den Haag, p, 16.

operations. Instead, the special forces chose to change tack and actively engage with the population to acquire better understanding about the local dynamics. The lack of contact with opposing forces did allow the special forces to familiarize themselves further with multiple team operations, long range reconnaissance in arid terrain, and air support procedures. In this regard, the mission by SFTG-A proved to be a fertile testing ground.[528]

Apart from the core task in Kandahar, the SFTG-A assisted the decision-making process of the Netherlands to deploy troops for ISAF *Stage 3* in southern Afghanistan. In May 2005, an intelligence detachment from the task group visited the American PRT in Tarin Kowt, the capital of Uruzgan. The intelligence personnel reported a "worsening security situation" in the province.[529] In October, several teams accompanied Dutch planners in an extensive reconnaissance of the province. The present American and Australian special forces impressed on their Dutch guests that Uruzgan was "rife with insurgents".[530] Somewhat ironically, this impressed the Dutch special forces with the notion that Uruzgan was a far more challenging area than southern Kandahar.

In contrast, the relative calm in Kandahar persisted until January 2006 when SFTG-A could expand its area of operations towards the border area with the province of Helmand. Almost immediately, the teams ran into various groups of smugglers, criminals, and insurgents. This led to several engagements in which multiple adversaries were detained.[531] In March 2006, the mission in Kandahar was concluded when the new Canadian task force deployed. This allowed SFTG-A to support the preparations for the Uruzgan mission by consolidating relations with their American and Australian colleagues in Uruzgan, conducting additional reconnaissance operations and logistical support at Kandahar airfield. In retrospect, the mission by SFTG-A was primarily notable in that it allowed the Dutch special forces to hone existing and acquire new skills. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to gain some preliminary information on the situation in Uruzgan and establish a foothold in the province.

4.2.3: Doctrine on counterinsurgency

Although the Dutch armed forces had no recent experience in counterinsurgency operations after the War of Decolonization in Indonesia, the Royal Netherlands Army published "Land Doctrine Publication II-C" (LDP II-C) in 2003 on combat operations against "adversaries that

528 George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). Formative Years: Military Adaptation of Dutch Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan . *Special Operations Journal*, 2(2), p. 151-155.

529 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, p. 190.

530 Interview Dutch commanding officer 7

531 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, p. 187-190.

employ irregular methods".[532] Notable in this regard is that the Royal Netherlands Army distinguished between combat operations, peace operations and national operations. By this categorization, these operations against irregular adversaries are classified as distinct from peace (support) operations as the military contribution to such conflicts are primarily combat operations.[533] However, it acknowledges that irregular warfare and peace operations are often related and can evolve in one another. Although the premise of this publication was broad, the content is primarily geared towards counterinsurgency warfare. The general term for irregular activities in this document is "armed resistance".[534] Despite this generic description, LDP II-C recognizes that the adversaries in counterinsurgency operations can be diverse regarding objectives (political, religious, criminal, ethnical or a combination), organization and employment of methods.[535]

While the doctrine focuses on the military contribution to counterinsurgency operations, it acknowledges the primacy of political considerations. Furthermore, the perception of the local population is regarded as a crucial concern in these conflicts.[536] The population's support is considered the center of gravity of the insurgents, so this should be denied to them. Military force is therefore considered an "essential, but often temporary addition to the sum of other activities".[537] According to the doctrine, counterinsurgency requires a comprehensive political operation with activities in the diplomatic, governmental, judicial, social, cultural, psychological, economic, and military dimensions. Evidently, beyond the use of military force these activities require the cooperation, if not leadership, by other organizations and agencies.

In practice, the main military contribution to counterinsurgency should be geared towards intelligence. Without accurate and timely intelligence, successful operations are impossible. According to the doctrine, intelligence operations in counterinsurgency require more effort than in conventional combat operations. It posits that gathering intelligence is a core task for the troops. Other operational tasks for the military are offensive operations against the insurgents and interdicting their supply lines, separating the population and the insurgents, targeting eternal support to the insurgents, influencing the moral considerations of the population and the adversaries, protection of the force and other actors.[538]

532 This is an imperfect translation from the Dutch phrase "Gevechtsoperaties tegen een irregulier optredende tegenstander", but it conveys the central message that the doctrine encompasses all adversaries that fight in an irregular way, not just non-state actors.

533 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2003). *Gevechtsoperaties, LDP II-C: Gevechtsoperaties tegen een irregulier optredende tegenstander.* Den Haag, p. 429.

534 Landmacht, *LDP II-C*, p. 431.

535 Ibidem, p. 435-436.

536 Ibidem, p. 430.

537 Ibidem, p, 437.

538 Ibidem, p. 438-439.

For its inspiration, the doctrine drew on a broad array of sources. Its bibliography lists books and articles describing American, British, French, Portuguese, Rhodesian, Russian and Dutch experiences in the 20th century. Furthermore, it included works on insurgencies, resistance movements, terrorism, civil wars, guerrilla tactics and special environments (urban and jungle).[539]

However, the impact of LDP II-C was limited. Although its existence was known to most officers, it was not widely read or actively taught beyond the Royal Military Academy as other types of conflict were more prominent in curricula.[540] Instead, planners for the first rotation in Uruzgan read a large volume of classical counterinsurgency prescriptions as they assessed that this would be relevant for their deployment.[541] Still, this uneven distribution of counterinsurgency knowledge bode ill for a unity of thought among the army regarding this type of conflicts.

4.2.4: Political decision to deploy to Uruzgan

The potential deployment of Dutch troops to southern Afghanistan as part of ISAF *stage III* was first explored in the autumn of 2004. These explorations were initiated by informal talks between general officers from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Canada.[542] Through these deliberations the intention by the three countries, who had collaborated in Bosnia earlier, to deploy to southern Afghanistan was formed.[543] Each partner would be responsible for a province. As such, the explorations by Dutch military planners predated any official political guidance in the Netherlands.

This military vanguard for a new mission to Afghanistan found support among high level officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Taking a lead role in one of Afghanistan's southern provinces served the interests of both groups, and by extension, departments. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognized the value of participating with the UK and Canada to improve the international posture of the Netherlands. Moreover, the mission was a natural follow-up from the previous contributions to Afghanistan and Iraq.[544] For the armed forces, the prospective mission provided the potential to prove their mettle in combat operations

539 Ibidem, p. 707-712.

540 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch army staff officer 23.

541 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 12.

542 See for a reconstruction of the decision-making processes of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands: Mirjam Grandia (2015). *Deadly Embrace? The Decision Paths to Helmand and Uruzgan.* Leiden: Doctoral Dissertation Leiden University.

543 Matthew Willis (2012). An unexpected war, a not unexpected mission: the origins of Kandahar. *International Journal*(Autumn), p. 991.

544 Lenny Hazelbag (2009). *Politieke besluitvorming van de missie in Uruzgan: een reconstructie.* Breda: Faculty of Military Sciences, p. 11-13; Kathleen McInnis (2020). *How and Why States Defect from Contemporary Military Coalitions.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 189.

and even exorcise the demons from Srebrenica. Furthermore, the military wanted to demonstrate its utility to its political masters to ward off new budget cuts.[545] To be sure, there were dissenting voices within the Ministry of Defence on whether the mission was realistic for the Dutch armed forces.[546]

With these considerations, and eventual backing at the governmental level, the preparations for the mission continued apace. Despite not having settled on a specific province to deploy to nor having received guidance on the objectives for such a mission, the military planners capped the number of troops at 1,000.[547] The rationale for this number was that this was the maximum that was politically feasible.[548] After a NATO-meeting in June 2008, the Netherlands sent a reconnaissance party to Afghanistan in order to assess which province was most suitable for a mission with the knowledge that Canada would deploy to Kandahar and the UK to Helmand.[549] After this fact-finding mission, the Netherlands resolved to opt for Uruzgan province.[550]

Simultaneously, Dutch Parliament was informed about the government's intention to deploy troops to Southern Afghanistan in June 2005. This prospect proved to be highly contentious as both opposition and coalition parties raised doubts over the military feasibility and the political desirability of the mission. As a result, the decision about the mission within the coalition government was delayed. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence formulated a list of points that had to be addressed before the government would agree to the mission. Their main concerns were the continuous presence of US forces in the north of Uruzgan (who operated under the OEF-mission), American military presence in the adjacent province Zabul, funds for reconstruction, the process for handling detainees and the relationship between ISAF and OEF.[551] With regard to the latter concern, the Dutch government sought to distance the ISAF mission to Uruzgan from the continuing American-led OEF that was perceived as being too enemy-centric.[552]

Despite the enduring misgivings among political parties, the government officially notified parliament in December 2005 of its resolve to deploy troops to Uruzgan in the summer of 2006. The notification letter was drafted along the lines of the "assessment framework" and

545 Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 119. However, these considerations were by no means universal within the ministry of defence, see p. 120.

546 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 15, Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 120.

547 Later these numbers were increased to between 1200 and 1400, depending on the staff complement for Regional Command South.

548 Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 121-122.

549 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 14

550 Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 123-125.

551 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 17.

552 Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 290-291.

stated that in principle the Netherlands would deploy a task force to Uruzgan to contribute to the ISAF-mission. The task force's objective would be "to promote stability and security by enhancing the local population's support for the Afghan authorities, and decreasing the support for the Taliban and associated groups."[553] This Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) would be operational for two years, after which tangible results would be attained and NATO would ensure continuation by searching for relief forces. As reasoning for the mission, the government stated that: "The stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan, particularly in the South where the Taliban's roots lie, is of great importance to improving the international rule of law and combating international terrorism which also threatens Europe."[554] Within the TFU, a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was designated as the lead element for stability and reconstruction. By implication, the other elements of the TFU were to support the efforts of the PRT.

While the government's letter emphasized stability projection, reconstruction, and governance, it also recognized the potential need for offensive operations.[555] However, this latter aspect of the mission was understated in the letter. As opposed to the earlier Special Forces-mission to Kandahar, the Dutch military would not formally operate under war-time conditions, thereby directing focus to the reconstruction and stability aspects of the mission.[556]Still, it was candid about the "significant" risks involved with the mission.[557] To mitigate these risks and for potential offensive operations. To this end, infantry, Apache attack helicopters and F-16 fighter jets would assist the PRT.

In addition to the troops destined for Uruzgan, the Netherlands would contribute to the staff of the new regional headquarters of ISAF (Regional Command South) at Kandahar Airfield. Responsibility for Regional Command South (RC-S) would alternate between the principal allies in the southern provinces: Canada, the UK, and the Netherlands. This arrangement would ensure sufficient Dutch influence over the direction of the ISAF campaign.[558]

In the reasoning for the Dutch participation in southern Afghanistan, the letter to parliament was largely silent about the Dutch responsibility towards its allies as a rationale for the deployment. Far more attention was awarded to the needs of the Afghan population and the ability of the Dutch armed forces to help them. However, in the subsequent political and public discourse, proponents of the mission emphasized Dutch responsibility towards the

553 Kamerstuk 27 925, nr 193, p, 1-3.

554 Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 298.

555 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2005, December 22). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme nr. 193. Den Haag, p, 3.

556 George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *21*(3), p.431.

557 Tweede kamer, Dossier 27925, nr. 193, p. 11-12.

558 Ibidem, p. 22-23.

allies and NATO as the institution.[559] Of course, assuming responsibility for a province in Afghanistan's volatile south was a high-profile mission that would reflect positively on the Netherlands' position in NATO.

Nevertheless, and as was clear to the government at the time, the mission would evoke intense discussions in parliament. This led to further postponement of a political decision.[560] A recurring theme in the debate about the ISAF-mission to Uruzgan was its relationship with the counterterrorism efforts under OEF. While the government emphatically stated that the two operations were separated, critics in parliament questioned the practicality of this bifurcation of two military missions in the same theatre.[561] Although Dutch critique towards American-led efforts under OEF held water due to its focus on counterterrorism, the presence of OEF-units in the north of the province was crucial to the feasibility of the Dutch deployment because the Netherlands recognized that it could not cover the whole province with the intended task force configuration. In addition to this cooperation with the Americans in the province, "a solid, military relevant partner [nation]" was identified that would cooperate with the Dutch troops under ISAF.[562]

Another aspect that fueled the debate was whether the Dutch troops would be involved in either combat operations or reconstruction. Critics of the mission argued that these activities were incompatible and argued that in any case, the situation in Uruzgan precluded reconstruction. Advocates of the mission did not deny the adverse security situation but contended that military operations (euphemistically called "stabilization") and reconstruction had to go hand in glove.[563] Moreover, these supporters were sure that Dutch experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that the Dutch military had a knack for this type of missions. Hopefully, the so-called "Dutch Approach" would mean that the Dutch troops could indeed show themselves different from their American counterparts in OEF.[564]

In the end, sufficient political support for deploying Dutch troops to Uruzgan was secured. The deployment of troops to southern Afghanistan struck a balance between stability projection and burden sharing among allies, with an emphasis on the former. Although the security challenges were not discounted, the discourse by the government focused on reconstruction, development, and governance, instead of an enemy-centric approach.

559 See for example the minutes of the parliamentary debate held on 2 February 2006: Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. (2006, February 2). Handelingen TK: Uitzending Nederlandse militairen. Den Haag, p. 45-3030; the answers on parliamentary questions; Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, January 31). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 201. Den Haag, p. 18; McInnis, *How and Why States Defect*, p 189; Rem Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 286-290.

560 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 20-21.

561 Tweede Kamer, Handelingen, p. 45-3017.

562 This partner was of course Australia.

563 Tweede Kamer, Handelingen, p. 45-3024

564 Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 292-294.

Thereby, the differentiation from the American counterterrorism efforts was ensured, while at the same time the Netherlands could deploy troops to placate the Americans and other allies.

4.2.5: Sub conclusion

From the outset, the proposed deployment to Uruzgan was recognized to be a (potential) formative mission for the Dutch armed forces. Although the Dutch military had acquired relevant experience in recent missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the operational risks and demands were understood to be much higher this time. The general, but not universal, sentiment in the armed forces was that the Uruzgan mission would be a challenging but valuable experience. Still, the military was under no delusions about the risks involved with the mission or the necessity to fight during the deployment. With the previous experience of recent missions and the availability of a viable counterinsurgency doctrine, the military ostensibly had an adequate starting point for the mission.

However, the decision to deploy Dutch troops to southern Afghanistan had proven to be highly contentious at the political level. The resulting protracted debate in parliament led to an almost dichotomous (and artificial) distinction being made between the reconstruction and combat aspects of the mission. In this sense, two competing tenets of Dutch strategic culture, being a relevant ally and employing the military to project international stability had to be reconciled. This was achieved by emphasizing the reconstruction tasks in the mission and professing the centrality of the PRT in the task force. Moreover, in the political discourse, the Dutch operational approach was distanced from the American counter-terrorist efforts in the OEF-mission. As a result, the anticipated intensity of the TFU-mission led to the military preparing for the worst while political observers had been won over by the government's assertion that the troops would generally avoid combat.

4.3: The mission: Task Force Uruzgan, 2006-2010

As established in chapter 2, military strategy, campaign plans and commitment of resources such as the number of troops, are manifestations of military learning processes. With regard to the recurring themes in counterinsurgency operations as enumerated in chapter 3, the existence of an integral campaign plan and the ability to learn and adapt are considered crucial. To understand the Dutch learning processes at the campaign level, the following subsections provide a general overview of the Uruzgan campaign and developments at the campaign level such as predeployment training and troop levels. Furthermore, the efforts to adapt the campaign based on operational assessment and the formal learning processes

by the Dutch military are examined. The developments at the campaign level are analyzed through the lens of organizational learning as provided in chapter 2 to identify the underlying dynamics, stages in the learning process and factors of influence.

4.3.1: Deployment and the Task Force Uruzgan

While the political deliberations dragged on, the personnel (military and civilian) that were to deploy to Afghanistan could in the meantime ill-afford to sit on their hands. Regardless of the contentious decision-making process a task force staff was assigned to start operations in August 2006. The most prominent units under this Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) were the PRT and the Battle Group. Although the PRT was designated as the mainstay of the mission, it was a small unit of approximately 50 individuals. The first rotation was formed around the staff of a tank battalion and was augmented by service members from other units and civilians. Its tasks were to support local Afghan authorities provide governance and assisting in development. Small mission teams of four individuals were to engage district leaders and tribal elders to link them to the central government in Kabul. For force protection, the PRT had to rely on the Battle Group.[565]

The Battle Group was a composite battalion-sized combat formation. Its first rotation was built around an airmobile infantry battalion, augmented by a company of mechanized infantry. Other elements of the TFU included an engineer company, a mechanized howitzer platoon, an ISTAR-module and medical support. The air assets, such as F-16's, attack and transport helicopters were organized in an Air Task Force (ATF) and were outside the command structure of the TFU. A novel but important part of the Dutch contribution was the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT). Comprised of officers and non-commissioned officers, the OMLT was to train the ANA and accompany its units on operation in a mentoring role. Small as the OMLT was, it had a vital role in the Dutch plans for Uruzgan as it was supposed to bring the ANA units in the province up to the level that they could take over responsibility for military operations.[566] Finally, the TFU-staff itself was to coordinate the activities of its constituent parts. This extra command-level was added on the basis of experiences in Iraq where managing the disparate elements had proven to be a burden for the Battle Group-staff.[567]

565 Kitzen, Osinga and Rietjens, Soft Power, p. 172-174; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 7.

566 Tweede Kamer, Dossier 27925, nr. 193, p. 14-15.

567 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 10

The rotation schedule was initially based on six-month tours for the TFU-staff and 4,5 months for the other units. In this way, as many units as possible could acquire experience in Uruzgan.[568] However, evaluations at the time indicated that the rotations of four to five months for the Battle Group and PRT were considered as too short. Not only was this period insufficient to acquire situational understanding, but the short rotations also took a heavy toll of the organization in the preparation phase. One of the reasons for these short rotations was that the Dutch Army wanted to let as many units as possible acquire experience in Uruzgan during the initial two-year mandate. However, the extension did not lead to a revision of this policy; the six-month tours of the TFU staff and later the PRT were considered as barely sufficient. Moreover, these longer rotations were impeded by mandatory leaves. Further extending tours would potentially invite pushback from military trade unions and was consequently not implemented. As a result, these elements were in constant flux and almost never up to assigned strength.[569]

Getting the task force to Uruzgan was however the primary consideration for the military planners in early 2006. Within days of the political assent to the mission, the first elements of the Deployment Task Force (DTF) under Colonel Henk Morsink left for southern Afghanistan. From the regional headquarters and logistical hub Kandahar Airfield, the Dutch troops went on to build a base on the outskirts of the Uruzgan capital of Tarin Kowt. The Americans had established Forward Operating Base (FOB) Ripley next to a dirt runway. At the time, FOB Ripley housed the American PRT and a Special Forces-detachments from the U.S.[570] Although the DTF's main task was limited to logistical preparations, Morsink inevitably liaised with the allies both in Kandahar and Tarin Kowt as well in Kabul. During these talks, allies stressed the need for offensive operations against the Taliban.[571]

A salient element of the early Dutch presence in Uruzgan was the Special Forces Task Group "Viper" from the Army Special Forces Regiment. Deployed in April 2006, it more-or-less continued the work from SFTG-A in Kandahar, albeit under the ISAF-mission and based at FOB Ripley. Its task was to conduct reconnaissance missions to establish situational awareness for the DTF and the subsequent Task Force Uruzgan. To establish themselves in the province, "Viper" collaborated closely with their American and Australian counterparts that operated under the OEF-mandate. As such, the Dutch SF could not only tap into the intelligence from the allies, but also hitch onto the "jammers" from their counterparts (electronic countermeasures against radio-controlled IEDs), which the Dutch lacked at that point. While this cooperation meant that Viper could establish itself quickly, it had the

568 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 23; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 11

569 Interview Dutch commanding officer 10, Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 6

570 The Australian Special Air Service-detachment was based in the adjacent FOB Russell.

571 Interview Dutch commanding officer 11

drawback that it could not determine its own courses of action due to this dependence on the allies.[572]

The first operations by Viper underscored the intelligence assessments and previous reconnaissance missions regarding the grim security situation in Uruzgan. From the outset, the combined patrols became engaged in firefights and ambushes in the Deh Rafshan-area and the Baluchi valley north of Tarin Kowt (see map on pages 126-127). This culminated in intense battles around the Baluchi-valley and Chora-district in June and July of 2006. During these operations, the coalition troops managed to wrest control of the Chora district from the opposing forces and inflict many casualties among the adversaries throughout the region. According to the American and Australian allies, this was a testament to the Taliban's grip on the province.

Looking back, Dutch operators questioned who they had been fighting during this period. Had they been confronted by hard-core Taliban or by so-called "accidental guerrillas"?[573] Yet another option was that they had become embroiled in a conflict between government- and coalition-backed Popolzai and disenfranchised other tribes (predominantly Ghilzai). These nuances were initially lost on the coalition forces in Uruzgan. At the same time, the intense combat fitted the trend across Regional Command South in which insurgents contested the influx of new troops.[574] Ironically however, the Dutch special forces had become associated with the OEF-mission that Dutch politicians were so keen to distance themselves from. On the other hand, Viper had little alternative courses of action available to them to execute their mission. Of course, the salient question was how these first experiences affected the subsequent deployment of the TFU, as they presented misgivings about the feasibility of reconstruction efforts in the province.

4.3.1.1: Predeployment training

As the TFU consisted of various units that had no organic command relationship, the preparation for each rotation proceeded among multiple tracks. Each unit or detachment trained for its specific task. The main subordinate units of the Task Force, the PRT and the Battle Group thus initially had separate preparations. Once the units had acquired a sufficient proficiency for their designated tasks, the various elements of the TFU would be integrated in a three-week exercise called *"Uruzgan Integration"*. This section analyzes the pre-deployment

572 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, Callsign *Nassau*, p. 203-205.

573 Ibidem, p. 237-238.

574 Martijn Kitzen (2016). *The Course of Co-option: Co-option of local power-holders as a tool for obtaining control over the population in counterinsurgency campaigns in weblike societies*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, p. 379-382.

training of the Battle Group and the TFU-staff. Other elements' preparations, such as the PRT will feature in separate sections.

Preparing for its deployment to Uruzgan, the first Battle Group commanded by lieutenant-colonel Piet van der Sar was under no false impression that the mission would be anything other than a counterinsurgency operation. Van der Sar and his battalion's intelligence officer (S2) captain Ralph Coenen had joined the reconnaissance to Uruzgan in November 2005. As a result, they had an impression of the local dynamics and the security situation.[575] Prior to the reconnaissance, captain Coenen had scoured classical counterinsurgency works by, among others, Galula, Thompson and Kitson. The more contemporary work by David Kilcullen, his *Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency*, also featured in the reading list drafted by the officer.[576]

When the Battle Group arrived in Uruzgan, the officers and NCOs were briefed by the Viper-detachment about their experiences in the province.[577] The special forces had compiled a list of best practices and observations that they had either acquired in the previous months or emulated from the Australian and American colleagues. This list included patrol techniques, reaction to ambushes, procedures to mitigate the threat of IEDs, instructions for equipment and observations about the enemy's modus operandi.[578] A majority of the lessons were incorporated and disseminated throughout the Battle Group by informal briefings. Early on, the Battle Group came to a different appreciation of the security situation as they were approached by the local population around the village of Sorkh Murghab. Where the Dutch and Australian special forces had been engaged in intense firefights in this area, tribal leaders assured the Dutch infantry soldiers that they were not affiliated with the Taliban and had no quarrel with ISAF or the Afghan government per se. Instead, they pointed out, an intertribal conflict between the local Ghilzai militias and the private forces of former governor Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan, both from the Popolzai tribe, was the cause of the violence in the area.[579]

The Battle Group's predeployment training consisted mainly of infantry skills and integration with the various supporting elements. The Combat Training School (Gevechts Training School) trained infantry units up to the company-level. Infantry platoons were considered the foundational unit for operations. For operations, the platoons were augmented by 'enablers' such as engineers, mortar crews, forward observers, logistics and potentially a PRT-mission team or detachment for psychological operations. To the extent these enablers

575 Kitzen, *Course of Co-option*, p. 381

576 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7, Dutch army staff officer 12

577 Interview Dutch commanding officer 7

578 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 12; Dutch commanding officer 7

579 Kitzen, *The Course of Co-option*, p. 382-383.

were available to the prospective Battle Group for training, the units trained together to familiarize with each other's procedures and collectively prepare for combat drills. The substance of this preparation phase emphasized aspects such as reacting to ambushes, counter-IED procedures, convoy operations and familiarization with new weapons and mission specific equipment.[580]

Beyond training regular infantry combat skills, the Battle Group also invested in cultural awareness for the mission in Afghanistan. Of course, a modicum of cultural training was offered to all troops destined for Uruzgan, but the first Battle Group rotation took this further by employing a cultural expert. Elements from this expanded cultural training, such as a visit to a Dutch mosque to learn about the Islamic faith and traditions.[581] Furthermore, instruction was provided in Pashtun culture. Underpinning this emphasis on culture was the counterinsurgency principle that the perception of the population was the main prize in the Afghan conflict. After the preparation of the first rotation, the Dutch Army directed that all successive rotations would participate in an extended cultural training.[582] Despite this increased effort, the effects of cultural training were limited.

The predeployment training for the Battle Group rotations was not without its challenges. These arose from the decision to limit the tours of the Battle Group to four months. A primary reason for this decision was the wish to have as many units as possible to serve a tour in Uruzgan in order to gain experience there.[583] Because of this short time span, multiple units were simultaneously preparing for a deployment. This put a significant strain on the instruction capacity of the Army.[584] Furthermore, other resources were also limited such as a mission specific training set including non-organic vehicles and communication equipment. This meant that these assets were available relatively late in the preparation phase.[585] Moreover, the training equipment was worn down due to the intensive use, thereby further limiting its availability. Finally, the emphasis on Uruzgan in terms of personnel, instruction capacity and equipment had the side effect that training for other types of mission was generally (and consciously) neglected.[586]

580 Piet van der Sar (2007). Kick the enemy where it hurts the most: de steun van de bevolking, daar gaat het om. *Carre, 30*(1), p. 15.

581 Bas Ooink (2008) *The Cultural Backpack: Training soldiers to operate in unfamiliar environments.* Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, p. 93-96.

582 Ibidem, p. 97-100.

583 This was informed by the assumption that the Dutch mission was mandated for two years at the beginning of the mission.

584 Interview Dutch army staff officer 23

585 Battle Group 3. (2007). *Evaluatieverslag Commandant 42 (NLD) BG LJ TFE 3, missie Uruzgan 1 apr 2007 t/m 1 aug 2007.* Tarin Kowt, p. 2; Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified ISAF: Eindrapportage over de Nederlandse inzet bij de ISAF missie 2006 - 2010.* Den Haag.

586 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 23

Another central element of the preparation phase was the operational reconnaissance by commanders and their staffs to Uruzgan. These visits enabled new rotations to become acquainted with the environment and dynamic of the TFU. Through conversations with their counterparts and looking over their shoulders, service members on reconnaissance could potentially obtain useful insights.[587] Furthermore, instructors regularly visited Uruzgan to stay abreast of the developments there and evaluate predeployment training with the current rotation.[588] In addition to the visits, officers and NCOs tasked with training opted for deployments themselves to gain first-hand experience with the objective to implement this in the predeployment training.[589]

For each rotation, an Army brigade was designated to form and prepare a TFU-staff. The assigned brigade provided a nucleus of staff officers and NCOs that was to be reinforced by other parts of the Army and the other services. While a specific brigade was responsible for this process, the substance of preparing the TFU-staff was supervised by the OTCOpn.[590] For the TFU-staff, the main training event was a command post exercise (CPX). As the TFU-staffs were composite formations, this training aspect was crucial to iron out tasks and internal staff procedures. Led by OTCOpn, the TFU-staff was immersed in a Uruzgan-specific scenario. These scenarios were based on visits to Uruzgan to include the latest developments in the mission. Service members from previous rotations were used to script specific aspects of the scenario, such as intelligence or civil-military cooperation.[591] Interestingly, assistance from the DTF or individually deployed staff officers to Afghanistan was not sought.[592] Furthermore, the instructors of OTCOpn had no formal link with the Army evaluations.[593]

While the scenarios were constantly updated according to developments in Uruzgan, the CPX had a fixed dynamic. The staff had to notice intelligence reports that insurgents were mounting an attack in a certain area to which the TFU then should respond. This would culminate in a large operation planned by the TFU-staff, employing all assets available. Although such scenarios by default emphasized security aspects of the mission, the themes of governance and development were integrated. By this deliberate method, the staff had to go through all aspects of the planning process under simulated pressure.[594]

587 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 6

588 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 9.

589 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 9.

590 The battalion-level staffs of the Battle Group and PRT were also supervised by the OTCOpn.

591 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 9.

592 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 20; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 11.

593 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18

594 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch army staff officer 18

The capstone of the pre-deployment training was the *Uruzgan Integration* exercise. In this three-week exercise all subunits would be trained according to scenarios based on experience from theatre. The first iteration had to be built up from scratch. Experiences from the DTF or from SFIR in Iraq were not used by the developers of the exercise. The first two weeks were still reserved for training the subunits while the third week evaluated the TFU in its entirety.[595] Although spectacular, with over a 1,000 participating troops, a multitude of military vehicles and a large amount of role players (posing as both population and adversary), questions were raised about the effectiveness of this integration exercise for the levels of the Battle Group and TFU-staffs. In a field training exercise of this scale, combined with the intensity of the scenario, the staffs were hard-pressed to stay abreast of the developments. As a result, the intensity of the exercise did little to improve the proficiency of the staff.[596] Another point of critique was the continuous emphasis of kinetic activities such contact drills during the exercise. TFU-commanders argued that interagency aspects should have received more attention as this was the core of the mission.[597] However, during the first rotations, crucial personnel such as the political advisors did not always participate in the exercises.[598] Over time, the attendance of civil servants to the predeployment training improved, which had a positive impact on the collaboration in theatre.[599]

In general, the predeployment training of the Battle Group and the TFU-staff saw no substantial changes over the course of the years. Small adjustments were mostly made based on theatre visits by instructors of the Combat Training School and the OTCOpn. Additionally, experience was incorporated into the training by using personnel from previous deployments to observe and coach new rotations. However, there was no direct link between the training organizations and the evaluation processes. Learning mechanisms were thus arranged in a semi-formal way at lower organizational levels. This meant that these provisions had little connection with the formal evaluation process. Furthermore, efforts to diffuse experiences and best practices received limited institutional support. Dissemination mechanisms such as information bulletins, road shows and mentored training saw limited central coordination ensuring comprehensive implementation. Overall, this lack of organizational influence hamstrung a formal learning process in the force preparation for Uruzgan.

595 Interview Dutch army staff officer 20.

596 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18.

597 Kitzen, et al., *Soft Power*, p. 177-178; interview Dutch army staff officer 15.

598 Interview Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 2

599 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 23.

4.3.2: Operational analysis and lessons learned processes

From the start of the mission, the Dutch military had two formal processes through which it could gauge the impact of the mission. This subsection will focus primarily on the processes themselves, rather than the substance of the assessment and evaluations. The findings and impact of these processes will feature in the subsequent parts of this chapter. The first process was dedicated to the assessment of the mission's progress itself. As such, it was aimed at the effects the mission had on the operational environment and could be used for adjusting operations and plans. The second process pertained to what the Dutch military as an institution could learn from the mission. Although these lessons could potentially benefit the campaign in Uruzgan, this process was also directed at the armed forces in general and future missions.

4.3.2.1: Campaign assessment

For the campaign assessment, operational analysts from the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) were seconded to the planning section (G5) of the TFU-staff. The key challenge for the analysts was how to measure the mission's effectiveness and acquire the relevant data to inform the metrics. Purely military effects such as killed enemy combatants and confiscated weapons are straightforward to tally. However, the Master Plan was built on the premise that the support of the local population would be the main effort of the operation. Apart from providing security, this called for activities that would influence the population's perception. These activities were consolidated under the themes "governance and justice" and "development". Beyond the fact that these activities were not military competencies, their effects were difficult to measure. According to the analysts, perceptions cannot be measured so they had to rely on the population's behavior.[600] However, the analysts found that the presence of the TFU's units affected the behavior of the Afghans, thereby skewing the veracity of the acquired data. A further complication, as the analysts were aware of, was that the population of Uruzgan was by no means a monolithic entity. Hence, surveys among certain parts of the population had little generalizable value if these differences could not be considered. Understanding these nuances was therefore crucial. A final complicating factor to the assessment was that the effects could not always be attributed to the activities of the TFU. For instance, activities by the Taliban also affected the behavior of the population.[601] As a result, collecting sufficient data to produce forecasts on which operations could be based was inherently difficult.

600 Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleeuw and Han van der Have (2007). Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan: Van het schaakbord naar een bord spaghetti. *Militaire Spectator, 176*(12), p. 552.

601 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 3; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch army reservist 4; Dutch army reservist 2.

Moreover, the analysts were unable to go "beyond the wire" to gain a firsthand understanding of Uruzgan and the effects of the mission. Patrol reports by infantry platoons and PRT mission teams were not always available to the analysts. In addition, these documents did not necessarily capture the data that the analysts were after.[602] To enhance their understanding of Uruzgan's dynamics and thereby the mission's progress, the analysts from TNO regularly conducted interviews with commanders and staff officers from the Battle Group and PRT throughout the mission. Additionally, the civilian personnel of the task force were often consulted for their view of the mission. An extra perspective was added by talking to Afghans in the so-called PRT-house within Camp Holland and the increasingly present representatives of NGOs and IOs in the province.[603]

A potential other source of data was the intelligence section of the TFU-staff (G2). For a variety of reasons, this proved to be no panacea. First, the task for the intelligence complement of the TFU was to provide the commander with an understanding of the environment on which he could make his decisions and issue his orders. Furnishing inorganic operational analysts with data was decidedly a lower priority. According to some of the analysts, the intelligence process was overly focused on the enemy.[604] A second and related problem was that the analysts held little sway over the intelligence collection plan that guided the queries of the various intelligence sensors. Instead, the analysts could only submit a "request for information" (RFI) when they needed specific data.[605] Lastly, most of the intelligence was classified and was often unavailable for the analysts, especially in the preparation phases for rotations. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, information was in practice shared with the operational analysts, but there was no formal mechanism for this.[606]

The efforts to acquire meaningful data to assess the campaign resulted in biweekly assessments for general activities and "intermediate assessments" that covered three months. Normally, these intermediate assessments would gauge the effect of an operation of the same length that was (sometimes) centered around a specific area or theme. Assessments with a larger temporal scope were not provisioned at the task force level. This seemed a logical consequence of the rotation schedule for the TFU-staff of six months in which at best two full cycles of operations and assessments could be completed. In practice however, the task force staffs made an operational planning that would cover the rotation with the successors. Through communications with the Netherlands and the pre-deployment reconnaissance, the new commander and his staff were kept abreast of the planning process and could exert some influence. This approach had inherent trade-offs. The main rationale for these

602 Smeenk et al. Effect gebaseerde aanpak, p. 559.

603 Interviews Dutch civil-servant 1; Dutch army reservist 2; Dutch army reservist 3.

604 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 2; Dutch civil servant 1

605 Interview Dutch civil servant 1

606 Ingrid van Bemmel, Aletta Eikelboom and Paul Hoefsloot (2010). 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan. *Militaire Spectator*, 179(4), p. 209.

staggered plans was of course to assist the new task force with an active operation which it could continue so as to prevent an operational hiatus in Uruzgan.[607]

Operational analysis (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Data-collection	Efforts to acquire relevant information for analysis	Various informal initiatives, no conclusive adaptation	Distinct organizational cultures
Integration in TFU	Central element in TFU-staff	Informal adaptation from first rotation	Leadership, organizational culture
Reporting	Adjustment of reporting to operational cycle	Informal adaptation	Organizational culture

Table 4.1: Learning processes in operational analysis

4.3.2.2: Lessons learned processes

The second formal evaluation process was directed from the level of the Defence Staff. Guided by a directive of the Chief of Defence, deployed units and their commanders were required to draft an assessment with observations on best practices and deficiencies. This process had two main objectives. The first aim was to provide political accountability towards parliament. Naturally, the second goal of the directive was that the armed forces in general would learn from these observations by analyzing them, remedy shortfalls and implement best practices or solutions to improve its performance in new missions. Although all participants in a mission could mention general observations, commanders, staff sections and units were expected to focus on their areas of expertise. [608]

However, in a 2005 report by the Inspector-General of the Armed Forces, the state of the lessons learned process in relation to missions was criticized. First, there was no central oversight of the collection and implementation of lessons learned, either at the Defence Staff or the individual services. Secondly, the services had devolved their learning elements to lower echelons of their organizations. A third problem was that the organizations responsible for the learning process were often inadequately staffed and as a result had no capacity to enact change based on the lessons. Finally, the report found that the services and Defence Staff was focusing on preparing for missions rather than the execution. Consequently, the

607 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 6.

608 Inspecteur-Generaal der Krijgsmacht. (2006). *Jaarverslag 2005*. Den Haag : Ministerie van Defensie, p.108.

effectiveness of a mission was left to the commander on the ground. This evidently restricted the longer-term view of the mission and the learning ability of the organization. [609]

The products of these evaluations were collected by the evaluation department at the Defence Staff. In the case of Uruzgan, this institutional process yielded so many observations that a portion had to be culled, for instance because of duplications or when potential remedies were within the competency of the TFU or single units.[610] Somewhat curiously, this department's primary task was and remains to report the effects of missions for parliamentary oversight and accountability. In addition to this task, the evaluation department investigated and reported on specific incidents such as the battle of Chora in 2007 and a fatal friendly-fire accident in 2008. Regarding this role, the department restricted itself to reconstructing factual accounts; drawing conclusions was left to other actors.[611] Occupied with this set of tasks, directing the implementation was beyond the competency of the evaluation department.

In addition to the formal process at the Defence Staff, yet another procedure existed at the level of the army in which observations from Uruzgan were captured. This constituted interviews and plenary sessions in which commanders at every level from a rotation could share their knowledge. Furthermore, there were assemblies for specific fields of expertise in which service members from across a rotation discussed their experiences to identify pertinent lessons for their areas.[612] These evaluation sessions were initiated by the Dutch Army's division headquarters in cooperation with the Education and Training Center for Operations (OTCOpn). At that time, the divisional headquarters was in the process of being abolished as part of larger reorganizations within the Dutch armed forces. Officers tasked with standing-down the headquarters consequently had the time to support this process.[613]

The topics discerned by these evaluation sessions would not have differed from the written evaluations at the Defence staff level. Indeed, there was a significant duplication of effort between the two evaluations processes. A marked difference was the attendance of officers from the OTCOpn at the army sessions. This allowed the quick turnaround of observations into adjustments in training and mission rehearsal exercises. Furthermore, the information collected was used to write doctrinal bulletins with the most salient knowledge acquired in the previous rotations. Unfortunately, the observations that were collected over time

609 IGK, *Jaarverslag 2005*, p. 115-116.

610 Interview Dutch army staff officer 8.

611 Interview Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch Navy staff officer 1

612 interviews Dutch staff officer 4; Dutch army staff officer 23; Dutch army staff officer 7.

613 Interview Dutch army staff officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch army staff officer 4.

by the Dutch army were not processed and stored in a database and were consequently not accessible for institutionalizing this knowledge.[614]

Participation in the army's evaluation was not the only way in which members of the OTCOpn gathered observations about the mission in Uruzgan. Officers and NCOs actively sought positions within the TFU to gain firsthand experience in Afghanistan with the aim of enhancing the mission preparation for subsequent rotations.[615] Furthermore, there were frequent staff visits from the OTCOpn to gather the latest insights from the field.[616] Thus, the Dutch army had a semi-formal process for collecting observations from Afghanistan. While the several ways in which information was gathered were supported by the army as an institution, the efforts were not part of a centralized and structured endeavor. As such information gathering remained highly dependent on individual service members for its continuation.

Still, other initiatives to disseminate the lessons were employed. For instance, the Army organized a 'road tour' in which service members visited units to share their experiences from Uruzgan.[617] Another initiative consisted of officers who compiled observations from both the first TFU-rotations and Dutch officers who held positions at Regional Command South. This resulted in two "information bulletins" that enumerated early lessons from Afghanistan. Ranging from technical to the operational level of military activities, the bulletins focused on the necessity of adopting a population-centric counterinsurgency approach.[618] While not discounting the requirement for the use of military force, the Dutch Army had to become more proficient in integrating non-kinetic activities. By writing these documents, the authors aimed to disseminate the observations for the benefit of subsequent rotations. While not meant as prescriptions, the authors thought of the bulletins as supplements to LDP II-C.[619] Ultimately, these observations could be incorporated into a new doctrine for land operations. Although the bulletins were included in the read-ahead materiel for TFU-staffs, they were not distributed across the Army.[620] Later on in 2009, the bulletins were redacted and published as articles in the journal Militaire Spectator.[621]

While there were multiple evaluation mechanisms for the Uruzgan campaign, they were largely disconnected (see table 4.2). To a certain extent, this is understandable as they

614 Interview Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch army staff officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 8.

615 Interview Dutch army staff officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 8.

616 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 9

617 Interview Dutch army staff officer 23

618 See: OTC Operatien. (2007/2008). *Informatiebulletin 07/02 and Informatiebulletin 08/01*. Amersfoort.

619 OTC Operatien, *Informatiebulletin 08/01*, p. 2.

620 Kitzen et al., Soft Power, p.181-182; Interview Dutch army staff officer 10

621 See Pieter Soldaat (2009). Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (I). *Militaire Spectator, 178*(5), pp. 252-266; (2009). Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (II). *Militaire Spectator, 178*(6), pp. 340-349.

served different purposes. Obviously, the campaign assessment itself was meant to track the progress of the mission across a variety of effects and to inform adjustments to the campaign plan. Indeed, the continuous assessment of the campaign was the inspiration for the larger changes to these plans as the campaign progressed in time. A striking aspect of this process was the leeway these analysts were granted in drafting the successive campaign plans. Moreover, the analysts were often the initiators of extensive changes in the campaign plan. At the same time, the formal (at the defence staff level) and semi-formal evaluation mechanisms (at the army level and below) were mostly concerned with technical, procedural, and organizational aspects of the mission and the organization.

During the TFU operations, the aforementioned processes were unwieldy for swift remedial action to resolve identified deficiencies. This deficiency in the learning process was recognized by the officers tasked with the evaluation at the Defence Staff. [622] Therefore, the evaluation process was inherently more attuned for institutionalization of lessons without the pressure of current operational demands. Of course, TFU commanders, and through them the rest of the task force, had other means to raise pressing issues to the Netherlands such as weekly situation reports ("sitreps" in military parlance).[623] Yet, the uncoordinated parallel existence of multiple avenues to share identified deficiencies had the potentially negative consequence of that problems were reported but not addressed.[624] Whether the formal process was better-endowed for institutionalizing knowledge beyond the Uruzgan mission shall be explored in the section that deals with the impact of the TFU on the Dutch military.

Learning processes (themes)	**Manifestation**	**Stage of learning**	**Influencing factors**
Learning process	Perceived to be insufficient across armed forces	Recognized deficiency	Organizational politics, resource allocation
Disconnect between department and service (Army)	Additional evaluation by the army	(semi-)formal adaptation	Organizational politics
Implementation of lessons at joint level	Most identified lessons were in the purview of services	Recognized deficiency	Organizational politics, resource allocation

Table 4.2: Developments in lessons learned processes

622 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified en best practices van de voortrekkers.* Den Haag, 06/126

623 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

624 Nationaal Lucht- en Ruimtevaart Laboratorium. (2011). *Systematisch Borgen Lessons Learned.* Amsterdam, p. 86-87

4.3.3: Planning and executing the campaign

4.3.3.1 The Master Plan (2006-2008)

Lacking practical guidance on how to conduct the campaign, the first TFU rotation drafted a plan on its own initiative, called the TFU Master Plan. The plan was intended to provide guiding principles on how to attain the stated objectives. It was initiated by the operational analysts who were detached from TNO to augment the plans section (G5) of the TFU-staff. Although their primary task was to collect data and gauge the effects of the mission in order to guide the planning process, they took on a leading role for drafting the plan.[625]

Before the deployment, the operational analysts drafted a first plan that was inspired by the Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBOA). It found its origin in the campaign plan that was drafted for the ISAF-mission in Kabul in 2003. The reason for this relationship was straightforward: the authors of the plan had been deployed to Kabul as well. Furthermore, experiences from the PRT in Baghlan informed the drafting process.[626] To identify the relevant effects in what they assessed to be a counterinsurgency mission, the analysts used the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine (the aforementioned LDP II-C). Consequently, the plan included effects beyond security, such as development, governance, and the perception of the local population. Despite their vital role in the preparations and their considerable leeway, the analysts had no access to intelligence reports, however. Naturally, this stymied their ability to understand Uruzgan's dynamics. Instead, the information from the Civil Assessment was used.[627]

In accordance with the objectives and discourse set out by the Dutch political leadership, both the military planners and the operational analysts acknowledged that the TFU must seek to generate effects beyond defeating the adversary. Rather, the TFU was to achieve effects in the political, informational, and economical domains, as well as providing security. For the deployed units, this required additional capabilities such as psychological operations-detachments (PsyOps) and Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) experts. Moreover, other actors such as interagency partner and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were to provide complementary competencies and expertise.

After the TFU became operational on August 1, 2006, the draft of the campaign plan was adjusted according to local conditions. A substantial amount of the input for these adjustments was provided by the civilians of the staff who felt that they were being ignored

625 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 4

626 Smeenk et al., Effect gebaseerde benadering, p. 554-557.

627 Interviews Dutch army reservist 3; Dutch army reservist 1.

by the staff, the Battle Group and the PRT.[628] Eventually, the Master Plan was finalized in October 2006. It formulated the TFU's mission as: "assist[ing]the local government in building its capacity, authority and influence and prioritising and synchronising reconstruction and development programs with assisting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in order to set the conditions for a secure and stable Uruzgan Province."[629] Recognizing that a secure and stable Uruzgan would not be reached within the Dutch timeframe of two years for the mission, intermediate objectives were set. After two years, the TFU must leave behind: "A relative secure and stable environment in the vicinity of the district centres and along the routes connecting them". Additionally, "a functioning provincial governance structure, [...] accepted by the majority of the population "must be present.[630]

The objective for the Master Plan itself was to serve as a guidance for operations and ensure that every part of the Task Force shared a common understanding of the mission and the situation within Uruzgan. To achieve the desired end state by ISAF and TFU, the Master Plan identified four operational objectives that were designated: governance and justice, development, security, and a credible task force. The first three objectives were in accordance with the lines of operation as espoused by ISAF-command in Kabul and ISAF RC-South in Kandahar. Adding the fourth objective of a "credible task force" indicated the recognition that the TFU needed the support of the local population, other actors in the province and the domestic public for its operations.[631] In order to work towards these four goals, the plan listed a set of 23 interdependent effects. For all these effects, the plan registered indicators to mark the progress (or lack thereof) towards the effect. Accordingly, operations could be adjusted based on the effects of the mission.

According to the plan, the TFU would focus its operations on the largest population centers in Uruzgan: Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawud. Designated as Afghan Development Zones (ADZs), these areas could potentially benefit the most from improvements in security, governance, and development. The ADZs would have a permanent ISAF presence and receive the bulk of development projects. The district of Chora would be a supporting effort. The main objective for this district was to reduce negative influences on the Tarin Kowt-ADZ. Over time, the ADZs would be expanded and eventually linked. Moreover, the TFU assessed that this approach would be feasible given the resources available.

Although ambitious, the Master Plan was candid about the limitations of what the TFU could achieve and how the effects of the mission could be measured. First, the mission's success depended on the ability to enhance the Afghan authorities' governance and its security

628 Interviews Dutch army reservist 3; Dutch army reservist 1

629 Task Force Uruzgan. (2006). *1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force Uruzgan Master Plan.* Tarin Kowt, p. 5.

630 TFU. *Master Plan*, p. 5.

631 Smeenk et al., Effect gebaseerde benadering, p. 553.

forces. The TFU was aware that the provincial authorities were plagued by understaffing, poor levels of education and corruption. Moreover, the newly appointed provincial governor Munib was entirely dependent on the Dutch support as he had no local power base. As for security, the Master Plan envisioned that the Afghan security forces would bear most of the responsibility for this aspect. However, the presence of the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the province was limited to an under-strength battalion (*kandak*). In terms of personnel, the TFU had little influence to increase the ANA's numbers in Uruzgan. Due to its low quality and corruption, the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Uruzgan was a liability rather than an asset.[632] This meant that the TFU would have to be far more engaged in security than initially planned.

At the time of its publication, the Master Plan did not inform the actions of the first Battle Group and PRT. As these subunits had become operational before the TFU-staff, the commanders had understandably moved forward instead of waiting on directives from a yet non-existent higher echelon. This is not to say that the activities employed by the Battle Group and PRT were inherently incompatible to the overall mission, however they indicated a lack in unity of effort.[633]

Essentially, the Master Plan was too late for the first TFU-elements to adopt.[634] An additional problem was that the friction between the commanders of the Battle Group (lieutenant-colonel Van der Sar) and the PRT (lieutenant-colonel Tak). To a certain extent, the Battle Group operated on the turf of the PRT by engaging local leaders and tribal elders.[635] In the meantime, Tak and the PRT mostly engaged the official provincial authorities. In particular, the newly appointed provincial governor, Munib, required assistance in finding his feet in Uruzgan; lacking an informal power base in the province, he had to rely on the international forces in the province to assert his authority.

The disconnect between the TFU's two main elements of the first rotation were eventually resolved by integrating the PRT's mission teams in the infantry companies. However, due to the separation of the two commands the issue of which unit had primacy within the TFU remained. Colonel Vleugels adopted the view that the PRT should be in the lead and advised to integrate the units, in order to preempt these discussions in subsequent rotations. However, his suggestion fell on fallow ground in the Netherlands as it was deemed impractical by the Defence staff.[636] Follow-on rotations had already been assigned and preparing for deployment, so to adjust the parameters midcourse would upset this process too much.

632 TFU. *Master Plan*, p. 12.

633 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8

634 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 7

635 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 389-390.

636 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch army reservist 1

While the internal arrangements were partially settled, the force configuration proved to present a more daunting problem. This was particularly felt by the Battle Group. Infantry platoons, invariably augmented with non-organic specialists and supporting capabilities, were judged to be the "smallest unit of action" for operations.[637] The Battle Group had twelve infantry platoons (eleven rifle platoons and one reconnaissance platoon) to ensure presence within the area of operations. Before the mission, Army leadership even sought to limit the number of platoons to nine to conform to the cap in personnel. Only after forceful protests from the TFU and Battle Group did the Army-staff relent.[638]

It is a military truism that a commander normally would like to have more assets than are assigned, but the required number of infantry platoons continued to be a bone of contention throughout the first years of the mission.[639] Moreover, beyond rest and maintenance the infantry platoons had to guard the FOB's in Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawud and were used for convoy operations along the supply routes. Consequently, the number of infantry platoons present within the ADZs at any given time was limited. Furthermore, due to these restraints it was not possible to assign the infantry platoons to specific areas to foster familiarity as had been the plan by the Battle Group.[640] In essence, the TFU's presence in the ADZs had a transient character. For SFTG Viper this meant that they had to function as a fire brigade in the province.

This dearth of infantry capacity was exacerbated by the situation in southern Afghanistan in the summer of 2006. Across the southern provinces, insurgents heavily contested the deployment of ISAF Stage III, particularly in Helmand and Kandahar (see the subsequent chapters for more details). When RC-South initiated operation Medusa to reduce the insurgents' pressure in two districts in Kandahar, Dutch forces were used in support. A company from the Dutch Battle Group took over FOB Martello from Canadian forces and another company was kept in reserve.[641]

Crucially, the TFU also deployed a semi-permanent presence to Chora at the outset of the mission. After the earlier clearing operations in that area, the Australians expected the TFU to conduct regular patrols to show presence. Although the TFU recognized the potential benefits of securing parts of the Chora district and winning over its population, it proved to

637 See Olof van Joolen and Silvan Schoonhoven (2021). *Schaduwoorlog Uruzgan: De rauwe werkelijkheid van de Nederlandse missie in Afghanistan*. Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam.

638 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 7.

639 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

640 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 12; Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8.

641 Piet van der Sar (2007). Kick the enemy where it hurts the most: de steun van de bevolking, daar gaat het om. *Carre, 30*(1), p, 12.

be a further drain on the task force's capacity.[642] Officers within the TFU voiced concerns that presence in Chora diverted resources that were intended to the ADZs.[643]

Looking back at the first rotation of the TFU, key officers acknowledged that the establishment of the task force in the province had been the prime effort. Shortage of infantry capacity, intelligence, and the initial inadequate synergy within the TFU proved to be detrimental to realizing the ambitions as set out in the Master Plan. Furthermore, the security situation in Uruzgan hampered the efforts in development. The same applied to the local provincial governance. Newly minted governor Munib had the backing of the Dutch but held no power beyond his compound at that stage.[644] Evidently, the TFU had some early accomplishments of which the cooperation with some tribal elders in the Deh Rafshan area had been the most conspicuous. Engagement with the local population contributed to the relative calm in the TFU's area of responsibility. Although the Dutch saw their fair share of fighting during this period, their presence was not challenged to the extent that the British and Canadian task forces experienced in Helmand and Kandahar. While this difference cannot be ascribed solely to the TFU's activities, as Uruzgan's dynamics had a crucial role as well, the discrepancy with the other provinces was noted in Afghanistan.

The consecutive rotations under command of colonels Hans van Griensven (January to July 2007) and Nico Geerts (August 2007 to January 2008) were to build upon the foundations laid by the first rotation. From the outset of the second rotation, colonel Van Griensven declared that the Uruzgan mission was a typical counterinsurgency campaign. According to him, the TFU's task was to make the Taliban irrelevant by winning the local population's support. The second rotation adopted the Master Plan as guideline for its operations and did not make significant adjustments to it.[645] However, there was skepticism within the TFU-staff regarding the feasibility of measuring progress of the campaign.[646]

The main themes for the second rotation were providing security and establishing a credible force. Governance and development were less pronounced as the threat posed by insurgents continued to hamper the efforts in these areas. Van Griensven's initial plan was to expand the Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawud ADZs and ultimately to link them. During the first half of 2007, the TFU would concentrate its activities in the Deh Rafshan-area. As Dutch troops were engaged by insurgents in this northern part of the Tarin Kowt-ADZ, substantial reconstruction activities could not be conducted. Van Griensven recognized that he did not have sufficient

642 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 4

643 Interview Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 12.

644 Interview Dutch commanding officer 4.

645 interview Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch Air Force officer 1.

646 Interview Dutch army staff officer 9.

forces to his disposal for permanent presence within the ADZs. Consequently, the TFU could not move beyond clear-operations and exploit tactical successes against the insurgents.[647]

Crucially, the lack of TFU-troops could not be balanced by Afghan security forces. The ANA-kandak in Uruzgan continued to be understaffed. Furthermore, the Dutch Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) had to vie with the American Special Forces for this scarce capacity. As a result, the ANA-troops were used as a flying brigade and at least provided an Afghan aspect to the ISAF-operations in the province. Unfortunately, the ANP in Uruzgan remained a problem child. According to TFU-reports from this period the ANP actually deteriorated in quality.[648]

An additional drain on the capacity of the TFU was its presence in the Chora district. Although this district was (still) not explicitly marked as an ADZ, the TFU-staff understood its symbolic importance. If the TFU would withdraw from the district, it was presumed that the Taliban would retake control of the area. Furthermore, tribal elders and the population of Chora were generally well disposed towards the TFU.[649] Nevertheless, throughout the spring of 2007 it became increasingly clear that the Taliban were planning an attack on the district center. Skirmishes around police posts near the northern fringe of the Baluchi-valley ensued. Losing control of a friendly district center was understandably an anathema to ISAF in general and to the Dutch military in particular. Moreover, withdrawal from the area would subvert the objective of being a credible force within the province. Hence, the Battle Group established a permanent presence to Chora.[650]

Consequently, Chora became the overriding focus for the second rotation of the TFU. Indications of problems in Deh Rawud were for example recognized but less pronounced. In the Deh Rafshan, skirmishes and IED-attacks continued. As a result, the population's perception of security deteriorated, although the level of violence was lower than in 2006.[651] Accordingly, reconstruction efforts in the ADZs were hampered by the security situation and the inability of the PRT to operate without the overstretched battle group.[652] Simultaneously, the governance aspect of the mission showed a reversal as well increasingly erratic behavior by provincial governor Munib who displayed large spells of absence from the province. This negatively impacted the populations trust in the provincial authorities.[653] All this led members of the TFU-staff to question whether the means were sufficient for accomplishing the TFU's ambitions.

647 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 6; Dutch Air Force officer 1.

648 Interview Dutch commanding officer 2.

649 Interview Dutch commanding officer 9.

650 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*. p. 405-407.

651 Interviews Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch army reservist 4.

652 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch Air Force officer 1.

653 Interview Dutch commanding officer 9.

The situation around Chora culminated in June 2007 in a Taliban attack on the police posts and even the Chora district center. While the company from the Battle Group in Chora held fast to repel the attacks, a counterattack was organized by the TFU and ANA with substantial support by local militias. Ultimately, the combined ISAF and Afghan operation was successful in thwarting the Taliban designs on Chora, albeit with prodigious and later controversial amounts of fire and air support.[654] Although a reconstruction of this episode is beyond the scope of this research, the operation around Chora had a profound effect on the mission and on the Dutch perception of it.[655] The decision to stand and fight in Chora seemingly had a positive effect on the population's perception of the TFU. Although there was critique on how the operation was conducted from both ISAF's headquarters and Afghanistan's central government, locals valued fighting together with the TFU against a common foe.[656] As such, the Chora-operation was a significant boost towards attaining the Master Plan's objective of a "credible taskforce". For the Dutch public and political discourse, "Chora" drove home the difficult conditions in which the TFU had to operate. It further dispelled the oversimplification of a reconstruction mission.

Colonel Nico Geerts succeeded Van Griensven. He and his staff had focused during the preparation on planning a large clearance operation in the Baluchi-valley. The operation, named *Spin Ghar* was to be focused on dismantling the insurgents' logistical infrastructure in the valley rather than detaining or killing the insurgents themselves. Spin Ghar aimed to reduce the influence the insurgents had on the Deh Rafshan and Chora areas.[657] However, it was clear from the outset that the TFU could not establish a permanent presence in the Baluchi-valley as there were simply too few troops to do so. With significant additional resources from RC-South, Spin Ghar was executed in October and November 2007. In the event, the combined force met little resistance in the valley. In the aftermath of Spin Ghar outposts, staffed by Afghan forces, were established at the southern and northern entrances of the valley. As for the long-term effects of the mission, most observers were skeptical as insurgents returned unhindered to the Baluchi-valley in the next months.[658] Whether the subsequent relative calm in the Deh Rafshan and Chora areas was a consequence of the operation and the new outposts is hard to assess.

Despite this lull in parts of the province, the TFU sorely felt the lack of personnel. At the end of 2007, the Deh Rawud district became increasingly restive and thus required more attention

654 See for a comprehensive analysis of the Battle of Chora: Ivor Wiltenburg and Lysanne Leeuwenburg (2021). *The Battle of Chora: A Military Operational Analysis of the 2007 Defence of the Chora District Centre in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan.* Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy

655 Kitzen. *The Course of Cooption*, p. 402-419.

656 Interview Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch Air Force officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 6; Dutch army staff officer 17

657 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3

658 George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21(3), p.440-441.

from the TFU. In communication with the Dutch Defence Staff and army headquarters, Geerts requested additional resources such as infantry platoons and civilian personnel. With regard to the infantry platoons a solution was found by deploying platoons that were specifically meant for guard duty on the FOB's in Deh Rawud and Tarin Kowt, thereby freeing up infantry platoons from the Battle Group for operations.[659] The civilian contribution increased from three to eventually nine individuals at the end of 2007.[660] Still, this increase in manpower did not mean that the battle group could maintain a permanent presence in the areas beyond Tarin Kowt, Deh Rawud and Chora. Expanding and linking the ink-spots as intended was not possible at the time.

In sum, the ambitious objectives as stated by the TFU were still a long way off at the end of 2007. This was caused by a combination of the resilience by the insurgency and the lack of troops within the province to move to the "hold" and "build" phases in line with the (informal) counterinsurgency approach of the TFU. While the Dutch troops acknowledged the need for perseverance in its operations, there remained a discrepancy between the ambitions set out in the Master Plan and the initial allotted two years for Dutch operations in Uruzgan. Nevertheless, the security situation in the Deh Rafshan and Chora improved gradually over the course of 2007, in part due to the operations by the TFU and the OEF-forces in the province. This was augmented by the continuous engagement of the local authorities and tribal leaders by the PRT. Over time, the rotations could build on each other's understanding of the province's dynamics, although this was by no means a flawless process.[661]

The TFU's mission was further significantly influenced by events at the end of 2007 that were beyond the control of the task force. First, Munib was replaced by Hamdam as provincial governor. Like Munib, Hamdam lacked an informal power base in the province and was therefore also dependent on TFU support. For the time being, the Dutch influence on the provincial government increased.[662] A second development was the deployment of the 4th ANA-brigade to Uruzgan in November 2007. Ultimately, 1,700 Afghan soldiers were stationed in Uruzgan. As a result, clearance operations could increasingly follow by establishing permanent presence and development activities. Moreover, the establishment of a brigade headquarters improved the quality of the administration of the now available *kandaks* (battalions).[663] Crucially, the Dutch armed forces matched this deployment by augmenting their OMLT-contingent. Finally, the Dutch government decided in December 2007 to extend the mission for another two years. As a result, the Dutch campaign was given more time to

659 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3

660 Ministerie van Defensie. (2009). *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF: 2008*. Den Haag, p. 7.

661 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 416.

662 Interviews Dutch Staff officer 33; Dutch commanding officer 5: additionally, the provincial chief of police was replaced

663 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 434; Dutch commanding officer 19.

accomplish its objectives. However, the task force itself did start to question the ambitions set out in the Master Plan going into 2008.

In the winter of 2007-2008, the Deh Rawud district came under increasing pressure by the insurgents. TFU-units on patrol were constantly harassed and the Dutch writ in the area contracted to the perimeter of Camp Hadrian. In an attempt to dislodge the insurgents' hold on the district, the battle group initiated operation *Kapcha As*.[664] The operation ended in a fiasco as in the darkness elements of the combined force opened fire on each other. As a result, two Dutch troops were killed and a third was severely wounded. Two Afghan soldiers were killed in another incident that was probably the result of friendly fire as well.[665]

Recognizing the lack of perceptible progress, Geerts requested additional guidance from the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs as a foundation on which he could base a new plan. The main issue with the original campaign plan was that its ambitions were both too vague and too grandiloquent.[666] The eventual result of this request was several documents that still offered little practical guidance and lacked a unitary vision. Consequently, the staff of the third rotation set out to work on a new plan on its own.[667]

4.3.3.2: The Focal Paper (2008-2009)

TFU-4, under the command of colonel Richard van Harskamp continued this work when it took over in January 2008. Although the staff of this fourth rotation were kept informed about the developments in Uruzgan, the plans section started working on a new plan when it arrived in theatre.[668] Again, the attached operational analysts from TNO took on a vital role in the drafting. The new plan, called the "Focal Paper", was finally published in July 2008. It made clear that the ISAF-campaign was essentially a counterinsurgency mission and explicitly stated that the TFU would conduct counterinsurgency operations.[669] As such, it reflected the increased attention towards counterinsurgency principles throughout the task force.

For the next two years the plan envisioned that the TFU would contribute an improved security situation in which the improved provincial authorities (with external assistance) could work towards the longer-term stabilization goals. Arguably the most interesting aspect

664 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 19; Dutch commanding officer 3.

665 Tweede Kamer Der Staten-Generaal. (2008, February 19). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme: Nr. 296. Den Haag

666 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 19.

667 Interview Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch commanding officer 3.

668 Interview Dutch army staff officer 11; Dutch army reservist 5, Dutch commanding officer 1.

669 Task Force Uruzgan/G5. (2008). *Focal Paper: Foundations for the Future.* Tarin Kowt, p.4

of the Focal Paper was that it stated that the objective of building Uruzgan into a developed province with a functioning government could realistically be attained by the year 2050.[670] In any scenario, Dutch troops would be long-gone by then.

These objectives, or "end states" as they were called in the document, pertained to "Governance", Socio/Economic Development and "A Safe and Secure Environment". In contrast to the Master Plan, the objective of a credible task force was omitted. The formulation of these three end states was concise and were divided into several lines of effort. To achieve the stated objectives, practical "desired effects", such as the number of literate adults, the construction of a bridge and the transfer of security responsibility to Afghan forces were formulated and planned for the remainder of the TFU-mission.[671] Another significant change from the Master Plan was that the TFU focused exclusively on the ADZs instead of trying to expand over the whole province. Furthermore, Chora was now included as an ADZ, thereby acknowledging the factual situation. The three ADZs were divided in smaller "Focal Areas". By distinguishing between these areas, the TFU could tailor its operations to the local conditions.[672]

Tellingly, the Focal Paper did not receive formal approval by the ministries of Defence and Foreign affairs when Van Harskamp sought this.[673] Although this lack of sanctioning at the department level did not affect the implementation of the new campaign plan, it showed that the interest in conduct of the campaign was limited at the ministerial levels. Furthermore, as the Focal Paper was not formal policy, it was not subject to political debate in parliament. This constrained the role of parliament to question the government's strategy formulation. As such, the formulation of campaign objectives remained an informal endeavor, initiated and implemented by the TFU's staff.

These changes in the campaign plan in mid-2008 were accompanied by significant adjustments in the TFU's configuration. The most prominent of these was that from the fifth rotation onwards, the TFU was to be led jointly by a military commander and the senior civilian representative.[674] By elevating the civilian component to the command level, the Dutch ensured that the contribution of civilian experts became an integral part of the military plans.[675] Concurrently, the number of civilians in the TFU was increased to twelve. These included new cultural advisors and an expert on narcotics. Furthermore, the intention of placing the PRT under civilian leadership was expressed. These adjustments were both a

670 Task Force Uruzgan/G5. (2008). *Focal Paper: Foundations for the Future.* Tarin Kowt, p. 7

671 TFU. *Focal paper*, p. 21-33.

672 Interview Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 11; Dutch commanding officer 17.

673 Interview Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch army staff officer 24.

674 The military commander of the TFU's fifth rotation was colonel Kees Matthijssen who had previously commanded a battlegroup in Iraq. The senior civilian representative was Peter Mollema.

675 Ministerie van Defensie. *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF*, p. 11.

reflection of the improved security situation within the ADZs by 2008 as well as a change in approach that increasingly favored non-kinetic activities.[676]

In contrast to the conceptual changes in the campaign plan, the increased emphasis on the civilian contribution was a formal adaptation. While successive TFU and PRT commanders had observed that additional civilian expertise capacity was needed, reinforcing the civilian component required the assent of the various departments.[677] Of course, the political and development advisors offered their observations and recommendations to their own organizations.[678] The developments regarding the PRT, non-kinetic effects and information operations will be discussed in more depth in subsequent sections. However, by the summer of 2008, the TFU and its environment had notably altered.

In the latter half of 2008, TFU-5 focused on strengthening a nascent program on Key Leader Engagement. By augmenting the TFU's intelligence component and improving the cooperation between the various subunits, the Dutch were able to engage tribal elders throughout the focal areas and exploit the relative calm around the population centers. This was aided by the increased presence of NGOs in the province.[679] A new large-scale operation in the Baluchi-valley, *Tura Ghar* (January 2009), was not opposed by insurgents. With the availability of sufficient troops from the ANA, this operation could now be followed by establishing a permanent presence in the erstwhile insurgent staging area. As such, it became feasible to enlarge the area in which the TFU could initiate development projects and facilitate linking the population with the provincial authorities. It seemed that the TFU's ink-spot had expanded.[680] Still, insurgents retained the ability to move into the ADZs and initiate suicide attacks and plant IEDs.[681] Beyond the ADZs, the Taliban enjoyed a freedom of movement that was intermittently contested by American and Australian (and from May 2009, Dutch) special forces.

676 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 432-433; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 21; Dutch commanding officer 17.

677 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 9.

678 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch civil servant 5.

679 Interview Dutch commanding officer 10; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 21.

680 Dimitriu and de Graaf. The Dutch Coin approach, p. 442-444.

681 Ibidem, p. 445.

4.3.3.3: The Uruzgan Campaign Plan (2009-2010)

While TFU-5 could exploit the improved security situation at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, the incoming rotation was working on a new campaign plan. Again, operational analysts from TNO initiated this process. Two analysts who had been deployed to earlier rotations of the TFU felt that the Focal Paper was too focused on the short term and needed to include more attainable objectives for the transfer of responsibility towards the Afghans. At the same time, the Focal Paper had certain qualities such as a more bespoke approach to the focal areas and clearer short-term and intermediate objectives. The main weakness of the Focal Paper, according to the analysts was that it was too military in outlook and did not inform the activities of other parties within the TFU and the province. Furthermore, the Focal Paper was focused on the activities by the (Dutch part of) the TFU.[682] Instead, the campaign plan should be more comprehensive to include the variety of actors in Uruzgan.

Primarily, the Afghan authorities were to be included in the plan, especially as the Dutch were presumably leaving in 2010. Far from being a unitary actor, the Afghans had to align their efforts among themselves. The provincial government, the national police, the national army and the intelligence and security service (National Directorate of Security, NDS) were constantly engaged in bickering over authorities. Thus, one of the preconditions of the TFU's success was to foster unity among the Afghan governmental organizations. Secondly, the countries contributing to the TFU had expanded to seven by 2009. For example, France had deployed an OMLT, while Slovakia provided guards for Camp Holland.

A third development that warranted consideration in the plan was the influx of NGOs in Uruzgan. By early 2009, 30 NGOs were present in the province, a marked increase from the handful in 2006. While the TFU could not control their activities, close coordination could potentially benefit the development of the province. An additional boon for the TFU was that the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan opened an office in Tarin Kowt in 2008. These developments reflected the improved security situation in the province and at the same time contributed to the ability to enhance its development and governmental structures.[683]

This multitude of actors in Uruzgan required a collaborative decision-making process. The objective of the new plan was not to control all the various actors' activities but to incorporate their goals and perspectives to align (or deconflict) the efforts in the province. With this plan, military and civil activities were integrated and identified common short-, mid-, and long-term goals. Furthermore, the analysts envisaged that the plan should be iterative in the sense that it could be adjusted according to conditions on the ground. These conditions and the effects of the operations had to be assessed through operational analysis

682 Interviews Dutch army reservist 4; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch Army reservist 2.

683 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch civil servant 2.

which then could inform changes to the plan. After each rotation, the plan and the situation in the province had to be reviewed.[684]

By itself, the rough draft of a new campaign plan needed a sponsor to be implemented in Uruzgan. The prospective TFU-commander, brigadier-general Tom Middendorp, invited the analysts to brief the outlines of the plan.[685] Middendorp embraced the plan and asked the analysts to continue working on it during the preparation for the deployment. Crucially, this acceptance was matched by the designated civilian representative of the sixth rotation, Joep Wijnands. This ensured that both the military staff and the variety of civilian experts could align their plans. Of course, some cultural differences had to be overcome, but this collaboration led to increased understanding between the service members and civil servants.[686] At the level of the Defence Staff, the nascent plan was regarded as an internal planning document. As such, the planners received little guidance or interference from The Hague.[687]

Based on prior experience in theatre, intelligence reports and advice from previous rotations, the relevant factors influencing the campaign were identified. This translated into nine development themes. These were similar to the objectives set out in the Master Plan and the Focal Paper. A primary distinguishing feature of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan was that it explicitly identified and incorporated the effects that were caused by other actors outside of the control of the TFU, such as Afghan authorities, NGOs, and local leaders. Recognizing the limits of the TFU's control, the plan sought to either mitigate, exploit, or influence the effects generated by other parties in the province.[688]

When the sixth rotation eventually deployed in early 2009, the staff set out to finalize the plan based on the conditions as they encountered them. The new campaign plan needed to include an outline on how to measure the performance of the TFU and the developments within Uruzgan. To this end the various actors in the TFU and beyond were consulted to identify metrics and how the data informing these metrics could be acquired.[689] Furthermore, the experts offered insight on how these metrics could be utilized to adjust the TFU's activities. The analysts acknowledged that most meaningful data would be qualitative in nature rather than quantitative. As such, neat charts depicting (preferably) positive trends were largely impossible to produce. Moreover, such data would be meaningless without the

684 Aletta Eikelboom, Rudi Gouweleeuw, Geert Roseboom and Jeffrey Schwerzel (2019). The Dutch Approach in OPSA: Lessons Learned from a Decade of OPSA in Afghanistan. In A. Shilling (Ed.), *Operations Assessment in Complex Environments: Theory and Practice*. NATO Science and Technology Organization., p. 254-257.

685 Interviews Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch Army reservist 2.

686 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4.

687 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4.

688 Kitzen, Rietjens and Osinga, Soft Power, the Hard Way, p. 171 - 172.

689 Interviews Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch Army reservist 5.

proper understanding of the context. Rather, the metrics were used to make sense of the environment and understand the effects the campaign had on it.[690]

An overriding concern for the Uruzgan Campaign Plan was that the Dutch involvement in Uruzgan was nearing its proposed end in august 2010. Although it was unclear at that moment how the ISAF-mission would continue in the province and whether this would include a residual Dutch presence, it was apparent that the Afghan authorities and security services would be called upon to take increased responsibility for Uruzgan.[691] This echoed the premise of the Focal Paper that envisaged that a stable and secure Uruzgan would be a long-term effort. The TFU would focus its efforts to supporting the Afghan authorities in assuming the responsibility for security, governance, and development. To this end, the TFU initiated the drafting of the "Uruzgan Security Plan" by the provincial Afghan governmental and security institutions. This Afghan-owned plan would both serve as a vehicle to foster cooperation among the various Afghan organizations and to provide a foundation for the final Uruzgan Campaign Plan.[692]

The analysis leading up to the UCP thus acknowledged the limitations of the TFU, both in time and influence, to steer the developments in the province. Accordingly, the end-state of the mission was kept 'fuzzy'.[693] In the definitive version of the UCP, the TFU's objective:

> *"[...], as part of ISAF, in partnership with ANSF and in coordination with GIRoA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the International Community, is to contribute to a reliable and effective government that can bring the government and the people closer together, and is able to provide a stable and secure environment and development progress in Uruzgan, in due course without ISAF support."*[694]

This formulation did not diverge significantly from the objectives as stated in the Master Plan and the Focal Paper. The defining element of the UCP was the explicit statement that the process towards this end state was iterative, based on conditions on the ground, instead of sequential. Compared to the Focal Paper, the UCP differed on two points. First, the boundaries of the focal areas were adjusted to represent the tribal dispositions in Uruzgan rather than geographical features. Based on the input of among others the tribal advisor, this adjustment better reflected the local dynamics and should improve the planning process towards the focal areas. A second change in the UCP was that it replaced the USECT methodology with the

690 Eikelboom, et al. Dutch approach in OPSA, p. 257-258.

691 Ingrid van Bemmel, Aletta Eikelboom and Paul Hoefsloot (2010). 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan. *Militaire Spectator*, 179(4), p. 198-199

692 Interview Dutch commanding officer 23

693 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch Army reservist 5

694 Sebastiaan Rietjens (2012). Between expectations and reality: the Dutch engagement in Uruzgan. In N. Hynek, & P. Marton (Eds.), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational contributions to reconstruction*. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 74.

classical "Shape, Clear, Hold, Build" framework for counterinsurgency.[695] Largely, this was a change in semantics. However, by employing this idiom the TFU aligned itself with that of ISAF RC-South.[696]

The eventual implementation of the UCP yielded mixed results. A positive development was that Middendorp and Wijnands succeeded in bringing the various Afghan actors in the province to the table with the aim of enhancing their collaboration. The provincial governor, the provincial chief of police, the brigade commander of the ANA and the provincial director of the NDS met periodically with the civil-military command team of the TFU. In what became known as the "Big Six" meetings, the TFU could consult the primary Afghan authorities collectively and facilitate aligning their perspectives.[697] Increasingly, the Afghan authorities were able to assume responsibility over the ADZs. In particular, the 4th ANA-brigade, assisted by the OMLTs, shouldered a substantial portion of the burden of providing security.[698]

Despite the profound analysis underpinning the UCP, the practical implementation was hampered by several problems. First, the UCP was classified and could consequently not be shared with civilian organizations, thereby hampering the ability to achieve a mutual understanding. Furthermore, the Dutch PRT saw a concurrent reorganization in which the CIVREP would become the PRT-commander and additional civilians would augment the mission teams. In practice, this led to confusion about the command responsibilities.[699] To make matters worse, the funding for PRT-projects was slashed by the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation.[700]As a result of these problems pertaining to the PRT, valuable time was lost in putting the new plan into action. Compounding these difficulties was the lack of adherence to the plan by Australian and American special forces. Of course, these allies had no command relationship with the TFU. Where the TFU strove to improve the delicate tribal relations in Uruzgan, the Australians and Americans believed that the security concerns warranted close collaboration with Matiullah Khan and his militia, who were still regarded by the Dutch as a negative influence in the province. Regardless of the merits of both perspectives, the lack of alignment between the TFU and its partners precluded a uniform implementation of the UCP.[701]
The litmus-test of the progress made in Uruzgan was to be provided by the presidential elections in August 2009. The ANSF would be primarily responsible for securing the polling

695 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 459-460

696 Interview Dutch civil servant 2.

697 Interview Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch commanding officer 23.

698 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 464-465.

699 Ibidem, p. 461.

700 Jair van de Lijn (2011). *3D "The Next Generation": Lessons Learned From Uruzgan for Future Operations*. Den Haag: Clingendael Institute, p. 34.

701 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 461-463.

stations in the province while the TFU-units would offer assistance when necessary.[702] During the "Big Six" meetings, the plans for the election day were drawn up. One of the most important aspects was the establishment of an Operational Coordination Centre-Provincial (OCC-P), in which the Afghan security forces could coordinate their activities for the elections and beyond.[703] Overseeing this important day was the seventh rotation of the TFU, led by brigadier Marc van Uhm and the civilian representative Michel Rentenaar.

From a security perspective, the elections were a success. No large incidents were reported in the province and TFU-units were not called to assist.[704] However, presidential election was marred by rumors of widespread fraud across Afghanistan. Moreover, the voter turnout was extremely limited. The numbers for Uruzgan reflected this with approximately one in five eligible voters casting their ballot.[705] Consequently, while the preparation and the execution of the plan for election day and the role of the ANSF could be heralded as a success, the overall result of the elections was sobering. A reason given for the low turnout in Uruzgan was that particularly members of the Ghilzai tribe had little confidence in the fairness of the elections.[706]

Despite the disappointment of the election, the seventh TFU-rotation saw some progress along the lines of security, governance, and development. Although the ANP remained a point of concern, the ANA proved a dependable partner for holding patrol bases, thereby increasing the presence of ANSF across the ADZs. In an operation in the Mirabad area (east of Tarin Kowt), ANA-units assisted by Australian forces established a new patrol base, expanding the writ of the provincial authorities.[707] Efforts to enhance provincial and district governments were increased as well. Regarding development efforts, the influx of organizations into the province continued. Dozens of organizations were now active in Uruzgan, and CIMIC-projects were adjusted to more long-term development.[708]

After the elections, the focus shifted towards continuing to build the ADZs and if possible, expand the TFU's footprint. An additional consideration was the large deployment of American troops to Afghanistan. Uruzgan saw the deployment of a large American helicopter detachment. Another effect of the "Afghan Surge" was that ISAF, now commanded by general Stanley McChrystal, officially embraced population-centric counterinsurgency. This approach was not dissimilar to the successive campaign plans of the TFU, especially from 2008 onwards. However, in an effort to align the multitude of national contingents, ISAF

702 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 23

703 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2009). *Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 366*. Den Haag, p. 89-10.

704 Interview Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 14.

705 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 469

706 The Liaison Office. (2010). *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*. Kabul: The Liaison Office, p. viii.

707 Interviews Dutch Marine staff officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 14.

708 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 466-467.

headquarters in Kabul issued many stringent guidances on how the international troops were to adhere to the new operating concept. To mark progress, ISAF was adamant on the metrics for every province, such as the number of IED-attacks, schools opened, and police officers trained. This emphasis on quantifiable metrics by ISAF revealed a discrepancy with the UCP where the latter relied more on qualitative data to adjust the campaign.[709]

The UCP provided guidance for the first three months of the seventh rotation. After that, the UCP was to be reviewed.[710] The staff section for plans (G5) and the attached operational analysts adjusted the UCP on three points. A first adjustment was that the UCP was considered to be too linear in its phasing (shape, clear, hold, build). The staff contended that the phasing could be reversed based on conditions on the ground. For instance, an area that was designated to be in the "hold" phase could be overrun by insurgents and subsequently would have to be "cleared" again. A second modification was that the description of the effects should be distinguished according to the levels that were to attain them. In this way, the constituent parts of the TFU would be better informed of their objectives and how these could be assessed. A third point that required revision was that the effects by the various actors should be synchronized during operations. This particularly applied to non-kinetic effects by civilians such as the political advisors and cultural advisors. Despite the comprehensive character of the UCP, the civilian contribution was often not an integral part of operation planning.[711] With these adjustments, TFU-7 was confident that the UCP was fit to set up the eighth rotation for success.

By the time, the eighth rotation deployed to Uruzgan at the beginning of 2010, the question of whether the Dutch would retain a presence in Uruzgan beyond the summer of that year came to a head. Within the Dutch military, it was widely recognized that the mission had exhausted the organization. Any residual presence would therefore be significantly smaller to be sustainable.[712] At the political level, it was clear that the Netherlands would in any circumstance transfer its leading role to an ally, who had not been identified at the time. However, the governing coalition was heavily at odds over continuing the mission in Uruzgan. The Christian Democrats (CDA) were increasingly susceptible to the overtures by the allies to remain in the province. Withdrawal from Uruzgan would draw the ire from the United States who had reinforced the international effort and asked their European allies to match the investment. The CDA reasoned that a smaller mission, with a more civilian

709 Interview Dutch civil servant 1.

710 Interviews Dutch Marine staff officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 13.

711 Interview Dutch Marine staff office 2r; Dutch civil-servant 1.

712 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 13; Dutch commanding officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 12; Dutch army staff officer 23.

character would be a reasonable compromise between what was politically (and militarily) feasible and what was desirable from the standpoint of alliance politics.[713]

Conversely, the Social Democratic party (PvdA) was adamantly opposed to prolonging the mission to Afghanistan in any configuration. The Social Democrats found further ammunition for their opposition when an inquiry into the Dutch political support for Operation Iraqi Freedom concluded in January 2010 that the invasion in 2003 lacked a basis in international law. Thus, the coalition government of that time, headed by the CDA, had been wrong to offer its support. From the perspective of the PvdA, this lack of judgment by the Christian Democrats extended to the Afghanistan-mission. When the coalition government subsequently received an official request in February 2010 by NATO to prolong the mission, this was regarded by the PvdA as an attempt to force an extension. In a heated debate, the Social Democrats resigned from the coalition government that collapsed as a result. This sealed the fate of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan, as the political mandate ended in August 2010 and the decommissioned government could not extend it.[714]

Consequently, the Dutch campaign fizzled out over the spring of 2010 as the TFU started to plan for the withdrawal and handing over the responsibilities to the successors.[715] In the four years of the Dutch efforts in Uruzgan some progress had been made regarding security and development. The districts of Deh Rawud and Tarin Kowt were assessed to be under government control. Within the ADZs, insurgent activities were now mainly subversion and IED-attacks However, the security situation remained fragile.[716] Socio-economic development showed a marked improvement, albeit from penurious beginnings. More than a hundred schools had been opened and access to healthcare had proliferated. Economic activity in the ADZs had increased as well during the four years. Nevertheless, Uruzgan still performed at a lower level than other Afghan provinces.[717] With regard to governance, the assessment was bleaker. Government institutions remained understaffed, and the capacity of the judicial system was still limited.[718]

Perhaps the clearest accolade for the TFU-mission from an Afghan perspective was a letter by tribal leaders in March 2010 in which they appealed to the Dutch to retain a presence in Uruzgan. According to them, the Dutch attempts to balance the various interests of the tribes had worked well and led to tangible progress in socio-economic development. The signatories were apprehensive that this delicate balance would be disturbed by the successor

713 Kathleen McInnis (2020). *How and Why States Defect from Contemporary Military Coalitions.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 204-207.

714 Ibidem. p 207-209.

715 A redeployment task force was established to execute the withdrawal.

716 The Liaison Office. (2010). *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010.* Kabul: The Liaison Office, p. IX

717 Ibidem, p. 7-22.

718 Ibidem, p. 27-39.

of the TFU, the American-Australian led Combined Team Uruzgan (CTU).[719] Over the years, the Americans and Australians had continued to collaborate with Popolzai strongmen Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan. While their militias had proved effective against Taliban, they also used their relations with Western forces to pursue private vendettas. The petitioners were worried about Uruzgan reverting to the situation before the TFU had deployed. As the letter was to no avail, the tribal leaders were subsequently vindicated in their fears. Governor Hamdam was replaced later that month with an affiliate of the Popolzai power brokers. Over 2010, individuals who had cooperated with the Dutch were sidelined or even killed, thereby strengthening the hold that the Popolzai held over the province. Eventually, Matiullah Khan became the provincial Chief of Police. The modest progress made under TFU proved to be fragile.

Furthermore, it is important to note that despite the improving security situation between 2006 and 2010 violence and subversion persisted in Uruzgan. Although the presence of the TFU and the Afghan security forces in the ADZs was no longer contested by the beginning of 2008, IED-attacks, assassinations, and other subversive activities continued. Beyond the ADZs, groups of insurgents had far more freedom of action. To ensure that the security of Uruzgan's population centers could be consolidated, special forces (Dutch, Australian and American) conducted operations around the periphery of the province to disrupt the insurgents' activities.[720]

The Dutch campaign in Uruzgan was formulated in an informal way (see table 4.3). Throughout the TFU's existence, it was the staffs that initiated and applied the iterations of the campaign plans. An interesting aspect was the role of the operational analysts in the planning process. As staff augmentees, they had a larger role in drafting and adjusting the campaign plans than their formal task of campaign assessment would suggest. The analysts had the support of the TFU-commanders and the wider staff and sought advice of the TFU's subunits and other actors within Uruzgan province. A small group of individuals, the analysts ensured a rather informal learning process as they were the main drafters of the plans' objectives and the arbiters on their effectiveness.

Moreover, the informal aspect of the campaign's planning process was driven home by the lack of interest into the plans at the ministerial levels and beyond. Official sanctioning of the Focal Paper was withheld in 2008, while in the case of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan in 2009 it was not even sought. Regardless, this aloofness in The Hague had no adverse effects on the implementation of the conceptual aspects of the plans. Conversely, individual operations were to be briefed for approval to the Defence staff. This meant that tactical (and technical)

719 Letter to the elected representatives of the Dutch people, translated by Bette Dam; Interview Dutch civil servant 2; Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*. p. 472-473

720 See Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 241-280.

activities were formally controlled from the Dutch capital while the planning and conduct of the long-term campaign was largely a bottom-up process without much interference.

Learning at the campaign level	Manifestations	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Campaign plans	Plans were adjusted by the TFU based on experiences	Informal adaptation	Organizational culture
Strategic guidance	Disconnect between strategic level and theater	Recognized deficiency	Organizational culture
Troop levels	Small reinforcements, continuous issues with troop cap	Limited formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, domestic politics, organizational culture
Configuration	Increase in civilian representation and dual command (2008) after evaluations by TFU	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, domestic politics
Rotation schedule	Short tours to spread broad experience, but detrimental to depth of knowledge	Recognized deficiency	Organizational politics, culture

Table 4.3: Learning processes at the campaign level

4.3.4: Vignettes of learning in Uruzgan

Beyond the largely informal learning processes at the campaign level, the Dutch forces adapted to more specific challenges in Uruzgan. In the following subsections, these learning processes are presented in vignettes that mirror the other recurring themes in counterinsurgency prescriptions. The first vignette examines the interagency cooperation through the experience of the Dutch Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). In the second vignette, developments within the Dutch intelligence process are studied. The third vignette looks at the adaptations in non-kinetic activities. Finally, the fourth vignette looks at counter-IED efforts as a manifestation to mitigate adversarial activities. As with the learning processes at the campaign level, the learning processes in each vignette will be analyzed through the theoretical lens of chapter 2, namely on the stage of learning, underlying dynamics and factors of influence.

4.3.4.1: The provincial reconstruction team

When reading the Dutch government's Article 100 letter of December 2005, one could be forgiven for getting the impression that the PRT dwarfed the Battle Group in size. Of course, the converse was true. The PRT initially numbered around 50 personnel, while the Battle Group was an augmented infantry battalion and had approximately 800 troops at its disposal. Despite this lopsided organizational arrangement, the PRT was responsible for two of the lines of operations: development and governance. Combined with the political emphasis on the reconstruction character of the mission, the expectation that the PRT would provide the main effort in Uruzgan was warranted.[721]

Although the Dutch military had acquired experience with the PRT-concept in Baghlan, the deployment of the PRT to Uruzgan marked a first for the Royal Netherlands Army. As there was no equivalent of a PRT in the army's standing organization, the unit's organization was built around a battalion staff or equivalent. For instance, the first two rotations were led by the army's tank battalions.[722] The PRT organization had a small staff with intelligence and operations sections. In the initial structure of the PRT, three civil servants were detached from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: a political advisor, a development advisor and tribal advisor.[723] Specifically trained CIMIC-officers complemented the staff. The field work was conducted by three (later expanded to four) mission teams composed of four service members. Although the mission teams had no fixed organization, they were generally comprised of officers and senior NCOs from the leading battalion, reinforced by additional personnel.[724] Given the novelty of the PRT-concept in the army, most of this personnel had no prior experience in the prospective line of work.

During the predeployment training, the PRTs were largely responsible for their own preparation. There was no established PRT predeployment training, nor would one be developed during the mission. This resulted in a recurring scramble for information and PRTs often found themselves facing similar challenges in their preparation phase.[725] Curiously, the first rotations did not seek out the experiences of the PRTs in Baghlan. Instead, additional knowledge was sought by engaging with previous allied PRTs in Afghanistan on their experiences.[726] A fixture in the PRT's predeployment training was participation in the Uruzgan Integration exercise. However, from the perspective of the PRT, this exercise was

721 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2005, December 22). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme nr. 193. Den Haag

722 Other PRTs were led by for example engineer battalions and field artillery battalions.

723 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2006). *Evaluatie PRT 1 Uruzgan.* Tarin Kowt.

724 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 20

725 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified en best practices van de voortrekkers.* Den Haag, 22/104

726 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9.

too focused on the Battle Group and held little training value for the mission teams and the PRT-staff.[727] A challenging consequence of the PRT's composite organization was that personnel from outside of the battalion staff's nucleus was often assigned on the basis of availability instead of expertise. An additional, related impediment was that a substantial number of positions was filled at a relatively late date, thereby hampering the preparation phase.[728] The combination of a lack of template training and "just-in-time" staffing led to an uneven level of knowledge among the personnel in the PRTs.[729]

While pioneering with the concept, the organization and the preparation, the PRT faced the assignment to foster development and governance in Uruzgan. At the beginning of the mission, this was however impeded by the dismal security situation. Due to the organization of the PRT the mission teams were dependent on force protection by the Battle Group. As described in the previous subsections, the available infantry capacity was stretched thin by the multitude of demands. Generally, the TFU-commanders and the Battle Group explicitly stated that the PRT was indeed the mainstay of the mission. Nonetheless, the infantry platoons required were often simply needed elsewhere. Although the availability of the Battle Group platoons gradually improved with the ANA-reinforcements and the guard platoons, the dependency of the PRT on force protection remained throughout the mission.[730]

After the second PRT-rotation, the tour length was increased from 4 to 6 months. The reason for this was that to allow for the relationships that the mission teams established to come to fruition and retain the knowledge acquired in theater.[731] While the benefits of this change were clear, the tradeoff was that the personnel of the PRTs now had a mandatory leave of 14 days as per Dutch regulations. This meant that during a period of two and a half months in the rotation the PRT was continuously transitioning personnel.

Another early evaluation point concerning the PRT was that it was predominantly composed of military personnel. The service members, particularly in the mission teams, were able to join the infantry on patrols and engage with the local population. Furthermore, when the PRT-staff and personnel in the mission teams hailed from the same unit, the familiarity paid dividends in the execution of the mission due to the developed trust.[732] However, despite

727 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified ISAF: Eindrapportage over de Nederlandse inzet bij de ISAF missie 2006 - 2010*. Den Haag), p. 44; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 20.

728 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2007). *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3: Periode maart t/m september 2007*. Tarin Kowt; interviews Dutch commanding officer 22; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 20.

729 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 22/104.

730 Task Force Uruzgan. (2007). *Assement Commander TFU-2*. Tarin Kowt; Task Force Uruzgan. (2008). *CDS Evaluatie C-1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force Uruzgan-III*.; interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

731 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2007). *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3: Periode maart t/m september 2007*. Tarin Kowt; interviews Dutch commanding officer 20; Dutch commanding officer 5.

732 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9.

these positive traits, most service members in the PRT had little experience or training in directing reconstruction projects. This was recognized within the TFU as an impediment to the PRT's effectiveness. During the early rotations, commanders of the PRT and TFU acknowledged that many of the activities conducted by the PRT required specific expertise. Moreover, they felt that the military character of the Task Force was at odds with both the political discourse on the 'Comprehensive Approach' and the operational demands of the counterinsurgency mission.[733] Accordingly, commanders requested additional support from civilian specialists from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation.[734]

This analysis drove main adaptation regarding the PRT during the mission, as it took on an increasingly civilian character from 2008 and onwards. The influx of additional civilian personnel was linked with the prolongation of the mission. The official announcement of the extension by the Dutch government explicitly stated that the civilian contribution of the PRT would increase in 2008 and that the PRT would eventually come under civilian leadership.[735] The subsequent parliamentary debate showed broad support for the proposed increased civilian character of the mission. With increased participation by personnel of other departments, the TFU could now adopt the *Comprehensive Approach* in the field.[736] Furthermore, the extension letter stated that the PRT would receive dedicated force protection, "as soon as possible".[737] Despite this tentative political directive, no practical steps were made to implement it in theater.

The civilian participation to the TFU was first augmented at the start of the fifth rotation when the mission came under the joint leadership of colonel Cees Matthijssen and the civilian representative Peter Mollema. At the beginning of the sixth rotation, the PRT came under civilian command. Nominally, the civilian representative would lead the PRT, however his duties as joint TFU-commander precluded him from giving daily guidance to the reconstruction efforts.[738] As a result, the leadership was delegated to both the deputy civilian representative and a lieutenant-colonel from the Dutch army. The former official was responsible for relations with the provincial government and contacts with the Dutch embassy in Kabul. For his part, the military officer led the mission teams and the internal

733 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 9.

734 Ministerie van Defensie. (2009). *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF: 2008*. Den Haag, p. 11; Lenny Hazelbag (2016). *De geïntegreerde benadering in Afghanistan: tussen ambitie en praktijk*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, p. 143-144. At the time, the Comprehensive Approach was designated as the 3D-approach (Defense, Diplomacy and Development). For consistency, the Comprehensive Approach is used throughout.

735 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, November 30). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 279. Den Haag, p.5.

736 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, December 17). Handelingen Tweede Kamer: verlenging ISAF. Den Haag

737 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, November 30). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 279. Den Haag, p. 32..

738 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch civil servant 5

processes of the PRT.[739] The efficacy of these complex command arrangements hinged on the personal relationships of the involved officials.[740] Furthermore, it was often unclear how the command responsibilities in the PRT were distributed for its members and for external parties.[741]

Beyond the new command arrangements, the PRT-organization was itself was augmented. It acquired additional personnel from the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation. Furthermore, at the end of 2008 a Dutch Police Mentoring Team, including a staff element was created within the PRT. International contributions included Australian and Slovakian staff officers and representatives from USAID and EUPOL. Further augmentations included a larger pool of functional specialists. Overall, by 2009 the PRT numbered approximately 125 personnel, a striking increase from the 50 individuals in 2006. Despite these reinforcements, the PRT still had no dedicated force protection.[742]

Over the course of 2009 and 2010, the stature of the PRT changed, constituting a second adaptation. With the improved security situation and the increased capabilities, the PRT now became the central element of the TFU.[743] As such the reality in the field came to resemble the public discourse of the mission. Consequently, the PRT became the unit that the other elements of the TFU would support.[744] More emphasis was placed on long term projects and promoting improved governance at the provincial and district levels. A constraining factor for the PRT to take on this leading role was, however, that its staff had not grown and thus was largely unable to coordinate the various efforts or plan larger scale PRT-led operations. A potential solution would be to transfer staff capacity from the TFU or Battle Group towards the PRT. Yet, the general organizational disposition remained in place to the end of the Uruzgan mission.[745]

In Deh Rawud and Chora the various units of the TFU could work in a more integrated fashion, specifically the Battle Group subunits and the PRT-mission teams, as there was less interference from their respective headquarters. By living in smaller bases or outposts, relations with the local population could be established more easily. Therefore, outlying district centers of Deh Rawud and Chora saw a better, continuous presence of the TFU than the surroundings of Tarin Kowt where the sprawling international base was located.[746] For a large part of the denizens of Camp Holland the only interaction with Afghans consisted

739 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 22; Dutch civil servant 5

740 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 22; Dutch civil servant 5

741 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 001/114.

742 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2009). PRT Briefing. Amersfoort.

743 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 002/122.

744 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 22

745 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 002/111.

746 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 22/108; Interview Dutch army staff officer 17; Dutch commanding officer 17.

of haggling with local peddlers over mementos and trinkets at the Bazaar every Sunday. To understand local dynamics, the PRT thus had to engage with the people from Uruzgan where they lived.

A third manifestation of adaptation was the gradual development of knowledge within the PRT about the province. Throughout the mission, the PRT strived to acquire a thorough understanding of Uruzgan's dynamics. This knowledge was necessary to identify the local leaders and how to engage them. From an intelligence perspective, the PRT was both a sensor and the main beneficiary of this information. However, with the small intelligence section and little formal training on this type of intelligence gathering, the PRT was hard-pressed to collect and process this intricate knowledge. To the credit of the respective early rotations, the PRTs grasped that the situation in Uruzgan was more complex than a Manichean conflict between the Taliban and the central government with neatly delineated tribal affiliations. Over the course of the first two rotations, the PRT produced a PowerPoint presentation "*Layers of conflict*" that discerned the various axes through which conflicts developed in Uruzgan. For instance, it identified residual grievances between the former *Mujahideen* and the communist government from the 1980's and the access to (natural) resources as drivers for conflict. These various axes led to shifting alliances between and within tribes with confounding cross-links for foreign interlopers.[747]

The members of the PRTs strove to leverage the gradually improving knowledge on Uruzgan by engaging various local leaders and their followers. Mission teams engaged with the tribes within their area of operations while the PRT-commanders and the POLAD's connected with the provincial governor and other provincial government officials in a bid to mentor them. Yet, this effort was initially makeshift as there was no comprehensive system in the TFU for *key leader engagement* (KLE). This had changed with the fourth rotation of the PRT initiating a program for KLE along with a database in which the information retrieved from the engagements could be stored.[748] This would ensure that subsequent rotations could build on the work of their predecessors.[749] With the addition of two new cultural advisors to the TFU in the summer of 2008 the PRT could further improve its understanding by fusing its intelligence with the knowledge of the civilian specialists.[750]

During the fifth rotation of the TFU, *Key Leader Engagement* was elevated in importance to the level of the Task Force staff. The TFU now integrated KLE in its staff processes and operations. As such, the fine-grained knowledge about Uruzgan's society could be leveraged

747 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2009). PRT Briefing. Amersfoort; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9.

748 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 06/121.

749 interviews Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 3; Kitzen, *Course of Cooption* (2016), p. 424.

750 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 448.

for all lines of operations: security, development and governance. The integration of KLE was supported by the intelligence section of the TFU staff.[751] This was in itself a manifestation of how intelligence personnel increasingly collected and analyzed data beyond purely military considerations.[752] In a collaborative effort, the PRT, the intelligence section and the civilian specialists devised a process that synchronized KLE-efforts, consolidated the information that was acquired and identified potential ways to leverage it.[753] While the PRT, with its increased complement of civilians, remained responsible for most interactions with the local leaders, the TFU now increasingly guided these efforts and sought to utilize their results. This novel approach was expanded upon during the sixth rotation when the TFU-commander and the civilian representative initiated the "Big Six-meetings".[754] The later rotations continued this approach.[755] As KLE and the underpinning intelligence became an integral part of the TFU's operations, the PRT's position within the mission became even more salient.

To summarize this subsection, the PRT saw three developments over the course of the Uruzgan mission: the "civilianization" of the organizational structure, the position of the PRT in the TFU, and the accumulation of knowledge on the province and how to leverage it (see table 4.4). The increased civilian character was driven by the analysis of early commanders that the PRT required more civilian expertise. Of course, the deployment of additional civil servants to the province required institutional support and the collaboration of the other ministries. This was assured in the political decision to extend the mission. The changes in the PRT's stature in the TFU and its improved information position in Uruzgan were results of internal TFU learning processes. These adaptations were facilitated by the decrease in violence in the ADZs and the improvements in the intelligence process in the ADZs. Thus, the efficacy of the PRT-concept increased during the mission and was consequently touted by the involved departments as a blueprint for future missions.[756] However, the PRT remained a foreign body within the army as the task fell to different battalions and no central training program was established throughout the mission. As a result, there was no single unit (or 'anchor point') responsible for storing and sharing the acquired experiences.

751 Ibidem, p. 449-451.

752 Interview Dutch army staff officer 13.

753 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 448-449.

754 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch commanding officer 23.

755 Interviews Dutch civil servant 1; Dutch Marine staff officer 2; Dutch army reservist 4

756 Ministerie van Defensie. (2011). *Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006 – 2010* . Den Haag, p. 102-113.

Provincial Reconstruction Team	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Civilian contribution	Increase in civilians attached to PRT and civilian command of the PRT (2008)	Formal adaptation	Learning mechanisms, civil-military relations
Status of the PRT in the TFU	Became more pronounced over time, based on conditions, experiences and plans. Yet, this was never formalized in structures	Informal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture
Leveraging knowledge on Uruzgan	Program on Key-leader engagement	Informal adaptation	Informal learning and dissemination mechanisms
Consistency in preparing the PRT	No formal specific training program. PRT was staffed by various battalions with attached personnel	Recognized deficiency	Lack of formal learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture

Table 4.4: Learning processes concerning the PRT

4.3.4.2: Intelligence

Understanding the environment in Uruzgan was a key consideration before the Dutch Task Force deployed. In the letter to parliament announcing the attention to deploy to Afghanistan, the Dutch government emphasized that intelligence was crucial for force protection. To ensure an adequate intelligence picture for the task force, "a broad array of intelligence collection and analysis assets would be deployed".[757] During the Dutch mission in Iraq (2003-2005), the intelligence capacity of the battle groups there had been too small in relation to the complex mission.[758]

Based on these experiences, the intelligence organization in the TFU was expanded. This resulted in a panoply of intelligence elements within the Task Force. For instance, the Battle Group, the PRT and the engineer company each had an intelligence section in their staffs. These intelligence efforts were augmented by a 'module' from the ISTAR-battalion.[759] An ISTAR-module consisted of a reconnaissance platoon, a team tasked with engaging sources

757 Tweede Kamer. *Dossier 279025, nr. 193*, p. 16.

758 Ministerie van Defensie. (2006). *Eindevaluatie Stabilisation Force Iraq (SFIR), 2003-2005*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie.

759 ISTAR : Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance.

for *human intelligence*, an electronic warfare section for intercepting radio transmissions, and later in the mission a remotely piloted vehicle (RPV) for surveillance. These diverse collection capabilities provided intelligence for the All-Sources Intelligence Cell (ASIC), that was tasked with the processing and analysis of the acquired intelligence.[760] An ASIC consisted of various analysts that specialized in geospatial intelligence (an enhanced form of intelligence on terrain), military intelligence on adversarial structures and human factor-intelligence. The latter analyst, generally a sole subaltern with an academic background, focused on ethnographic intelligence and thus sought to understand Uruzgan's society.[761] A further addition to the intelligence effort was a detachment of the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (DISS) whose task was to support the TFU-commander with intelligence reports.[762] Tasking for the coordination of the various intelligence efforts fell to the intelligence section (G2) of the TFU-staff. However, the efficacy of the coordination varied between rotations, especially due to the lack of a hierarchical relationship with the ISTAR-module and the DISS-detachment.[763]

In the preparation towards deployment, the Dutch armed forces had little understanding about Uruzgan and its dynamics. Knowledge that was available about Uruzgan, such as a report detailing the ethnographic makeup of the province by an NGO and a strategic assessment by the DISS, were not disseminated throughout the Task Force.[764] Other intelligence was provided by the American and Australian allies and the *Viper*-detachment. However, this intelligence was focused on the insurgent activities and lacked in nuance. [765] To a considerable extent, the TFU was going in blind.[766]

The various intelligence elements made significant efforts to acquire understanding about the province. Especially the PRT sought to gain a detailed understanding of Uruzgan's population and tribal dynamics. This was a consequence of their specific intelligence needs. The PRT required a fine-grained understanding about the population for their projects and key-leader engagement.[767]

For its part, the ASIC was initially built to analyze insurgency networks. As this focus proved insufficient for the operational demands, the ASIC started to produce long-term intelligence

760 G.P. Krijnsen (2007). 103 ISTAR-bataljon: Onbekend maakt onbemind. *Militaire Spectator*, 176(2), p. 56-59.

761 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch army staff officer 34.

762 Interviews Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 32; Dutch army staff officer 34. Due to the classified nature of this element, its contribution cannot be explored further in this study.

763 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 31.

764 Kitzen, *The Course of Cooption*, p. 380-382.

765 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 237-239.

766 Interviews Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 5

767 Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 4.

that incorporated all relevant influences.[768] To this end, they employed the PMESII (Politics, Military, Economy, Social, Information and Infrastructure)-method that collected and analyzed data on a wide array of factors. This enabled a more comprehensive intelligence picture of Uruzgan and thus could help the decision-making process.[769]

To be sure, the PMESII-method featured in the Master Plan for the list of indicators; however, the operational analysis was a distinct process from intelligence.[770] Accordingly, the intelligence sections of the TFU and the Battle Group continued to focus on classical intelligence that analyzed adversarial activities. To a certain extent, this was understandable as the security situation in 2006 and 2007 was precarious. However, commanders focused too much on this type of intelligence and did not sufficiently include available ethnographic intelligence in their plans.[771] Compounding this problem was that the available Dutch intelligence doctrine, and thus training, prescribed this enemy-centric approach to intelligence.[772] In a complex counterinsurgency environment, this approach was far too narrow.

Another recognized deficiency was the general lack of trained intelligence personnel. This shortage affected the PRTs, Battle Groups and the TFU staff the most. In large part the dearth of intelligence personnel was caused by the fact that the intelligence was not a separate branch within the Dutch army. Personnel in intelligence positions were thus primarily trained for other vocations such as infantry, artillery, or logistics. In theory, a service member could fill successive intelligence positions within the army but there was no mechanism in place that ensured retention of experience and knowledge. Moreover, due to the increased demand for intelligence billets, more inexperienced personnel were deployed to Uruzgan in intelligence positions.[773] An example being the Team Intelligence Cells at the company-level; for Uruzgan, this one-person cell was reinforced by another officer or NCO. At best, such personnel were trained in intelligence techniques and analysis only during the predeployment training. Unfortunately, even this minimal requirement was often not met as personnel were assigned at the last moment. The lack of qualified and experienced intelligence personnel was widely recognized within the TFU and the Defence staff.[774]

Over time, the incorporation of intelligence beyond terrain and threats improved (see table 4.5). This could be ascribed to the increased focus on non-kinetic operations by the TFU

768 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 09/126.

769 Anonymous Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 13. See also Wouter Kuijl (2019). De All-Sources Information Fusion Unit in Mali en de Dutch Approach. *Militaire Spectator*, *188*(1), p. 5.

770 TFU. *Master Plan*, p. 9.

771 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 009/002.

772 See Koninklijke Landmacht. (2006). *Leidraad Inlichtingen LD-5*. Amersfoort, p 69-70.

773 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 009/002.

774 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 3, Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch civil servant 6.

and the additional integration of civilian experts such as two cultural advisors with deep knowledge about Afghanistan. Although the civilians were not part of the intelligence structures, they could provide crucial input in the process of understanding Uruzgan and its people.[775] Additionally, the number of intelligence personnel in the TFU-staff was increased in 2008. This quantitative reinforcement was made possible by the extension of the mission which provided political leeway to increase the number of troops in Uruzgan.[776]

However, the most important aspect was what the intelligence personnel themselves learned from their experience. The small cadre of experienced intelligence personnel within the army was concentrated in the ISTAR-battalion. Crucially, this battalion was collocated with the Joint Intelligence School. As intelligence personnel acquired experience, they acknowledged the deficiencies in the Dutch intelligence processes. Simultaneously, the officers and NCOs developed best practices that incorporated information on various aspect of Uruzgan, including tribal affiliations and social dynamics.[777] Over time, the PMESII-approach to intelligence was adopted throughout the TFU.

Thus, an improved process for intelligence analysis developed. Several service members rotated and went on to train new personnel with intelligence tasks for Afghanistan at the intelligence school. In this way, the lessons from Uruzgan were integrated into functional doctrine and actively disseminated.[778] In essence, intelligence personnel formed the learning and dissemination mechanisms, 'anchored' by the ISTAR-battalion and intelligence school.

Additionally, the intelligence component was reorganized in 2008 following the reinforcement in numbers. By integrating the various intelligence sections, the cooperation was improved and allowed for more efficiency.[779] Furthermore, the information on local leaders was now consolidated in a program based on intelligence procured by the PRT, which allowed the transfer of this knowledge over rotations.[780] Combined with an enhanced understanding of Uruzgan and its population, the intelligence process showed marked improvements in the later years of the campaign.

Potential ameliorating measures at the institutional level were also identified in the evaluations by the successive rotations, such as improving training courses and establishing career paths for service members who specialized in intelligence to incentivize knowledge retention. Due to the operational demands of the mission, such steps could only be taken

775 Interview Dutch civil servant 2; Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 009/002.

776 See Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2008, June 20). Dossier 27925 Bestriding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 315, p. 15-16; Interviews Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch civil servant 6

777 Interviews Dutch civil servant 2; Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 31.

778 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 31; Dutch army staff officer 34.

779 Interviews Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch army staff officer 34.

780 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 450-453.

after the mission.[781] Of course, creating a separate intelligence branch within the army would provide the most profound remedy to this deficiency as this would negate the necessity of temporary assignments. Yet, due to constrained resources, an intelligence branch would inevitably cut into the other army branches. At the time, vested interests and organizational politics stymied the professionalization of army intelligence. Although some informal improvements had been made based on the operational demands of Uruzgan, the formal evaluation process recognized that most identified deficiencies required an institutional response after the mission had ended.

Intelligence	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Population-centric intelligence	Restructuring of intelligence personnel and increased focus on PMESII-factors	Informal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms. Driven by 'anchor point' of intelligence personnel (ISTAR-battalion and intelligence school)
Professionalization of intelligence personnel	Deployment of personnel with limited experience and training	Recognized deficiency	Resource allocation, organizational politics

Table 4.5: Learning processes in intelligence during the Uruzgan campaign

4.3.4.3: Non-kinetic activities

With the professed centrality of the PRT to the TFU-mission, the Dutch armed forces primarily sought to attain non-kinetic effects. In the words of the Dutch government at the end of 2005: "the Dutch activities would be supported by a measured and intensive information campaign".[782] This capability could help influence the population's perception by amplifying messages and exploit certain events such as a new development project or a successful military operation.[783] To a large extent, the PRT would deliver the non-kinetic effects by executing development projects and engaging the local population.[784] Furthermore, a Public Affairs officer in the TFU-staff handled the media contacts. Psychological operations (psyops) were conducted by a detachment by the Army's Air Defence Corps, who had acquired this mission as a secondary task. The psyops detachment contained a target audience analyst,

781 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified ISAF: Eindrapportage over de Nederlandse inzet bij de ISAF missie 2006 - 2010.* Den Haag; interviews Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch army staff officer 34.

782 Tweede Kamer. Dossier 27925, nr. 193, p. 14.

783 TFU. *Masterplan*, p. 71-72.

784 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 9.

a production cell responsible for products such as leaflets and a tactical psyops team that could be attached to an infantry platoon to disseminate the messages.

However, the responsibility to orchestrate these diverse capabilities resided with a single staff officer. A telling example was TFU-2 in which a captain of the plans section (G-5) took up the gauntlet to coordinate information operations in the staff. He had received no formal training, could not hand over his tasks to a successor and was not debriefed on his experiences.[785] While TFU-commanders were increasingly conscious about influencing the populations perception of the Dutch mission, there was no comprehensive effort to combine information effects in operations planning. [786] Information operations were treated as an afterthought, especially at the start of the mission when the security situation was the overriding concern.[787]

The problem with integrating information operations with the TFU's activities stemmed from two institutional causes. A first reason for this deficiency was that the Dutch armed forces had no cadre of personnel that had the necessary training or experience to conduct these types of operations.[788] As a consequence the solitary officer responsible for coordination of information operations in the TFU was selected on the basis of availability rather than ability. In the central evaluation of the Defence Staff, the quantitative and qualitative lack of staff officers charged with information operations was recognized.

The second reason for the lack of integrating information operations was that, in general, Dutch commanders and staff officers had little experience with information operations. Of course, some commanders had prior experience with information operations in previous deployments.[789] Still, without a dedicated branch or unit for information operations in the organization, it was hard to train and prepare the information capability. Moreover, without specifically trained personnel to advise them, commanders lacked the input to integrate information operations in their staff process.[790] Dutch officers were trained to attain kinetic effects.[791] The combination of these factors meant that the efficacy of information operations hinged on the qualities and attention that key personnel in TFU awarded to this capability.

As the mission continued, the attention towards information operations was limited. While the Master Plan included information operations as part of the activities that could produce

785 Interviews Dutch Air Force officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 17.

786 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

787 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 2.

788 Ingrid van Osch (2011). Information Operations: Synchronisatie van actie en informatie. *Militaire Spectator, 180*(5), p. 206-208.

789 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 8.

790 Van Osch. Information Operations, p. 207-208.

791 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 18/101-109.

the desired effects, the subsequent Focal Paper of 2008 did not mention information operations at all.[792] It alluded to the importance of influencing the local population's perceptions, but had little to say on how such influence could be achieved.[793] The Uruzgan Campaign Plan did include an appendix on information operations and aimed to integrate the effects within the campaign.[794] A practical example was that after their "Big Six"-meetings, the provincial authorities were interviewed by the local radio station. This was initiated by the TFU to convey the message to the inhabitants of Uruzgan that the different government institutions were working together for the population.[795]

Beyond the developments in key leader engagement as described in the previous subsection, two developments regarding information operations can be identified. The first was the establishment of an "*InfoOps Coordination Board*" in the TFU-staff. This weekly meeting aimed to synchronize all activities by the various actors within the TFU that could contribute to information operations. While these meetings had the benefit of regular consultations among the various specialties, the practical outcomes were negligible.[796] A second development was the publication of a policy report on information operations. While this report touted the importance of this capability in operations it did not have effects for the training of personnel or the operations in Afghanistan.[797]

Although there was an increasing awareness within the Dutch armed forces on information operations, the practical execution and coordination of non-kinetic activities remained a subservient part of the TFU-mission (see table 4.6). This was caused by a lack of skilled personnel, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Dutch officers had not been trained in employing information activities or integrating them in campaigns. As a result, there was no concerted effort to use information operations in the military staff to exploit and amplify the improved security situation in Uruzgan and the increased emphasis on the PRT. While this deficiency was identified both in Uruzgan and in the Netherlands, the remedy for this situation would require institutional action.

792 TFU. *Masterplan*, p. 68; TFU. *Focal Paper*.

793 TFU. *Focal Paper*.

794 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, p. 28.

795 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4.

796 Van Osch. Information Operations, p. 205-210.

797 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 18/001

Non-kinetic effects	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Integrating non-kinetic effects	Increased attention, lack of capacity and capability	Recognized deficiency, limited informal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms
Specialized personnel for non-kinetic effects	At best associated task for personnel, no specific training or unit	Recognized deficiency	organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.6: Learning processes concerning non-kinetic activities during the Uruzgan campaign

4.3.4.4: Counter-IED

When the first Dutch forces arrived in Uruzgan in early 2006, it became clear that *improvised explosive devices* (IEDs) were a main threat to the coalition forces. Although the Dutch military already had some experience with IEDs in Afghanistan and Iraq, there had been little anticipation towards this threat in the preparation towards the mission.[798] To reduce the threat posed by (radio-controlled) IEDs, the American and Australian forces in Uruzgan employed *electronic counter measures* (ECM, or *jammers*). As the Dutch forces had not brought such equipment to the theatre they had to improvise and scrounge.[799] The special forces task group *Viper* improvised by closely working with the Americans and Australians in order to move within the electronic bubble of the allies.[800] In the meantime, the DTF that conducted large convoy-operations from Kandahar to Tarin Kowt could lend jammers from the Canadian task force.[801] In practice, these acts of allied benevolence meant that the Dutch political prohibition to work with OEF-forces was further eroded. In the case of the special forces, the professed demarcation between the two missions bordered on fiction.

Although the lack of institutional anticipation affected the operations by the DTF and Viper, knowledge about IEDs was present within the army. Several combat engineers, primarily NCOs with prior experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, endeavored to acquire more understanding about the threat. To this end, several engineers enrolled in a British Army course for 'searching' out IEDs. Based on its experiences in Northern Ireland and Iraq, the British Army had accumulated extensive knowledge on this peril. Armed with this knowledge, the engineer NCOs set out to implement search in (predeployment) training.[802] When they applied the British experiences to the Dutch context, the engineers identified deficiencies in equipment and organization. These problems were partially addressed by

798 Interview Dutch army staff officer 21

799 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch army staff officer 21

800 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 204.

801 Ministerie van Defensie (2007). *Analyse DTF, TFU-1 en ATF.* The Hague, p.8

802 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 26, Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch army staff officer 16.

informal procurement of material such as mine-detectors and mission organizations for engineer squads.[803] The search TTPs were further disseminated to the rest of the army to increase the security of personnel during patrols.[804]

These bottom-up initiatives were quickly matched by an institutional response. In the early reports from Uruzgan, IEDs and their effects on operations were main and recurring features.[805] First of all, the initial search TTPs were incorporated in the predeployment training of all units.[806] A second adaption was the procurement of additional equipment. Through expedited procurement processes, the Ministry of Defence acquired jammers, robots for the Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD)-detachments and new vehicles that offered better protection against IEDs over the summer of 2006. With regard to the vehicles, the troops in Uruzgan could lend Nyala vehicles from the Canadians as an interim solution.[807] In the meantime, Bushmaster vehicles were purchased from Australia.[808] These arrived in theater in September 2006.[809] A third adaptation in 2006 was the establishment of a *Task Force Counter-IED* (TF C-IED) by the army at the OTCOpn. This new organization's objective was to coordinate all efforts about IEDs as it was recognized that this challenge affected all branches in the army (and beyond).[810]

The TF C-IED could draw on wide experiences from allies and NATO. Based on NATO-doctrine, the task force adopted a counter-IED approach that consisted of three pillars. The first pillar emphasized in 'defeating the device' and was defensive in nature. Activities associated with this pillar were: detecting IEDs through search, neutralizing the devices by EOD and mitigation of the effects for instance by employing Bushmasters. The second pillar, 'attack the network' was offensive and aimed to prevent the emplacement of IEDs altogether. Accurate intelligence about the network producing and facilitating the IEDs was central to the offensive activities. This required network analysis and forensic expertise to target the networks. Finally, the third pillar, 'preparing the force' focused on knowledge collection and dissemination. Through doctrine development and training, awareness on IEDs was increased at the various levels in the armed forces.[811]

803 Interview Dutch army staff officer 21.

804 Interview Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18

805 Interview Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 21.

806 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 21

807 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, July 21). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 221. Den Haag.

808 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, September 1). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 226. Den Haag.

809 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, September 15). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 233. Den Haag.

810 H. Molman (2007). Counter-IED: van reactief naar proactief. *Militaire Spectator, 176*(7), p. 360.

811 H. Molman (2007). Counter-IED: van reactief naar proactief. *Militaire Spectator, 176*(7), p. 361-366.

Despite the best efforts of its personnel, the TF C-IED suffered from inherent organizational weaknesses. As the task force was placed within the army, it lacked the mandate and budget to impose doctrine on the other services or acquire additional equipment.[812] To procure necessary gear in a timely manner, the task force had to coordinate with the Defence Materiel Organization (DMO), a separate entity within the Ministry of Defence. Funding for equipment had to be obtained at the department level. Without a mandate, the TF C-IED had insufficient leverage to produce sufficient results.[813] As the mission progressed, the threat of IEDs increased and led to casualties among the Dutch troops. In 2007, five service members were killed by IEDs in Uruzgan and Helmand. Casualties commanded the attention of the political realm. Therefore, proposed measures for force protection received parliamentary interest.[814] Faced with mounting casualties, the Chief of Defence, Dick Berlijn resolved at the end of 2007 that a new task force was needed. The new Join Task Force Counter-IED (JTF C-IED) was established in early 2008 and was placed under the Chief of Defence. Consequently, it had more influence and budget.[815]
The JTF C-IED continued the work of its less fortunate predecessor as it retained the three pillars. Members of the JTF C-IED deployed to Uruzgan to advise the troops and investigate IEDs. In the course of 2008, a field laboratory was deployed to Afghanistan to conduct forensic research that could be exploited for intelligence on the networks producing the IEDs.[816] Another technological adaptation was the employment of the so-called *recce-lite*, a sensor pod that could be attached to an F-16 fighter jet. This could recognize ground disturbances over large areas which could help detecting emplaced IEDs.[817] To expedite procurement processes, the JTF C-IED often had to wield its organizational clout. With its inception, the JTF C-IED formed an anchor point for knowledge on IEDs and countermeasures. Of course, units such as the combat engineers and the EOD contributed to this with their expertise.

Beyond new equipment, the Dutch forces could benefit from the experiences and knowledge of ISAF coalition members. Among the troops, awareness and improved over the years. Yet, the insurgents responded to this by adjusting their own modus operandi by, for example, changing the method of detonation or increasing the amount of explosives. In general, the Dutch troops emphasized the defensive and training activities in addressing the threat of IEDs. Offensive action against the IED networks proved harder to execute.[818]

812 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21.

813 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21.

814 See for example: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, July 20). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 222. Den Haag; Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, December 19). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 287. Den Haag.

815 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 26; Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21

816 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2008, October 28). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 325. Den Haag, p. 24; Interview Dutch army reservist 3.

817 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 09/009

818 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch army reservist 3

Throughout the mission, IEDs remained the scourge of the TFU. In total, 13 Dutch service members lost their lives through IEDs while a multitude of troops were (severely) wounded. The efforts to adapt to this threat were substantial, as reflected by increased training activities, bespoke temporary organizational structures and quick procurement processes (see table 4.7). Both the armed forces and the policy makers understood the gravity of the threat of IEDs towards the troops; this created a common sense of urgency to address this challenge. In this adaptation process, the Dutch troops could tap into the knowledge of allies and emulate their countermeasures. Still, the trade-off with focusing on force protection about IEDs was also apparent. While IEDs severely restricted the freedom of movement of coalition forces, it was a defensive weapon. Search procedures to mitigate the threat of IEDs led to further curtailing of the TFU's activities. [819] In the evaluation after the mission, the counter-IED adaptation was regarded a success that warranted institutionalization within the armed forces.

Counter-IED	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Developing and sharing new TTPs	Immediate adaptation by troops in the field and quick dissemination by training establishment	Informal and formal adaptation	Organizational culture, resource allocation, learning and dissemination mechanisms
Materiel acquisition	Acquisition of Bushmaster vehicles and "jammers"	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, domestic politics, learning and dissemination mechanisms
Comprehensive countermeasures and knowledge sharing	Establishment of C-IED task forces	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 4.7: Learning processes in counter-IED during the Uruzgan campaign

4.2.5: Sub conclusion

Throughout the mission, the Task Force Uruzgan saw various adaptations based on operational experiences. The most salient of these developments were the drafting of the three consecutive campaign plans and the 'civilianization' of the TFU-staff and the PRT. Lacking guidance from The Hague, the writing processes of the plans was done at the task force level. Although these efforts included insights from various elements of the TFU, the operational

819 See S.J. van der Meer, C.E. van den Berg and E. Bakker (2007). Effecten van IEDs op het defensieoptreden. *Militaire Spectator,* 176(9), p. 352-359; Ministerie van Defensie (2007). *Analyse DTF, TFU-1 en ATF.* The Hague

analysts attached to the plans section had a leading role here. A prime consideration for the continuous process of adjusting the campaign plan was the difficulty to assess the mission's progress. Relevant quantifiable metrics were hard to acquire, and their explanatory value was found to be uncertain. Instead, the assessments had to rely on qualitative information such as perceptions and gauging the proficiency of Afghan institutions. Thus, the drafting of the campaign plans was an iterative process in which the acquired experiences from the mission were incorporated.

The increased civilian contribution was requested by commanders (TFU and PRT) from the early rotations as they felt that civilian specialists were better equipped to enable development and diplomacy. In 2006 and 2007, the scarcity of civilian expertise and the volatile security situation stymied the progress at the development and governance fronts. Together with defense, these aspects formed the so-called 3D-approach (later called the Comprehensive Approach). The eventual resolution to deploy additional civilians and institute a dual command arrangement was made possible by the political decision to extend the mission at the end of 2007. Of course, the Dutch military was dependent on the contribution of other parties, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide the personnel. As a result, this adaptation not only required a formal organizational response, but also the cooperation from an external partner. With the modest influx of civilians and the development of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan, the vaunted Comprehensive Approach was given more practical substance and thus followed the political discourse.

Given the professed centrality of non-kinetic activities needed for the mission, the Dutch armed forces had inadequate capabilities and capacity. During the mission, it became clear that the Dutch army lacked sufficient specialized personnel for intelligence, information operations and for staffing the PRTs. A common deficiency that was identified for these aspects of the TFU-mission was that these capabilities had no separate career paths. As a result, officers and NCOs who were deployed in these roles often returned to their parent units after the deployments and could not share their experiences or build on them in next positions Moreover, apart from intelligence, there were no knowledge authorities in the army which could serve as a knowledge repository. Despite efforts to improve the output of these capabilities, the army's evaluators recognized that institutional changes were warranted, such as establishing specialized units, career paths or even branches, to genuinely improve these capabilities.

A more successful adaptation was formed by the effort to counter the menace of IEDs. Through emulating allies, informally sharing experiences, between rotations, incorporating techniques in predeployment training and expedited procurement of equipment, the Dutch armed forces sought to mitigate this threat. In this regard, informal observations and identified deficiencies were recognized and tackled by a formal organizational response.

As IEDs were responsible for most of the Dutch casualties, these efforts were supported by a sense of urgency and political backing. Still, the armed forces deemed it necessary to establish a Joint Task Force Counter-IED to circumvent bureaucratic hurdles to address this threat.

Although less perceptible, continuous adaptations regarding predeployment training were important to prepare the successive rotations. Through visiting staff members and post deployment interviews, the training establishment of the Dutch army strove to stay abreast of the developments in Afghanistan. With this input, the predeployment training was constantly adjusted. Nevertheless, these adjustments primarily pertained to kinetic activities for the battle group and its subunits. While observations for the TFU and PRT were also identified, these proved harder to incorporate in training as these elements had no equivalent in the army's organization.

An important additional aspect that warrants attention is that not all identified challenges during the TFU-mission can be ascribed to deficiencies in the Task Force or in the wider institution of the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Grievances by the local population about corruption, the absence of the rule of law or the lack of economic development by local authorities can at best be only mitigated by foreign efforts, regardless of their innate qualities.

In sum, the Dutch armed forces sought to adapt to the circumstances in Uruzgan. However, the manifestations of learning during the mission pertained to the mission itself. There were no indications that these adaptations would impact the Dutch armed forces, or more specifically the army, beyond the TFU-mission as the changes did not affect the standing organizations. If the observations and adaptations from the TFU were to have a lasting effect on the Dutch military, a deliberate effort for institutionalization was needed.

4.4: Institutionalization?

Following the decision to withdraw, the Dutch armed forces could take stock of the lessons it had identified during the last four years. While some observations had been acted upon by the TFU-rotations, units, or the military as an institution, many of the identified deficiencies needed further action if the Dutch armed forces were to address them. The following section examines how the Dutch military sought to institutionalize the lessons from Afghanistan and the extent of success in this enterprise. To study the impact of the Afghanistan mission on the Dutch military, this section will investigate processes of evaluation and strategic analysis. Additionally, the substance of the observations and the influence of these experience

on various manifestations of learning, such as doctrine, organizational structures, training, and education, will be addressed.

4.4.1: Learning from Uruzgan: mission evaluations and lessons learned

As described in the previous section, the Dutch armed forces had two parallel evaluation processes in place to capture observations from the Uruzgan-mission. The first and primary evaluation mechanism was that by the evaluation department at the Defence staff. A complementary process was established by the army and consisted of debriefings. The latter process was an indication of the army's willingness to incorporate the lessons from Afghanistan.

4.4.1.1: Mission evaluations

Simultaneously, the Defence staff sought to consolidate the observations from the central evaluation process. The written assessments from each TFU-rotation had yielded a deluge of observations, often with considerable overlap. Under guidance of the director of operations, (then) major-general Tom Middendorp, a project team was established that included the evaluation department and personnel from TNO. [820] The objective of this project was to write an internal evaluation report that could function as a starting point to transform the observations into lessons learned.[821] The responsibility to implement the lessons was left to the services. To distribute the workload and prune out duplications, the observations were aggregated under 25 themes. These themes represented a broad array of observations, ranging from strategic decision making to financial considerations. For every theme, a project leader (called forerunner in the document) was made responsible.[822] In addition to the written assessments, workshops and interviews were held with personnel that had experience with the topic at hand.[823]

This effort resulted in a list more than five hundred observations. For each observation that made the list, an analysis of the identified deficiency was provided. This analysis was subsequently boiled down to a succinct "lesson identified". Finally, a recommendation was made on how this deficiency or observation could be addressed.[824] This process resulted in an internal report that summarized the main takeaways for the themes. Although the report

820 Interview s Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch commanding officer 23.

821 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch army reservist 5.

822 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified ISAF.*

823 Interview Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 13

824 See: Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*.

was finalized in May 2012, the initial main findings were communicated to the Defence Staff and the services in February 2011 to potentially start implementation of the lessons.

The report focused on the TFU and supporting structures. As a result, it emphasized land operations. Accordingly, most of the lessons pertained to the Army. Observations relevant for the Air Task Force were processed in a separate report by the Air Force. Other associated missions such as the Deployment Task Force and the Special Forces Task Force 55 (TF 55) were also subject to discrete evaluation processes.[825]

Observations by the considerable number of service members who worked at the staffs of Regional Command South in Kabul and ISAF headquarters in Kabul were excluded from the internal report, however. Instead, major-general Mart de Kruif drafted a specific report in the summer of 2010 with the aim of learning from the experiences of working in higher, multinational staffs in Afghanistan.[826] Based on his own experience as commander ISAF RC-South (2008-2009), De Kruif argued that there was room for improvement in how Dutch staff officers and senior NCOs functioned in international staffs. Crucially, the armed forces neglected valuable experiences, as the report recognized that the experiences of individually deployed service members were insufficiently captured by the normal evaluation process.[827]

Although the report was mild in its tone, it found that Dutch service members could improve their grasp of the English language (in particular about the technical military idiom), diplomatic skills and knowledge about (NATO) doctrine. This would potentially enhance the Dutch position in relation to Anglo-Saxon allies in such staffs.[828] Another identified challenge was that the Dutch armed forces lacked sufficient trained personnel to contribute continuously within specific functions as intelligence, counter-IED and operational planning. In still other areas as information operations, psychological operations and strategic communications, the Dutch military had little to no organizational expertise. This often led to unqualified personnel being deployed to such positions with detrimental effect to Dutch standing.[829] To enhance the quality of senior personnel the report specified several potential ameliorating actions; for instance, more attention to language skills in English and French, additional professional education for senior service members and an increased focus on (collective) staff training.[830]

825 For example, a separate evaluation report had been written for the DTF.

826 Ministerie van Defensie. (2010). *'Van Eredivise naar Europees voetbal'*. Den Haag.

827 Ministerie van Defensie. (2010). *'Van Eredivise naar Europees voetbal'*. Den Haag, p. 67-68. Indeed, this point was reinforced by staff officers who had worked in Kandahar and Kabul. Interviews Dutch army staff officer 20; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch army staff officer 7.

828 Ibidem p. 80-81.

829 Ibidem, p. 106-107.

830 Ibidem, p. 84-91.

A supplemental effort by the Dutch Army to capture relevant knowledge from the Uruzgan mission was a workshop held in October 2010 to which all TFU commanders were invited. This meeting was organized by the Dutch Army and moderated by a colonel from the Netherlands Defence Academy. The objective of the session was to get the personal perspectives of the TFU commanders that would potentially be lost in the consolidated written evaluation reports. Furthermore, bringing the commanders together would help getting a comprehensive overview of the mission that was widely regarded as a formative experience for the Army.[831] Conspicuously absent from the workshop were the commander of the Deployment Task Force (Henk Morsink) and the two Dutch commanders of ISAF Regional Command South (Ton van Loon and Mart de Kruif).

A common observation by the TFU-commanders was the lack of strategic guidance by the ministry of Defence. While the commanders appreciated the leeway to form their own plans for an individual rotation, they argued that longer-term objectives should be stated at a higher organizational level.[832] Conversely, the TFU-commanders had to procure approval from the Defence Staff for individual operations. The discrepancy between the strategic detachment and effusive attention to tactical and technical details chafed with the TFU-commanders. They felt that interagency coordination and strategic guidance should start at the departmental level. Planning and executing operations on the other hand should be their purview.[833] Beyond these general observations, the TFU-commanders stated that the army should institutionalize knowledge on doctrine, command and control, intelligence campaign planning and capabilities such as Security Sector Reform, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and information operations. Only then would the army be able to capitalize on the experiences from Uruzgan for future missions.

4.4.1.2: Lessons learned processes

Despite the candid evaluations, the collected observations by the army did not lead to a consolidated report or a central plan of action to capitalize on these experiences. Personnel turnover had produced a hiatus in consistency in this process.[834] The judgment that the army made no use of this effort is harsh but fair.[835] In practice, there was a fragmented body of knowledge within the Dutch army regarding the Uruzgan experiences.[836] General best practices such as institutionalizing the comprehensive approach in stabilization operations

831 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch commanding officer 4

832 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8, Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 1, Dutch commanding officer 23.

833 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 1.

834 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18

835 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 23; Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 23.

836 Kitzen, et al. Soft Power, p. 182-183.

and integrating non-kinetic effects in operational planning were 'stored' by OTCOpn. Subsequently, these elements were incorporated into doctrinal publications (see subsection 4.4.3).

Regarding how the Dutch armed forces learned, critical internal reflections persisted. At the tactical and technical levels lessons were mostly identified and implemented at either the service level or by specialized units that served as anchor points for knowledge. Conversely, there was no similar process that institutionalized experiences at the strategic and operational levels.[837] The central evaluation process at the Defence Staff was seen as too focused on political accountability rather than on assessing effectiveness of missions and learning from experience. Furthermore, as implementation of lessons learned was the responsibility of the services, this process lacked central guidance and oversight. An additional aspect compounding this problem was that the services, and in particular the army, lacked the organizational structures to implement lessons learned.[838]

Within the army, responsibility for the lessons learned process was further delegated to OTCOpn. Moreover, beyond writing doctrine based on these lessons, the OTCOpn lacked staff to execute this process. As such, there was no organizational clout to enforce compliance and implement change within the army.[839] Ironically, these deficiencies in the formal learning process had been identified prior to the Uruzgan mission in 2005.[840]

As the Dutch military was faced with severe budget cuts after 2010, addressing these deficiencies was no priority. At the army level, the lack of formal learning and dissemination mechanisms continued to be unresolved throughout the years.[841] An effort to improve the lessons learned process was initiated at the Army-staff in 2019 by establishing a council for retaining "experiential lessons". However, lack of resources and attention impeded its effectiveness at the service level. Moreover, identified lessons from the brigade-level and above did not always find their way to the Army-staff.[842]

Thus, although the Dutch armed forces had drawn a wealth of experiences from Afghanistan in the intervening years, the military had neglected to enhance its aptitude to learn (see table 4.8). This impeded the ability to institutionalize lessons. Still, the evaluations yielded insights that could be internalized in doctrine. Potentially, updated doctrinal publications

837 Nationaal Lucht- en Ruimtevaart Laboratorium. (2011). *Systematisch Borgen Lessons Learned*. Amsterdam, p. 86-87; Interviews Dutch civil servant 3; Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch army staff officer 4; Dutch Air Force officer 2.

838 Ministerie van Defensie. *Eredivisie*, p. 76-77. Interview Dutch army staff officer 8.

839 NLR. *Lessons Learned*, p 21-24.

840 IGK. *Jaarverslag 2005*, p. 103-120.

841 Commando Landstrijdkrachten. (2019, July 11). Memo: Raad Ervaringslessen Staf CLAS. Utrecht.

842 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 28; Dutch army staff officer 29; Dutch army staff officer 4.

could be used for knowledge retention and as a starting point for practical organizational changes. The following subsections will examine these efforts.

Learning process	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Disconnect between joint and service-level lessons learned processes	No; recognized deficiency/efforts to respond. Initiatives to address this have yielded insufficient results	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 4.8: Lessons learned process after Uruzgan

4.4.2: Strategic environment and Defence Policy

While the Uruzgan mission wound down in March 2010, a strategic analysis was published by an interdepartmental working group called "Strategic Explorations" (in Dutch: *Strategische Verkenningen*"). The result of an elaborate two-year study, this report had the aim to assess the future strategic environment of The Netherlands and provide options for Defence policy for 2020 to 2030.[843] Given the now-inevitable withdrawal from Uruzgan, the report was timely as it offered a vision towards the future for the Dutch armed forces while armed forces started to take stock of the experiences it had just acquired. The main elements of the report consisted of strategic scenarios and general directions, or profiles, for the Dutch Armed Forces.

The strategic scenarios were not mutually exclusive but sketched potential directions in which the security environment of The Netherlands could develop. In outlining the future scenarios, two axes were used. The first axis depicted the increase or decrease of international cooperation. The second axis indicated the primacy of either state or non-state actors in international affairs. This exercise resulted in scenarios that ranged from a relatively benign global order, a situation of multipolar competition, to a state of fragmentation in which both globalization and nation-states are challenged. [844]

Additionally, the report drafted four potential profiles for the Dutch military. Every profile incorporated the three main tasks of the Dutch armed forces (national and allied territorial defense, promoting international stability and support to civil authorities). The distinction between the profiles was in what task was emphasized. This would have consequences for how the armed forces would organize, equip, and operate. The first profile was focused on national and allied territorial defense. In this option, expeditionary operations such as in

843 Interdepartementale project-Verkenningen. (2010). *Eindrapport Verkenningen: Houvast voor de krijgsmacht van de toekomst*. Den Haag, p. 7.

844 Interdepartementale. *Verkenningen*, p. 127-145.

Iraq and Afghanistan would be less probable. In contrast, the second profile indicated a shift towards participation in interventions to coerce compliance to international law.[845]

The third profile pointed in the direction of participating in stabilization missions and thus would indicate a continuation of recent operations. Naturally, the fourth profile, represented in the report by a Swiss army knife, combined the three previous options. This option envisaged that the armed forces should retain a flexible posture to adapt to strategic challenges when they arise. This would be a continuation of the contemporary policy. With regard to funding, this option was deemed not entirely feasible in the event that the ministry of Defence was confronted with budget cuts. If the funding would remain at current levels, investments could be made in unmanned vehicles, cyber operations and security sector reform-capabilities.[846] Admitting that the future was unclear and could contain elements of every scenario, the authors of the report contended that the Dutch defence policy should clarify which profile the armed forces would adopt so the departments could plan accordingly.[847]

Concurrently with the "Strategic Explorations", the Dutch Ministry of Defence issued a "Military Strategic Vision". This document envisaged the future of the Dutch Armed Forces based on the findings of the "Explorations". Although the document recognized the continued need for conventional military capabilities and deterrence, it was heavily influenced by the Dutch Afghanistan experience. This experience was not explicitly mentioned as a source of inspiration, but the document was laced with photos from Uruzgan. Moreover, numerous observations from the various Afghanistan evaluations featured in the document, whether these were published at the time or not. For instance, capabilities that should be enhanced for future missions included: intelligence, information operations and security sector reform. Other aspects that required attention were the ability to conduct expeditionary operations, an emphasis on interagency cooperation and rotation schedules that were based on military effectiveness and sustainability rather than peace time considerations. Other general aspects that were emphasized were expeditionary operations (including for the defense of allied territory) and interagency cooperation also bore the marks of recent missions. An intriguing proposition touched upon in the text was the establishment of a permanent joint headquarters. Unfortunately, this plan was not elucidated in the document so the rationale behind it remains unclear.[848]

Between the various described evaluation processes and strategic analyses that were conducted at the end of the Uruzgan mission, the Dutch army in particular identified several

845 Ibidem, p 216-250.

846 Ibid, p. 253-283.

847 Ibid, p. 199-207.

848 Ministerie van Defensie. (2010). *Militair Strategische Visie 2010*. The Hague: Ministry of Defence.

lessons that warranted institutionalization. However, by 2010 the Netherlands was being confronted by a severe economic recession, stemming from the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. Faced with looming austerity measures, the Army lobbied to the Defence Staff to retain brigade headquarters, invest in enhancing intelligence support and institutionalize knowledge on PRTs, Information Operations and Security Sector Reform in a specialized unit.[849] This indicated that there was a genuine willingness within the army to retain the lessons from Uruzgan.[850]

Following the collapse of the coalition government over prolongation of the Uruzgan-mission, the new government that was installed in October 2010 took action to redress the budget deficit. The Dutch armed forces would not be spared from budget cuts. To make matters worse, internal funding shortfalls had to be balanced. And yet, the strategic analysis of the "Explorations" was still considered valid. Consequently, the incoming coalition opted for the Swiss army knife-model for the military. This meant that the tasks would essentially remain the same, though smaller in volume and longevity and with a budget reduction of a billion Euros.[851] As a result, the Ministry of Defence had to cut 12,000 personnel positions. Moreover, significant numbers of equipment were scrapped such as patrol vessels, f-16 fighter jets and all the army's main battle tanks.[852]

While engaged in a major downsizing operation and concurrent reorganization, the Dutch armed forces were yet again hit with budget cuts in the fall of 2013. Again, this round of restructuring was driven by financial considerations rather than a strategic analysis.[853] The armed forces retained their tasks and essentially their existing capabilities. To conform to the financial constraints, the capacity of the armed forces was trimmed. This meant that the sustainability of operations was scaled down.[854] At the same time, the armed forces would invest in cyber capabilities, developing the comprehensive approach and professionalizing intelligence.[855] The latter two investment areas reflected a willingness to implement at least some observations from Uruzgan. However, the financial constraints and the concurrent vast reorganizations led to an emphasis on retaining existing capabilities.[856]

The strategic calculus of The Netherlands changed dramatically in 2014. Described as a watershed moment in international security, 2014 saw the both the rise of the Islamic State

849 Koninlijke Landmacht. (2010, December 8). Terugkoppeling Evaluatie TFU-commandanten aan Commmandant der Strijdkrachten. Utrecht; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 15.

850 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 12; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 10.

851 VVD-CDA. (2010). Regeerakkoord: Vrijheid en verantwoordelijkheid. Den Haag, p. 9.

852 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2011, April 8). Beleidsbrief Defensie. Den Haag, p. 14-17

853 Ministerie van Defensie. (2013). *In het belang van Nederland.* Den Haag, p. 6.

854 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2014, January 21). Dossier 33763 Toekomst van de krijgsmacht, nr. 33, p. 132.

855 Ministerie van Defensie. (2013). *In het belang van Nederland.* Den Haag, p. 24-25.

856 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 10.

and the Russian annexation of the Crimea and its proxy war in Ukraine.[857] The latter strategic challenge became even more poignant for the Dutch public by the shooting down of a Malaysian Airways jet over contested territory by pro-Russian separatists. In this incident, 193 Dutch citizens (out of a total of 298 casualties) were killed. In light of these Russian activities, the Dutch government recognized that deterrence and collective defense, the first constitutional task of the Dutch armed forces, had become more prominent.[858]

However, the emphasis on stabilization missions of the last decades and the consecutive budget cuts had left the Dutch armed forces woefully unprepared for this challenge. The Dutch armed forces lacked both crucial capabilities for escalation dominance as well as sufficient capacity for sustained operations. This situation not only affected the ability to deter or fight a conventional enemy but also to make the contribution to stabilization operations.[859] At the end of 2014, the Dutch government resolved to address the dismal state of the military. Gradually, the budget of the ministry of Defence would be increased. However, this increase initially amounted to 100 million Euros and was thus insufficient to make up for the recent cuts.[860]

The renewed tensions in Eastern Europe marked a new deployment for the Dutch army. In 2016, NATO established an 'Enhanced Forward Presence' (EFP) in Poland and the Baltic States to reassure these member states and deter Russian activities. The Dutch army contributes to this ongoing allied effort by deploying company-sized elements on a rotational basis to the German-led battlegroup in Lithuania.[861] During these rotations, the international units train for conventional operations. The ability to continuously train with allied forces in Lithuania is valued as it helps improving the combat readiness of the Dutch army units.[862] Evidently, the training scenarios in EFP differ significantly from the mission experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Beyond these new training efforts, the Dutch armed forces also required additional investments. In 2017, the Dutch government announced a larger budget increase for the military, amounting to 1,5 billion Euros.[863] This resulted in a new Defence whiter paper in 2018. This policy paper did not contain a vision for the Dutch armed forces or their purpose.

857 Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken. (2015). *Instabiliteit rond Europa: Confrontatie met een nieuwe werkelijkheid.* Den Haag, p. 5.

858 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2014, November 24). Beleidsbrief Internationale Veiligheid: Turbulente Tijden in een Instabiele Omgeving. Den Haag p. 6.

859 AIV (2015) *Instabiliteit rond Europa*, p. 35-38.

860 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2014, November 7). Dossier 33 763 Toekomst van de krijgsmacht, nr. 59. Den Haag.

861 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2016, July 1). Dossier 28 676 NAVO, nr. 249. Den Haag,

862 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2018, Oktober 19). Dossier 25921 Nederlandse deelname aan vredesmissies, nr. 369. Den Haag.

863 Ministerie van Defensie. (2017). *Houvast in een onzekere wereld: Lijnen van ontwikkeling in het meerjarig perspectief voor een duurzaam gerede en snel inzetbare Krijgsmacht*. Den Haag.

Instead, it sketched some investment themes for the near future to increase the military's readiness for the constitutional tasks. Again, this document stated that collective territorial defense had gained in prominence over the last few years. According to the Ministry of Defence, this required more "robust units" and investment in technologies.[864] In accordance with NATO capability goals, the Ministry of Defence identified five investment themes: additional f-35 fighter jets, enhancing combat power on land, enhancing combat power on sea, improved support for special operations forces and investments in the cyber and information domains.[865]

These investment priorities indicate an emphasis on conventional capabilities for collective defense and deterrence. Except for enhancing capabilities in the information domain and arguably special operations forces, the proposed modernization areas are mainly focused on regular warfare. Although the increased budget and resulting plans for the Dutch armed forces are rooted in (new) strategic analyses, they are a marked departure from the missions that the Dutch armed forces have performed over the last decades. This has led to the critique that the armed forces, and mainly the army, are preoccupied with conventional warfare and technology, while neglecting the practical experiences of stabilization missions. As a result, the hard-won lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq, in particular Uruzgan, will be forgotten or even discarded. Moreover, by focusing on conventional war, the Dutch military will be ill-prepared for new stabilization missions as the knowledge from Uruzgan dissipates.[866]

4.4.3: Doctrine

As mentioned in the previous chapters of this dissertation, doctrine forms a clear manifestation of learning. Doctrine reflects an agreed-upon body of knowledge, based on experience and study within a military organization. As such, it can guide military personnel on how to think about conflict. During the TFU-mission, officers from the OTCOpn sought to capture and disseminate observations and best practices through the expedients of semi-formal information bulletins. At the same time, they were drafting a new iteration of a doctrine on land operations. This general doctrinal publication would incorporate many of these observations to the extent that they held relevance for land operations in a general sense. However, in 2009 the writing team was replaced because of administrative regulations. A new team of writers started from scratch on a new draft.[867]

864 Ministerie van Defensie. (2018). *Defensienota 2018: Investeren in onze mensen, slagkracht en zichtbaarheid*. Den Haag, p. 11.

865 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2018, December 14). Dossier 28676 NAVO, nr. 308. Den Haag.

866 Martijn Kitzen and Floor Thonissen (2018). Strategische Vaagheid: Hoe het gebrek aan strategische visie het lerend vermogen van de Koninklijke Landmacht beperkt. *Militaire Spectator, 187*(4), p, 220-223.

867 Interview Dutch army staff officer 7.

The new doctrine on land operations ("*Land Doctrine Publicatie*") was published in 2009. This doctrine has drawn the critique that it had little to say on counterinsurgency operations and "largely neglected" the experiences from Uruzgan.[868] However, it is important to note that this is a general doctrine on land operations and serves a different purpose than thematic counterinsurgency doctrines such as the Dutch LDP II-C[869] or the American FM 3-24. Consequently, it describes all types of conflicts in which land forces can be deployed. It identifies four campaign themes along the spectrum of conflict: peace time military engagement, peace support, counter insurgency (sic.) and major combat.[870] While this publication does not reflect the observations as listed in the information bulletins, the influence from recent operations is nevertheless pervasive. For example, the doctrine focuses on irregular adversaries, operations amongst the people, the centrality of intelligence, the comprehensive approach, information operations and non-kinetic effects. Yet, some critique is warranted. It is sparse on what a counterinsurgency campaign is, and the implications it has for military activities. Furthermore, a conspicuous omission is that it does not mention the *shape, clear, hold, build* phasing in counterinsurgency campaigns as an overarching concept.[871] This was a central observation from operations in Uruzgan, one that had only gradually dawned on the TFU.[872] Instead, the doctrine merely distinguishes between offensive, defensive and stabilization activities. How the latter can fit in a campaign theme is not explained in the text.[873]

In 2014, a new iteration of the doctrine on land operations was published. This new publication ("*Landoperaties*", DP 3.2) did not distinguish between types of operations and superseded thematic doctrines such as LDP II-C on irregular warfare.[874] A recurring central feature in this document was the distinction between campaign themes. In this edition however, "counterinsurgency" was replaced by "security" as the latter encompassed more types of operations.[875] Further on, the necessity of a comprehensive approach to military operations was emphasized.[876] Other observations from Afghanistan were also included in this doctrine. For instance, the document called for campaign plans based on clear objectives, which are subject to continuous and rigorous assessment.[877] Other aspects that

868 Kitzen, et al. Soft Power, p. 182.

869 The thematic doctrine LDP II-C was still considered as valid and could be used in accordance with the new general doctrine on land operations.

870 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2009). *Land Doctrine Publicatie: Militaire Doctrine voor het Landoptreden.* Amersfoort: Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatien, p. 94.

871 To be fair, the information bulletins also did not adopt this framework, yet at the time of writing this concept was not commonplace in Afghanistan or the Netherlands.

872 See Dimitriu and De Graaf. The Dutch Coin approach: Kitzen, et al. Soft Power; Interview Dutch commanding officer 10.

873 Koninklijke Landmacht. *Land Doctrine Publicatie*, p. 144-147.

874 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2014). *Doctrine Publicatie Landoperaties 3.2.* Amersfoort: Land Warfare Centre, p. 1-3

875 Landmacht. *Landoperaties 3.2*, p. 3-3.

876 Ibidem, p 3-18 - 3-21.

877 Ibidem, p. 4-2 - 4-3.

featured in the evaluations were also incorporated in the doctrine. Understanding of all aspect of the operational environment based on intelligence was regarded as a prerequisite of military operations.[878] Another salient element was the attention awarded to influencing behavior, both by physical and psychological activities.[879] This reflected a decreased focus on destroying the enemy in Dutch doctrine. Of course, this continued to be a valid effect albeit within a panoply of other instruments. For planning purposes, the doctrine enumerated various operational frameworks. It distinguished between frameworks based on operational areas (deep-close-rear), core functions (find, fix, strike, exploit) and effects (shape, decisive, sustain). The central counterinsurgency framework of shape, clear, hold, build is mentioned only in passing as a specific framework with the campaign theme "security".[880]

Thus, important observations from Afghanistan were incorporated in Dutch generic doctrine on land operations. Accordingly, service members could recognize these aspects when perusing these publications. Yet, to institutionalize the observations coming out of the several evaluations on Uruzgan, a thematic doctrine on counterinsurgency operations was needed. Arguably, the LDP II-C could have provided a foundation for such a document. A draft doctrine was produced in 2009 by OTCOpn. However, this project was stillborn, and a lack of personnel precluded a new draft for a counterinsurgency doctrine. Instead, the Dutch armed forces adopted the NATO counterinsurgency doctrine, *Allied Joint Publication 3.4.4* (AJP 3.4.4.).[881] Adhering to NATO doctrine has obvious benefits. It fosters a common understanding across allies and thus interoperability. Conversely, the downsides are also apparent. As a collaborative document, the member states must reach a consensus on its contents. Invariably, national nuances will be smoothed over in the consulting process, thereby reducing the applicability. A further, related disadvantage is that updating a NATO-doctrine is an even more protracted process than national doctrine writing.

Ultimately, at the end of the Uruzgan mission, the experiences were unevenly reflected in Dutch (army) doctrine. Germane elements such as campaign planning, the comprehensive approach, the necessity of intelligence beyond terrain and adversaries and non-kinetic effects were elevated to capstone doctrinal documents. This means that the insights are available to Dutch service members for future conflicts. Furthermore, by incorporating these observations in general doctrine shows that they are deemed relevant beyond counterinsurgency operations. Still, doctrinal developments show that counterinsurgency principles are given short shrift in the Dutch army; the omission of the shape, clear, hold, build-framework provides a case in point. In the 2014 doctrine, the campaign theme of counterinsurgency was further diluted to "security". Moreover, the Dutch army lacks a

878 Ibidem, p. 4-2.

879 Ibidem, 4-5 - 4-8.

880 Ibidem, p. 6-40.

881 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 3; Dutch Marine officer 1. The current edition of AJP 3.4.4 was published in 2016.

thematic doctrine on counterinsurgency that can assist service members to think about such operations in-depth and within which the experiences from Afghanistan can be synthesized with foreign and classical perspectives. Without such a document and a clear concept of what counterinsurgency is, the Dutch army (and the armed forces in general) risk that these experiences evaporate as they lack a profound foundation in doctrine. Whether the experiences from Uruzgan have found their way to other manifestations of organizational learning is the subject of the next subsections.

4.4.4: Training

During the mission in Uruzgan, most of the army's training efforts were geared towards the deployment. Yet, many officers recognized that the focus on the Uruzgan-mission and the earlier deployments had degraded the army's proficiency in combined arms tactics in high-intensity conflict scenarios.[882] As such, tactical and technical adaptations from Uruzgan proved resilient among service members, even if these went against standing doctrine and impeded readiness for other missions.

This recognized deficiency was exacerbated by the budget cuts and the scrapping of the tank battalions and other disinvestments in capacity. Furthermore, budget constraints curtailed training activities. Finally, smaller missions such as Kunduz and Mali required predeployment training that was not focused on addressing this shortfall.[883]

The resurgence of conventional threats by Russian activities in 2014 and onwards provided a rationale to conduct large scale training exercises for combat operations. In early 2017, the Dutch army conducted a brigade level exercise (by 43 mechanized brigade) in Poland called *Bison Drawsko*. This was the first brigade-level exercise in more than 15 years. The objective was to train combined arms tactics in a combat scenario.[884] As these skills had received scant attention over the last years, *Bison Drawsko* was considered as a diagnostic through which deficiencies could be identified. Indicative of the subsided familiarity of such exercises, retired officers with experience on large exercises from the Cold War were seconded to *Bison Drawsko* to provide advice.[885]

882 This was a recurring theme during the interviews with Dutch officers: interviews Dutch commanding officer 1 Dutch commanding officer 21; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 19; Dutch commanding officer 14; Dutch army staff officer 25; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch army staff officer 18.

883 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7.

884 Otto van Wiggen and Robert-Jan Aarten (2017). Oefening Bison Drawsko 2017: Een essentiële nulmeting voor de Landmacht. *Militaire Spectator, 186*(12), p. 581-582.

885 R. van den Akerboom (2017). Oude ijzervreters terug om jong garde te leren vechten? *Militaire Spectator, 186*(9), p. 412-413.

According to officers involved with *Bison Drawsko*, the exercise showed that Dutch army officers had some difficulty to adjust to high intensity combat as they had their formative experiences in a stabilization mission such as the TFU. The combat scenario with a simulated opposing force equipped with similar weapon systems, proved to be a less forgiving environment than Uruzgan. Not only was the operational tempo far higher, but the troops also had to employ more force against a capable enemy in order to survive. The central conclusion of this diagnostic exercise was thus that the Dutch troops needed to relearn how to fight. To address this deficiency, high intensity combat operations should become more prominent in officer education and training exercises.[886]

At the end of 2018, Dutch troops participated in an even larger, NATO-led, exercise in Norway called *Trident Juncture*. A behemoth of an exercise, *Trident Juncture* involved more than 40.000 allied troops of which 2250 were Dutch. In this international exercise, all services from the Dutch armed forces participated. The scenario was that of a conventional interstate conflict in which a NATO-member state was attacked and the alliance had to respond. Interspersed throughout the scenario were so-called 'hybrid' elements such as cyber threats, electronic warfare, and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles.[887] Still, the exercise took place in a secluded battle space and was purely military in character. As a result, the lessons identified from the mission pertained to conventional warfare. Observations from the exercise included: the importance of training a large-scale strategic deployment in Europe, integrating all (physical) domains in a joint setting, and interoperability with allies in combat operations. For the Dutch armed forces, *Trident Juncture* was a further step towards refocusing the mindset towards high intensity combat operations.[888]

Another example of an exercise in a conventional combat scenario was *Deep Strike* in 2018, conducted by 43 mechanized brigade. This was a command post exercise (CPX) that simulated a 'realistic' high intensity combat scenario against a capable adversary of division strength.[889] To its credit, 43 brigade incorporated elements such as information operations, cyber capabilities, and civilian engagement in the scenario. Furthermore, it consulted with external (civilian) experts in the preparation phase. In the evaluation of the exercise, the most salient observation was that the current brigade is ill-prepared to conduct combat operations due to deficiencies in doctrine, equipment, organization, and mindset. However, the brigade also recognized that it needed integrated non-kinetic capabilities such as information operations and a cyber-element to be effective in a contemporary operational environment.[890]

886 Van Wiggen and Aarten. Bison Drawsko, p. 585-586.

887 Robert-Jan Aarten (2019). Trident Juncture 2018: Substantiële Nederlandse bijdrage aan Joint High Visibility Exercise. *Militaire Spectator, 188*(9), p. 411.

888 Aarten. Trident Juncture, p. 418-420.

889 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2018). *Evaluation Exercise Deep Strike.* Utrecht, p. 7.

890 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2018). *Evaluation Exercise Deep Strike.* Utrecht, p.14-18.

Training exercises at the brigade level and higher have been conducted to address acknowledged deficiencies in readiness for conventional combat operations. After 2014, these deficiencies have become more significant with the increased potential threat of interstate conflict. However, exercises as *Bison Drawsko* and *Trident Juncture* seem to neglect the non-military aspects of the operational environment. As such, Dutch officers run the risk of forgetting the application of non-kinetic capabilities, such as information operations and the cooperation with non-military actors.

4.4.5: Institutionalization: the vignettes

Although deficiencies at the campaign level in Uruzgan were recognized in the Dutch military after the withdrawal, limited efforts were undertaken to address these. Furthermore, institutionalizing knowledge from the campaign was awarded limited resources due to financial constraints and a shifting strategic environment. Still, the more specific learning processes might offer a more nuanced view of institutionalizing experience from the Uruzgan mission. The following subsections will examine the efforts to remedy deficiencies and retain knowledge in these specific areas.

4.4.5.1: The Comprehensive approach and the PRT

At the end of the mission in Uruzgan, the Dutch armed forces regarded the Comprehensive Approach as a model for future military deployments. Although the Comprehensive Approach was introduced during a counterinsurgency operation, the Dutch Defence Staff contended that it applied to all types of military operations. The primacy of the comprehensive approach was reflected in the National Defence Doctrine (NDD). [891] During the Uruzgan mission, the ministry of Defence had coordinated with the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation. On the ground in Afghanistan, this collaboration was increasingly made manifest by the contribution of civil servants in the TFU-staff and the PRT. Yet, the question was how to institutionalize this collaboration for future missions, both in The Hague as in the areas of operations.[892]

To implement the comprehensive approach in military operations, the Uruzgan Campaign Plan was considered a textbook example on how to conduct an interagency planning that warranted institutionalization. This was a considerable departure from standard military planning processes. Yet, as shown in the previous section, the UCP was devised and regarded

891 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 06/004, 06/006.

892 To be sure, the Comprehensive Approach entails more than just interdepartmental cooperation. Collaboration with international organizations, NGOs and host nation governments are additional important aspects of this approach.

as an internal planning document. For future operations, a strategic plan drafted by the involved ministries should inform the campaign and operations in theater. Such a strategic plan had not been provided for the duration of the Uruzgan mission, which imposed the need to draft a campaign plan at the task force level.[893]

With a new Police Training Mission in the northern province of Kunduz, the Dutch ministry of Defence and other departments had the opportunity to implement the Comprehensive Approach in a campaign plan. In this case, the Ministry of Justice and Security also participated in the mission and thus the preparation.[894] Although an attempt was made to draft a plan along the lines of the UCP, this effort did not come to fruition. This was caused by the political constraints and caveats imposed by Dutch parliament to garner sufficient political support for the mission.[895] An additional factor that impeded the drafting of a campaign plan was the multitude of international actors in Kunduz. Other than in Uruzgan, The Netherlands had no coordinating role, which impeded its ability to influence the international efforts. The combination of the domestic political imperatives and the junior position of the Dutch in Kunduz precluded a viable campaign plan for the mission.[896]

The military component of the mission was understated in the official communication. Although the military contribution, necessary for the protection and sustainment of the mission, dwarfed the civilian contingent, the Dutch government emphasized the civilian character of the mission.[897] This was reflected by the stated objectives for the deployment. The Dutch effort in Kunduz was to enhance the quality and quantity of the Afghan National Police and strengthening the judicial system.[898] To this end, police officers, judges, prosecutors, and human rights experts were deployed.[899] The command arrangements for Kunduz were even more intricate than in Uruzgan. The Dutch contribution was headed by a "coordinating management team". This team consisted of a military commander, a civilian representative responsible for the contacts with Afghan authorities and other organizations and a political representative who coordinated with the EUPOL-mission.[900]

While the Dutch mission in Kunduz has been subject to considerable criticism, the collaboration between the ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs was hailed as a

893 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 06/008.

894 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2019). *Op zoek naar draagvlak: De geintegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan*. Den Haag: Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie, p. 24.

895 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 22; Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch army reservist 5.

896 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Draagvlak*, p 49-50.

897 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2011, January 27). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 419. Den Haag.

898 Ministerie van Defensie. (2014). *Eindevaluatie Geintegreerde Politietrainingsmissie.* Den Haag, p. 6

899 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Draagvlak*, p. 27-28.

900 Ministerie van Defensie. (2014). *Eindevaluatie Geintegreerde Politietrainingsmissie.* Den Haag, p. 6.

success.[901] There was a genuine effort to draft a campaign plan at the interdepartmental level before the mission, yet the political situation in the Netherlands derailed the prospect of a viable roadmap. Still, the ministries involved showed that the ability for interdepartmental collaboration during missions had grown since Uruzgan.

An attempt to institutionalize this aspect of the comprehensive approach was conducted in 2014 with the publication of the "Guideline Comprehensive Approach". This document was drafted by the ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation and Justice and Security. Its objective was to provide a common vision for the departments on the Comprehensive Approach in conflicts and conflict prevention. While the departments retained the responsibility for policy and execution of their tasks, the guideline sought to streamline these efforts.[902] To this end, the guideline established a roadmap consisting of six steps that ensured that the participating ministries would pass a common process in response to international security crises or conflicts.[903] Lacking a national strategic authority, the Dutch primary coordination body for international missions is the Steering Group for Missions and Operations in which the relevant ministries participate through senior civil servants.[904] As such, the guideline and its six-step roadmap was to guide the workings of the steering group and thus coordinate the employment of various instruments of the Dutch government. Yet, the guideline acknowledged that cultural differences between the ministries could hinder a comprehensive approach to international crises and missions. To overcome, or at least ameliorate these obstacles, the personnel of the departments had to routinely cooperate in The Hague or in training situations. This would allow for a better understanding of each other's strengths and limitations.[905] Of course, the best way to learn to implement the Comprehensive Approach was in the field, such as in Uruzgan by the PRT and the dual command system of the TFU-staff.

Despite the publication of the guideline, the practical application of the Comprehensive Approach by The Netherlands has been limited. Without the operational demands imposed by a mission such as Uruzgan, the sense of urgency at most ministries to participate in training is largely absent. Even during the TFU-mission, civil servants were not always able to participate in the predeployment training. Beyond the ministry of Defence, ministries have no culture of conducting training exercises as their workload is continuous.[906] As a result, it is hard to align departmental agendas for practicing the Comprehensive Approach in the absence of a mission.

901 See for a thorough examination of the Kunduz mission: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Draagvlak*, p. 45.

902 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2014). *Leidraad Geintegreerde Benadering: De Nederlandse visie op een samenhangende inzet op veiligheid en stabiliteit in fragiele staten en conflictgebieden.* Den Haag, p. 6.

903 Ibidem, p. 24.

904 Hazelbag, *De geïntegreerde benadering in Afghanistan*, p. 123

905 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Geïntegreerde Benadering*, p. 41.

906 Interviews Dutch civil servant 5; Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch army staff officer 22; Dutch army staff officer 19.

From the military's perspective, the ability to fulfill a vanguard role in training the comprehensive approach was constrained. Although the armed forces had the experience and organizational arrangements to plan and execute training in general, there was no equivalent of the PRT or the TFU-staff in the standing organization. This deficiency, already recognized during the TFU-mission, hindered the implementation of doctrine and the guideline on the Comprehensive approach.[907] Short of establishing a new unit, the mixture of non-kinetic specialties could be incorporated in the army's CIMIC-battalion. This unit was essentially the linchpin between the armed forces and civilian experts. In Uruzgan, it had detached civilian experts from its network of reservists to the PRT who could advise on their areas of expertise. This network included specialists in agriculture, judiciary, hydrology, finance, business, government, and other areas. Furthermore, the staff of the battalion had formed the last PRT in Uruzgan.

Moreover, from 2014 and onwards, the army brigades and battalions increasingly focused on training in conventional warfare to regain the associated capabilities that have been neglected during the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.[908] In a mission like the TFU, these units can be called upon to form task force staffs or PRTs. However, the recalibration of army units towards conventional warfare threatens to drown out attention towards incorporating other organizations in missions; the doctrinal centrality of the Comprehensive Approach in any type of conflict notwithstanding.[909]

Perhaps the most practical effort of institutionalization of the Comprehensive Approach can be found at the 1 German/Netherlands Corps (1GNC). This multinational corps headquarters serves as a deployable high readiness headquarters that can function at the tactical and operational levels.[910] 1GNC has been deployed three times to the ISAF mission. In 2003 it served as the ISAF headquarter in Kabul. During its second deployment it provided the staff for ISAF Joint Command. This deployment was reprised in 2013. Additionally, 1GNC provided staff members for Regional Command-South, in particular during the rotations of the Dutch commanders Ton van Loon (2006-2007) and Mart de Kruif (2008-2009).

When lieutenant-general Ton van Loon assumed command of the combined corps in 2010, he sought to institutionalize the lessons from Afghanistan. The most important lesson identified by him and the staff of 1GNC was that complex challenges, such as the war in Afghanistan, required a more comprehensive response than just military (kinetic) activities. Thus, the

907 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, p. 24; interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 23.

908 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 12; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18.

909 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 19; Dutch army staff officer 22; See also Hazelbag. Geintegreerde benadering, p. 214-215.

910 Besides Germany and The Netherlands, ten other NATO member states participate in the corps. See J. W. Maas, M. Greune and J.E. Livingstone (2017). 1 (GE/NL) Corps, ready for oprations! The road to a Land Centric Joint Task Force Headquarters. *Militaire Spectator, 186*(7/8), pp. 316-326.

comprehensive approach became central to the plans and operations of 1GNC.[911] Although the comprehensive approach was developed in response to a counterinsurgency conflict, 1GNC applied it to all types of military operations. The underpinning argument for this is that all military operations take place in a civilian environment and therefore need collaboration with other, civilian organizations to effective. There are no secluded battlefields.[912] To support integrating other and external capabilities in the panoply of the corps, the staff was reorganized. For instance, a staff division "Communication and Engagement" was established. This division encompasses branches for Civil Military Interaction, public affairs and information operations and targeting. [913] By incorporating these capabilities in a staff division, the efforts concerning communication and engagement, especially with civilian actors could be synchronized and integrated in the staff process. Ultimately, this should facilitate 1GNC's adoption of the comprehensive approach in its plans and operations.

Still, 1GNC acknowledged this staff reorganization was by itself insufficient to institutionalize the comprehensive approach. It recognized that it needed civilian partners such as other department, international organizations and NGOs to implement a genuine comprehensive approach to operations. From 2010, 1GNC initiated a project for an exercise, christened *Common Effort*, which included relevant civilian organizations for training in a scenario implementing the Comprehensive Approach. The main objective was to foster understanding and thus cooperation among the civilian and military participants. An important consideration was that the participants would learn to appreciate the cultural differences between them and understand the practical implications of these differences.[914] By engaging and consulting the civilian organizations before the exercise, these actors could weigh in on the scenarios. This was considered an essential precondition for the participation as the civilian organizations did not want to perform as glorified extras in a military exercise. [915]Crucially, the project was supported by the Dutch and German ministries of foreign affairs. Their support helped to reach out to many of the civilian organizations and to build a network of participants.[916] In 2015, the coterie of participating organizations signed a cooperation statement for the Common Effort Community, thereby formally establishing the yearly exercise.[917]

A recurring challenge for the Common Effort exercise is to ensure participation of the civilian partners. In contrast to the military, the civilian organizations may have no culture or organizational resources for conducting training exercises. Resources that are allocated

911 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 16.

912 Interview Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 1

913 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 15.

914 Common Effort Fact Sheet, https://commoneffort.org

915 S. Offermans and J. Brosky (2011). Project Common Effort: Een praktische manier van comprehensive trainen? *Militaire Spectator, 180*(10), p. 427-429; Interview Dutch army staff officer 1.

916 Ibidem, p. 426.

917 Maas, *et al.* 1 (GE/NL) Corps, p. 322.

for participation in *Common Effort* cannot be used for normal day-to-day operations.[918] Despite this challenge, *Common Effort* is held on a yearly basis, alternatively in The Hague or Berlin. As such, it is an example of practical institutionalization of lessons derived from Afghanistan. Facilitated by 1GNC's staff structure, the exercise helps to retain knowledge from a previous conflict and develops its applicability for future operations. Additionally, 1GNC can train divisions and brigades from allied states. In any training scenario, whether it represents a stability operation or a large-scale interstate war, the Comprehensive Approach is integrated so that the trained formations learn to plan and collaborate with civilian actors in a complex environment.[919]

Thus, the institutional embedding of the Comprehensive Approach and the practical experiences from the PRT in the Dutch armed forces is uneven (see table 4.9). Although the Comprehensive Approach is touted in doctrine and interdepartmental policy documents, the practical implementation is limited. One reason for this is the renewed focus of the Dutch armed forces towards conventional warfare, thereby limiting the attention for the interagency cooperation. This is compounded by the lack of interest by other ministries as there is no mission that provides the incentive for intense cooperation. Still, the reorganization of the German/Netherlands Corps and the yearly Common Effort-exercise are indications that the Comprehensive Approach as initiated in Afghanistan continues to be relevant in parts of the Dutch armed forces, and that a modicum of experience is being retained and built upon.

Comprehensive approach and PRT	**Institutionalization**	**Influencing factors**
Doctrine	Yes, incorporated in doctrine and policy papers	Political salience, dissemination mechanisms
Organizational structure	Limited to CIMIC-battalion, but no PRT-capability	Organizational culture, learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation
Training	Mainly by 1 GNC in structure and exercise Common Effort	Leadership

Table 4.9: Institutionalization of lessons from the PRT

4.4.5.2: Intelligence

As described in the preceding section, Dutch army intelligence personnel came back from Uruzgan with considerable homework. Deficiencies were identified throughout the mission that pertained to doctrine, training, and professionalization of army intelligence

918 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 9

919 Interview Dutch army staff officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 15

personnel. At the end of the TFU-mission, the army's intelligence assets were concentrated in the ISTAR-battalion. Due to the severe budget cuts of 2011, the intelligence section at the Army Headquarters was all but dismantled.[920] The ISTAR-battalion itself was also subject to reorganization. While it lost a company of ballistic radars, it gained some intelligence elements from the Navy and the Air Force. Consequently, the unit was rebranded as the Joint ISTAR Command (JISTARC). Moreover, in the new JISTARC configuration, the intelligence knowledge center was integrated in the organization.[921] Later on, the Defence Intelligence and Security Institute, responsible for educating and training intelligence personnel was also absorbed by JISTARC.[922] Although these reorganizations were primarily driven by budget constraints, it had the benefit that the aspects of operations, doctrine and training were all concentrated in one unit.

In 2012, a new joint intelligence doctrine was published. Although it was a joint document, it contained many of the lessons that were identified during the land operations in Afghanistan. This led to an adjustment in the intelligence process. Threats would no longer come just from conventional state actors but would generally originate from non-state groups such as insurgents or criminal organizations. This shift in threats warranted a broader frame of analysis in *people centric* intelligence.[923] Instead of focusing on terrain and weather, the intelligence process made an evaluation of the operational environment as a whole. Thus, the population and intangible factors such as history, religion, culture, and economy were to be included in the intelligence preparation for operations.[924] In essence, the new doctrine codified the PMESII-method and prescribed a more comprehensive approach for intelligence in contemporary conflicts. With the new doctrine and the experiences from Uruzgan, the intelligence courses were also adjusted. Almost without exception, military instructors had served in an intelligence capacity in Afghanistan and thus had firsthand experience of both the deficiencies and the best practices.

The efficacy of these changes could be put to the test in new missions. For instance, JISTARC supported the Police Training Mission in Afghanistan and the maritime deployment around the Horn of Africa from 2011 and onwards. Deployments of this kind were well suited for a broader intelligence approach as espoused by the PMESII-method. Intelligence analysts could focus beyond threats on local dynamics and root causes of conflicts.[925] Yet the most interesting mission from an intelligence perspective presented itself in 2014 as the Netherlands opted to participate in the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA).

920 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 13.

921 Leo van Westerhoven, (2011, October 20). Nederlandse krijgsmacht bundelt inlichtingencapaciteit. *Dutch Defence Press*.

922 These organizations already enjoyed the benefit of being collocated at the same complex of Army barracks which allowed for close coordination.

923 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Joint Doctrine Publicatie 2: Inlichtingen.* The Hague: Ministry of Defence p. 30-31.

924 Ibidem, p. 60-69.

925 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch civil servant 6.

Plagued by the effects of successive budget cuts, the Dutch armed forces opted for a relatively small but qualitatively high-profile contribution to the UN mission. The Dutch contingent would be centered by its contribution to the *All-Sources Information Unit* (ASIFU) of the mission. JISTARC would provide a company tasked with intelligence collection and a unit (ASIC) of analysts that would process and analyze the acquired intelligence. Other principal elements of the Dutch contribution consisted of a helicopter-detachment and a Special Operations Land Task Group (SOLTG). The latter unit would conduct long range reconnaissance missions and functioned as an additional sensor for the ASIFU.[926]

The ASIFU was a novel concept in an UN-mission and was therefore often referred to as an "experiment". In the history of UN-missions, collecting intelligence had been given short shrift as this activity was deemed incongruous with the declared impartiality of the missions. Furthermore, UN-forces often lacked the organizational and technical ability to establish a functioning intelligence process.[927] The ASIFU used the PMESII-method to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the environment. From this process, the ASIFU would produce analyses that should provide the mission's military and civilian components with predictive scenarios on which they could plan and execute their operations.

Although subsequent evaluations showed substantive critique towards the ASIFU in Mali, this mainly applied to how the intelligence unit and its products were used rather than the concept itself. A crucial point for consideration was that there was a disconnect between the comprehensive (PMESII) intelligence that the unit produced and the needs of the military units who were primarily concerned with threats against their forces. Furthermore, the intelligence sections of these units had little experience in both processing the complex products from the ASIFU and collecting intelligence themselves that could contribute to the overall mission process.[928] Despite these identified deficiencies, ASIFU showed that the Dutch intelligence effort in Mali was a step forward from Afghanistan, as it took on a broader view of intelligence collection and analysis that incorporated the PMESII-method instead of a narrow military perspective.[929] A new and positive development in the ASIFU was the use of an open source intelligence (OSINT) cell. Gathering and analyzing publicly available information, such as from local news outlets and social media, proved a useful, if fledgling, capability. During the operations in Uruzgan, OSINT was of limited use due to the lack of its availability there.[930] In sum, the Dutch participation in ASIFU built in large part on

926 See Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2013, November 1). Dossier 29521 Nederlandse deelname aan vredesmissies, nr. 213. Den Haag.

927 Sebastiaan Rietjens and Erik de Waard (2017). UN Peacekeeping Intelligence: The ASIFU Experiment. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 30(3), p. 533.

928 Ibidem, p. 541.

929 Ibidem, p. 549.

930 Erik de Waard, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Georges Romme and Paul van Fenema (2021). Learning in complex public systems: The case of MINUSMA's intelligence organization. *Public Management Review*, pp. 1-32.

the experiences in Uruzgan. While this effort was no resounding success, it shows that the lessons identified in the previous mission had been implemented in Mali.

The increased salience of intelligence in the Dutch armed forces was not only reflected by its vital role in deployments such as Uruzgan and Mali. While the military was confronted with a new round of budget cuts in 2013, intelligence was one of the few capabilities that would receive additional funding.[931] As the Dutch armed forces gradually regained budget, intelligence continued to be a theme that warranted increased attention. In the Defence Whitepaper of 2018, intelligence was again designated as a theme for investment throughout the organization.[932] This resulted in augmenting the intelligence capability within the army, of which JISTARC was the main beneficiary. Two additional companies were established: one for OSINT collection and analysis and one for technical exploitation intelligence.[933] The latter unit is dedicated to collect forensic intelligence from technological equipment. This includes biometric data such as fingerprints and DNA, but also digital data. A primary application for this capability is forensic investigation of IEDs to uncover the network responsible for its production. Although the concept underpinning the company is broader than just collecting intelligence on IEDs, it is a direct result of the experience in Uruzgan.[934]

Arguably the hardest observation on intelligence to address was the professionalization of intelligence personnel. To be sure, increased effort was made to train intelligence personnel. However, as there was no distinct career path for officers and NCOs who worked in intelligence, it was hard to build on their experience and retain knowledge.[935] A first step towards a specific career path was when the army established intelligence as a secondary specialization and labeled intelligence positions accordingly. With concurrent new personnel management arrangements, this allowed officers and NCOs to specialize in intelligence.[936] This step was augmented when branch-specific courses on intelligence were created for new officers (2017) and NCOs (2019). Spanning nine months, these courses harmonized the starting qualifications for new army personnel who started in intelligence positions.[937] As an ultimate development within intelligence, the Dutch army established an intelligence corps within a new *information manoeuvre* branch. With these successive measures, the intelligence personnel took important steps towards professionalization. As intelligence developed into a separate army branch, new career paths for personnel were created, thereby incentivizing officers and NCOs to build their experience in this vocation. A qualification of this development was that most intelligence positions in army battalions and brigades

931 Ministerie van Defensie. (2013). *In het belang van Nederland*. Den Haag p. 22-24.

932 Ministerie van Defensie. (2018). *Defensienota 2018: Investeren in onze mensen, slagkracht en zichtbaarheid*. Den Haag, p. 14.

933 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch scholar 1; Dutch army staff officer 31; Dutch army staff officer 32.

934 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 21

935 Interview Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 13.

936 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 31; Dutch army staff officer 32.

937 Interview Dutch army staff officer 34.

are not exclusively for intelligence personnel, which risks allotting such positions towards inexperienced NCOs and officers. As such, an important identified deficiency from Uruzgan remains unresolved.

To conclude, the intelligence capability within the Dutch army saw profound efforts to institutionalize lessons from the operations in Uruzgan and has resulted in changes in doctrine, organizations, operations, training and even a new career path for officers and NCOs (See table 4.10). This ostensible success can be ascribed to several factors. An important contributing factor is that in the evaluations on Afghanistan, most commanders recognized both the value of intelligence in operations and the deficiencies of the organization concerning this capability. Consequently, intelligence was a capability that was spared in times of scarcity and could grow when additional budget was allocated. Another aspect that contributed to change is the fact that as the primary intelligence unit in the armed forces, JISTARC contains elements that execute operations, train personnel and process knowledge and experience in new doctrine. This arrangement allows for swift adaptation of doctrine and training. Still, while the extent of institutionalization has been considerable, the more salient manifestations of learning took almost ten years to materialize. The establishment of an army intelligence corps and a unit for technological exploitation were only feasible with additional resources and provided they did not endanger existing organizational structures.

Intelligence	**Institutionalization**	**Influencing factors**
Intelligence process	Yes, experiences from Uruzgan were retained and developed. Incorporated in doctrine and applied, for instance in Mali	Learning and dissemination mechanisms
Professionalization of intelligence personnel	Yes, but after significant hiatus. Intelligence corps and associated career paths were established after several years	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.10: Institutionalization of lessons on intelligence

4.4.5.3: Non-kinetic activities

A substantial portion of the evaluation points after the TFU-mission had ended indicated that the Dutch military had to invest in new capabilities that had proven their value during operations in Afghanistan. While the PRT-concept had already evolved and delivered results during the mission, the integration of information operations within the campaign had in essence not moved beyond the recognition that the Dutch armed forces lacked the capability and capacity to employ this aspect successfully. Moreover, these non-traditional

military capabilities lacked a sufficient organizational base in the Dutch military. For instance, strategic communications and the PRT-concept had no set place in the peace time organization. No single branch or unit was responsible for retaining the experiences from the TFU-missions, drafting functional doctrine or training service members. For psychological operations, the situation was somewhat different as this capability had been made a secondary task for the Army's air defense corps. Evidently, psychological operations had scant relation with shooting at flying objects, and the dual tasking risked degrading the proficiency in one of the assigned duties.

A 2007 study on brigade headquarters, which had formed the building blocks of the TFU-staffs, indicated that the staffs had to be augmented with additional capabilities. In a new organization table, the brigade staffs were allotted two staff officers for information operations and two for psychological operations.[938] At face value, this was an improvement as the new positions could familiarize brigade staffs with these capabilities and incorporate them into the staff processes. In practice, qualified officers who could work in such positions were scarce. There was no doctrine or training in The Netherlands from which service members could be prepared for such tasks. Moreover, there was no career path for such capabilities. At best, working in psychological or information operation was an interesting and temporary diversion from more standard careers. Consequently, by 2011 many of these positions were still vacant.[939] In the successive budget cuts and reorganizations, the positions were quietly scrapped. During missions such as the Police Training Mission in Kunduz, Dutch troops conducted information operations in order to influence perceptions of the local population as part of a larger ISAF campaign. While this practice yielded additional experience, the efficacy of these efforts was unclear.[940]

The attention towards information operations as a capability for the armed forces gained new impetus with the Russian activities in the Crimea and Ukraine in 2014. The ability to shape perceptions of relevant audiences by Russian (dis)information campaigns came to the forefront and initiated renewed efforts to establish countermeasures for this in The Netherlands.[941] Concurrently, the Dutch army sought to enhance its own capability to attain non-kinetic effects through information operations. To be sure, the Dutch plans stopped well short from employing disinformation to influence audiences.[942] Still, military activities to influence perceptions and ultimately behavior are not without controversy in The Netherlands.[943]

938 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Beleidsstudie Staven op Brigadeniveau*. Den Haag.

939 Van Osch, Information Operations, p. 207.

940 E. Broos and M. Sissingh (2013). Verhelderen van de informatieomgeving voor 'Information Operations' door 'Systemic Analysis'. *Militaire Spectator, 182*(7/8), p. 345-346.

941 P. Dekkers and P. Grijpstra (2016). *Informatie als Wapen*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie.

942 Land Warfare Centre. (2016). *Future Land Operating Concept: Editie Ascalon*. Amersfoort, p. 25.

943 Een soft maar gevaarlijk wapen, *NRC* (29 June 2020)

In the army plans, information operations were regarded as an integral part of military campaigns. Operations require orchestrated efforts in the physical, human and information domains. As such, military staffs need to understand how to information operations can be integrated in military operations to attain the stated objectives.[944] Evidently, this would be a marked improvement over the experiences in Uruzgan where information operations were treated as a discrete capability. The centrality of the information domain was reinforced by the army's future vision of 2018. It states that: "Future conflicts require a comprehensive approach with all instruments of influence and power, such as political, military, economical and information means"[945]. To this end, the army "will invest in capabilities and concept development for influencing behavior and protection against [...] manipulation and disinformation".[946]

The salience of information operations was translated into practical activities by the army. The army's *Civil-Military Interaction Command* (CMI co, the organizational successor of the erstwhile CIMIC-battalion) became the custodian of behavioral research, behavioral influencing, and engagement with external actors. This unit develops concepts for non-lethal influencing activities. Additionally, it seeks to cultivate and leverage a network of external partners such as government agencies, academia and NGOs. Its own network of reservists with specific knowledge should reinforce this task[947]

Another development is the army's initiation of a specific training course for officers in communication and engagement in 2019.[948] This formed a further step towards the establishment of a new corps of communication and engagement in the Dutch army in 2020. The branch is home to officers who specialize in psychological operations, civil-military interaction, or public affairs. In general, these officers are to be central to the efforts of integrating activities in the information domain in military operations. By instituting a specific branch in combination with specific training, service members can accumulate experience and knowledge on information operations and subsequently build a career in this specialization.[949] These developments show that the Dutch armed forces, and more specifically the army, attempt to address the identified deficiencies in executing information operations in Uruzgan (see table 4.11). However, in this instance it is the Russian activities in the information domain that have prodded the Dutch military into action rather than the latter's experiences in Afghanistan.

944 Land Warfare Centre. (2016). *Future Land Operating Concept: Editie Ascalon.* Amersfoort, p. 26-27.

945 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2018). *Veiligheid is vooruitzien: De toekomstvisie van de Koninklijke Landmacht.* Utrecht, p. 6.

946 Ibidem, p. 12-14.

947 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 30; Dutch army staff officer 27; Dutch army staff officer 14

948 S. van den Bulk (2019, May 7). Communicatie als wapen. *Defensiekrant*; Dutch army staff officer 14.

949 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 14; Dutch army staff officer 27.

Non-kinetic activities	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Integration of non-kinetic activities	No; experiences from Uruzgan were not consistently retained and developed. Lack of 'anchor point'	Learning and dissemination mechanisms
Professionalization of information operations personnel	Yes, but after significant hiatus. Communication & Engagement corps and associated career paths were established after several years	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.11: Institutionalization of lessons on non-kinetic activities

4.4.5.4: Counter-IED

After the redeployment from Afghanistan, the Dutch armed forces strove to institutionalize the acquired knowledge on IEDs. The Defence Staff evaluation stressed that the Dutch military should retain capabilities to deal with this threat. Consequently, the ad hoc organization of the Joint Task Force had to transition into a permanent institute that could function as a knowledge authority on IEDs. It was tasked to follow developments on IEDs and potential countermeasures and to serve as an advisory body to the rest of the armed forces.[950] In spite of the large budget cuts in 2011 and 2013, the establishment of a permanent counter-IED capability received an investment of 71 million Euros.[951]

The Joint Task Force was embedded in the army's *Land Warfare Centre*. As such, it became part of the land forces' unit that was tasked with concept development and doctrine. In 2014, the Joint Task Force was rebranded as the *Defence Expertise Centre Counter-IED*.[952] Furthermore, counter-IED capacity was embedded within the army's brigade staffs through specialized officers and NCOs.[953] While the institutionalization of knowledge on IEDs was relatively successful, procuring the necessary equipment for the armed forces proved to be harder. Lacking the sense of urgency provided by the operations in Uruzgan, further investments in counter-IED had to compete with other materiel projects for scarce resources in this period of financial austerity. Moreover, because of the (re-)embedding in the army, the Expertise Centre had lost its privileged position at the defence staff level and thus its ability to expedite acquisition processes.[954]

950 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified ISAF*, p. 34-35; Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 19/101-19/102.

951 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2011, May 20). Dossier 32733 Beleidsbrief Defensie, nr. 2. Den Haag, p. 91.

952 Ministerie van Defensie. (2014, October 8). Task Force Counter-IED wordt expertisecentrum. *Defensiekrant*.

953 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch army staff officer 26

954 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 26; Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch scholar 1.

In recent missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mali, IEDs continue to pose a threat to deployed Dutch troops. The Dutch army has therefore recognized the enduring relevance of counter-IED knowledge and capabilities (see table 4.12).[955] As IEDs continue to proliferate and evolve in manifestations, efficacy and lethality, the Dutch military has to keep up in order to mitigate this threat to its troops and operations.[956] This imperative is reflected by persistent investments in technology and concepts that can be used to detect, disarm or protect against IEDs.[957]

Another recent manifestation of organizational adaptation regarding IEDs is the establishment of the JISTARC company for technical exploitation (described in sub section 4.3.5). This unit is tasked with collecting and analyzing intelligence that can help targeting IED-networks and thus prevent attacks.[958] These developments show that identified deficiencies in Uruzgan have retained their relevance in recent years for the Dutch armed forces, although financial constraints have stymied their implementation.

Counter-IED	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
JTF C-IED	Yes, JTF C-IED was retained as an expertise center	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture, resource allocation
Specific intelligence	Yes, but after significant hiatus	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.12: Institutionalization of lessons on counter-IED

4.4.6: Sub conclusion

At the end of the Uruzgan mission, there was a profound aspiration to capture and institutionalize the lessons within the Dutch armed forces. This was reflected by the various evaluation efforts and resulting reports. In the evaluations deficiencies had been identified regarding doctrine, training and (non-kinetic) capabilities that were considered necessary for counterinsurgency missions. High ranking officers recognized that the armed forces needed new capabilities and to invest in cooperation with external partners in complex missions. Although Uruzgan should not be considered the blueprint for future missions, general

955 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2016, January 22). Prioriteiten Kennis en Innovatie Landoptreden t.b.v. DKIP 2017 . Utrecht, p. 9.

956 W. Meurer (2015). *Countering de current en future IED dreiging*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie), p.2-4.

957 Defensie Materieel Organisatie. (2016). *Kennis- & Innovatieplan Grondgebonden Wapensystemen (GWS), 2016-2018*. Den Haag, p. 46.

958 Interview Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch scholar 1.

lessons could be distilled that were applicable to all types of conflicts, such as the value of the Comprehensive Approach and the centrality of intelligence and non-kinetic activities. Of course, these considerations did not mean that the Dutch armed forces should neglect the capability to fight. If anything, the recent missions had degraded the ability to fight a capable foe. Still, a broader panoply incorporating and coordinating various instruments of power was required to be successful in modern conflict. This awareness was explicated in doctrine and policy papers, which professed the value of a capable military that could be employed using the Comprehensive Approach.

This aspiration was however impeded by the lack of real lessons learned organizations at the Defence Staff or within the services. The efforts to capture and implement the lessons were fragmented. As such, there was no authority with sufficient influence to ensure a coherent plan for institutionalization. Moreover, these efforts were undercut by dramatic budget cuts in 2011 and 2013. The armed forces lost more than 12.000 personnel positions, discarded significant amounts of equipment and was downsized in capacity. Consequently, the Dutch military was preoccupied by retaining basic capabilities, rather than investing in new ones. To be sure, some small investments were made because of the evaluations on Uruzgan such as counter-IED and intelligence. Nevertheless, financial constraints limited the ability to institutionalize these lessons to their full extent.

After 2014, the strategic analysis of The Netherlands changed. The Russian activities in Ukraine and the rise of the Islamic State alarmed Dutch policy makers about the necessity of the military. Consequently, the budget of the armed forces was gradually increased, thereby largely repairing the earlier cuts. The changes in the strategic environment also had repercussions for the substance of Dutch defense policy. Whereas in the last decades stability projection had gained in prominence, Russian assertiveness had renewed the attention to territorial defense.

For the Dutch military, this meant that it had to recalibrate towards conventional warfare. This was most pertinent for the Dutch army due to its leading role in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The general opinion within the army was that the combination of two decades of stabilization operations and the budget cuts had diminished its ability to perform high intensity combat operations. When additional funds became available, most proposed investments were planned towards increasing the combat readiness of the army and the military in general.

This is not to say that the experiences from Uruzgan are discarded in the Dutch Armed Forces. For instance, the Comprehensive Approach is still a central concept in doctrine and policy papers. However, the value of documents for achieving institutionalization is limited. More practical manifestations are, for example, the efforts of the German/Netherlands Corps to

implement the Comprehensive Approach in its organization and training. Other instances of institutionalization are the establishment of a counter-IED center and organizational developments regarding intelligence and information operations. By instituting specific branches for intelligence and communication and engagement, the Dutch army strove to enhance these capabilities through investing in specialized personnel. Nevertheless, if investments, training, and general organizational attention are focused on conventional warfare, the relevant experiences from the TFU-mission run the risk of being neglected. When newer capabilities, based on the lessons from Uruzgan, are not integrated within staffs and training exercises, a rift can occur between the traditional elements of the armed forces and the newer specialties, thereby diminishing the latter's value.

4.5: Conclusion

In retrospect, the ability of the Dutch military to learn from its Uruzgan-mission shows an uneven record. Despite the professed willingness of the Dutch armed forces to learn from the deployment, it lacked the organizational learning and dissemination mechanisms to do so. This was as much recognized both before the mission in 2005 as afterwards in 2010. Although there were various evaluations at different levels of the organization to capture lessons and observations, there was no central authority to enact institutional changes. Over the years since Uruzgan, the Dutch armed forces have invested little in the capability to learn. Assessing operational experiences, either from missions or exercises, is still absent. Mission evaluations are predominantly geared towards political accountability rather than learning from experience.

A strong suit of the Dutch military's learning processes in Afghanistan was the way in which informal knowledge sharing was facilitated by formal processes. Small unit tactics and counter-IED procedures were shared horizontally and quickly incorporated in both predeployment and in-theatre training. Furthermore, the various training organizations routinely visited Afghanistan to both learn the latest developments and evaluate their courses with the audience. Returning personnel were often tasked to help mentor and advise their counterparts of successive missions. Although this was a formal arrangement, the efficacy hinged on the quality of the knowledge, its sharing and personal rapport of the involved service members.

During the Uruzgan mission itself, several observations pointed to institutional deficiencies such as the lack of specialized personnel. This particularly applied to positions that had no equivalent in the armed forces standing organization that could serve as anchor points for knowledge retention and development. For instance, there were no organic units within the armed forces that executed PRT-like missions or information operations. While the

PRT-rotations showed meaningful adaptations over time, the knowledge evaporated as the units refocused on their organic tasks. Furthermore, there was no centrally directed training program for the PRT. Consequently, knowledge was shared informally.

Conversely, crucial capabilities such as intelligence did have organic positions and units in the Dutch army. These elements served as a semi-formal anchor point in which experiences were transferred through doctrine and training. In this way, intelligence personnel were able to adopt changes in Uruzgan. Still, the identified institutional deficiencies were not addressed by the army or the ministry. Dedicated career paths or even a specific intelligence corps were not supported by the army during or after the mission due to a lack of resources and an unwillingness to disinvest in existing capabilities.

Although coming ten years after Uruzgan, the recent establishment of new branches within the Dutch army for intelligence and communication and engagement are positive developments that should remedy the identified lack of personnel in these fields for future missions. These developments show that the institutional changes based on operational experiences have been initiated at grassroots levels. Evidently, these changes had to be accepted at the institutional level. As the evaluations at the end of the mission showed, investment and knowledge retention in these aspects were advocated at higher levels in the Dutch army and the ministry of Defence. However, the subsequent budget cuts stymied the implementation of these lessons. When the financial situation improved, some of the plans were rekindled by advocating officers, with additional insights from the altered strategic environment and new missions. These were bottom-up initiatives that eventually were accepted at the institutional level.

Other examples of observations from the field that were made possible by institutional responses were the measures against IEDs and the "civilianization" of the mission from 2008 an onwards. Both adaptations were facilitated by political support. Of course, there were significant differences between the threat posed by IEDs and the more general challenge of fostering governance and development in a counterinsurgency context. The former was an active response to the presence of (foreign) troops by the insurgents. In effect, the increased use of IEDs was an adaptation by the insurgents after direct confrontations against ISAF in 2006 and 2007 had proven too costly and ineffective. Conversely, the response of deploying additional civilians to Uruzgan was more a reflection of the dawning realities of counterinsurgency operations. Officers in the field recognized that they were not qualified to perform all the given tasks and requested specialized civilian assistance.

The most important aspect of the mission, adapting the campaign plan, was done in an informal fashion. Campaign plans were drafted on the initiative of operational analysts or TFU-commanders. While the three campaign plans varied in the extent that they incorporated

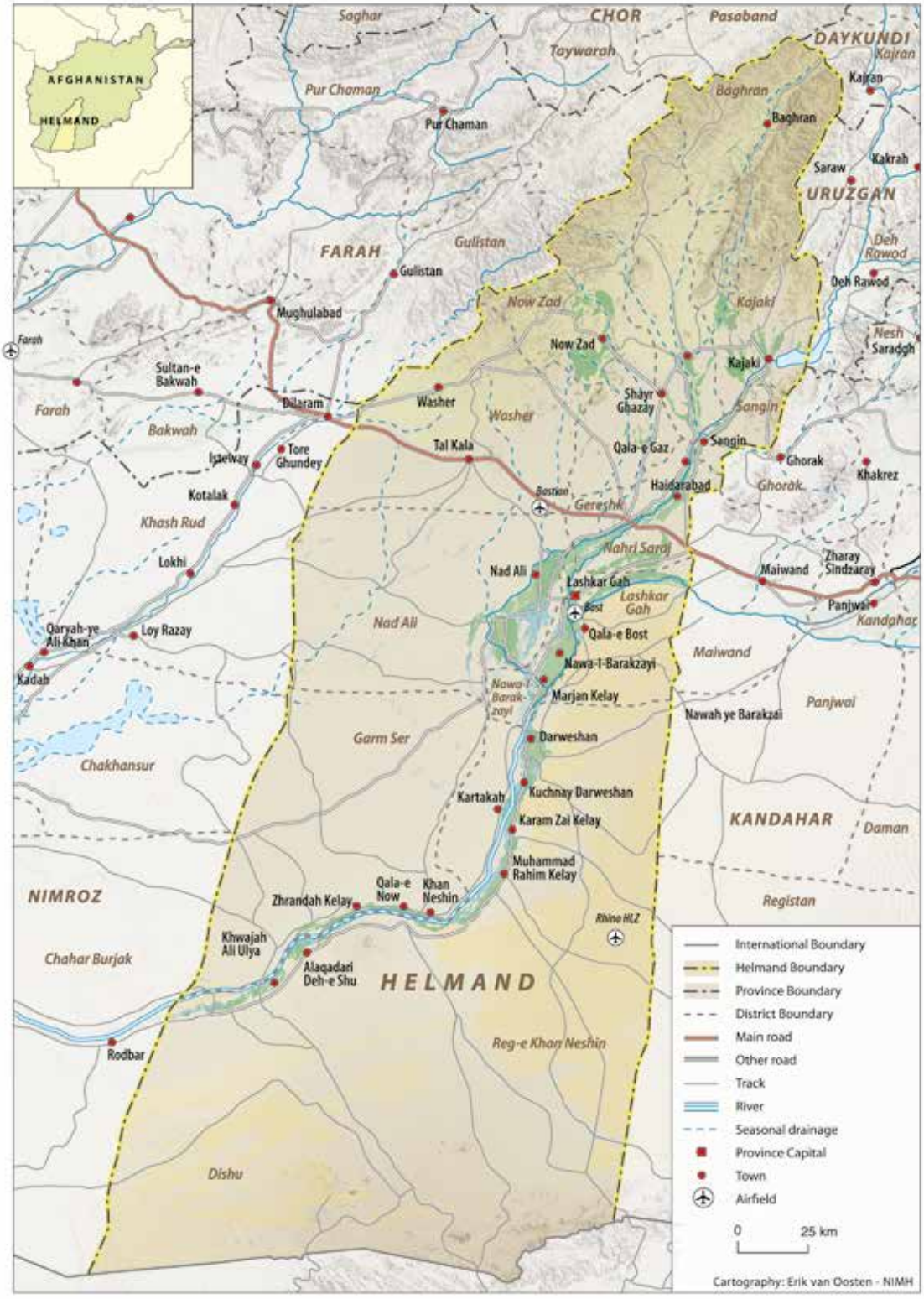
non-military perspectives, they were drawn up in a deliberate political vacuum as they were not formally sanctioned by the departments and consequently not subject to debate in parliament. The campaign plans sought to coordinate the efforts in the fields of security, governance and development in order to execute the Comprehensive Approach. In the field, the growing civilian contingent and the military personnel were increasingly able to plan and execute the operations, thereby giving substance to the ideal of the Comprehensive Approach. At the departmental level, the ministries routinely coordinated their efforts, yet the support for the campaign plans amounted to little more than acquiescence as these plans were considered as internal task force planning documents. Whether the Dutch ministry of Defence, preferably in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is capable of drafting (and adapting) a strategic guidance for a new mission remains to be seen. An attempt to do so for the Kunduz-mission was unfortunately stillborn due to political interference. The publication of an interdepartmental *Guideline Comprehensive Approach* is therefore of limited value if it is not practiced in missions.

The institutionalization of the Comprehensive Approach within the armed forces is more pervasive. A self-evident qualification of this statement is that this defeats the purpose of the concept. Nevertheless, the Comprehensive Approach still features in military doctrine as a guiding principle in any Dutch involvement in conflict. Furthermore, the German/Netherlands Corps has embraced the Comprehensive Approach in its organization and training. A potential pitfall of this general applicability of the concept is that its practical meaning is diluted. By contrast, in the counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, the value has become pertinent.

Recent observations show that the armed forces, and in particular the army, are recalibrating towards conventional conflicts and high intensity combat operations. In such scenarios, as seen in training exercises, the Comprehensive Approach and non-kinetic activities are far from primary considerations. Regaining the ability to fight a capable, well-equipped adversary takes precedence in practical terms such as training, education and investments in new capabilities. This can lead to divergence between the combat arms that refocus on conventional warfare and capabilities such as civil-military cooperation, intelligence and non-kinetic activities that are more geared towards stabilization operations. An additional hazard is that due to this focus at certain levels, the efforts in other areas, often with their roots in operational experiences in Afghanistan or elsewhere are seen as less relevant and therefore subject to increased scrutiny.

In sum, the Dutch armed forces in Uruzgan adapted to an extent in relation to the operational environment. However, these changes were in large part initiated through informal processes and only at a later stage supported by formal organizational support. The formal learning mechanisms mostly geared towards capturing observations and not implementing

lessons. After the mission, the Dutch armed forces intended to institutionalize the relevant experiences from Uruzgan. When the financial situation allowed this, meaningful institutional adjustments were made, including the establishment of new branches. In light of a new strategic analysis that awards more weight to conventional capabilities, these organizational changes lack a coherent vision. The prime culprit for this is the enduring lack of organizational arrangements that help to learn from operational experiences.


AFGHANISTAN
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FARAH
Gulistan
Deh Rawod
Mughulabad
Now Zad
Kajaki
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Farah
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Bala Ram
Washer
Shayr Ghazay
Sangin
Bakwah
Tore Ghundey
Tal Kala
Qala-e Gaz
Ghorak
Khakrez
Kotalak
Haidarabad
Gereshk
Khash Rud
Nahri Saraj
Lokhi
Nad Ali
Lashkar Gah
Zharay
Sindzaray
Maiwand
Panjwai
Kandahar
Qaryah-ye Ali Khan
Loy Razay
Bost
Qala-e Bost
Kadah
Nawa-I-Barakzayi
Marjan Kelay
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Garm Ser
Darweshan
Chakhansur
Kartakah
Kuchnay Darweshan
Karam Zai Kelay
KANDAHAR
Daman
Muhammad Rahim Kelay
NIMROZ
Zhrandah Kelay
Qala-e Now
Khan Neshin
Registan
Rhino HLZ
Khwajah Ali Ulya
Chahar Burjak
Alaqadari Deh-e Shu
HELMAND
Rodbar
Reg-e Khan Neshin
Dishu
International Boundary
Helmand Boundary
Province Boundary
District Boundary
Main road
Other road
Track
River
Seasonal drainage
Province Capital
Town
Airfield
0
25 km
Cartography: Erik van Oosten - NIMH

Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Task Force Helmand and its impact on the British Army

5.1: Introduction

The British mission in Helmand (see map on page 231) under ISAF lasted from 2006 to 2014. Within the British armed forces, the Helmand campaign is colloquially referred to as "Operation Herrick".[959] Like the Dutch mission in the adjacent province, the deployment into Helmand can be described as a seminal experience for the British armed forces.[960] Still, despite the proximity of Helmand and Uruzgan and comparable local dynamics the intensity of the conflict was markedly greater in the British area of operations. The total number of fatalities, 456, among British service members and civilians in Afghanistan, in this regard, is a telling indicator.[961] Moreover, Helmand province eventually became the focal point of the ISAF-campaign and housed the largest number of coalition troops.[962]

The structure of this chapter closely resembles that of the previous one on the Dutch mission in Uruzgan and likewise consists of three main parts. The first section forms a preamble to the Helmand campaign by examining the strategic and organizational cultures of the United Kingdom, recent missions, contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine and the decision to deploy to Helmand. Subsequently, the second section offers a concise overview of the campaign and the developments relevant to the learning process of the British Army. Furthermore, the established themes from chapter 3 are elaborated upon in vignettes. The third section assesses the impact of Operation Herrick on the British army by revisiting the vignettes, studying evaluation processes and other organizational and conceptual developments in the British armed forces.

5.2: The road to Helmand: prior experiences and preparation

The conduct of the Helmand campaign by British forces was naturally shaped by the dynamics of the Afghan conflict and the Western intervention since 2001. Additionally, internal British factors also profoundly influenced the mission. For instance, the deployment into Helmand was affected by British cultural factors, recent missions, and the decision-making process for the deployment itself. These factors, along with contemporary British doctrine will be explored in this section to assess their impact on the mission further on in this chapter.

959 Technically, the moniker "Operation Herrick" refers to the wider British military contribution in Afghanistan at that stage and began in 2005. Yet, the mission in Helmand was the centerpiece of the contribution and both terms are generally used interchangeably.

960 British Army. (2015). *Operation HERRICK Campaign Study*. Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare, p. iii.

961 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 1.

962 Rajiv Chandrasekaran (2012). *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 62-66.

5.2.1: Culture

5.2.1.1: Strategic culture

As a former empire and a permanent member of the United Nations security council, the United Kingdom regards itself as an influential power.[963] The enduring relation with its former colonies means that there are few limitations to what it perceives to be its strategic interests. Given the legacy of empire and the grand ambitions of foreign policy, the British public and political elite are generally at ease with deploying its armed forces to defend British interests.[964]

A crucial element in the actual employment of the UK's military is the "Royal Prerogative". This means that the Prime Minister and by extension the Cabinet can decide to deploy the UK's armed forces abroad without consulting Parliament.[965] Nevertheless, support by a majority in Parliament is considered as desirable. As such, the House of Commons is generally informed of the intention to deploy on a mission. Over the last years, this prerogative has been challenged as the lack of oversight for military missions forms a democratic deficit.[966] From his installment as Prime Minister in 1996, Tony Blair has used his Royal Prerogative on several occasions such as the interventions in Sierra Leone (1997-1999), Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001 and onwards). As an exception, the invasion in Iraq was put up to a vote in parliament.[967]

The prolific employment of the UK's military under Blair can be ascribed to two themes in British strategic culture: the UK's ambition to be "a force for good" and the 'special relationship' with the United States.[968] In April 1999, during the Kosovo War, Blair outlined his 'Doctrine of the International Community' in a speech. He argued that the international community could intervene to prevent "acts of genocide". Interestingly, he also stated that "[o]ne state should not feel it has the right to change the political system of another [...]".[969] Recognizing that the international community could not intervene in all internal conflicts, Blair listed five preconditions for military action:

963 Paul Cornish (2013). United Kingdom. In H. Biehl, B. Giecherig, & A. Jonas (Eds.), *Strategic Cultures in Europe : Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent* (pp. 372-385). Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 372-373.

964 Malena Britz (2016). Continuity or Change? British Strategic Culture and International Military Operations. In M. Britz (Ed.), *European Participation in International Operations* (pp. 151-175). London: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 161.

965 House of Lords: Select Committee on the Constitution. (2006). *Waging war: Parliament's role and responsibility.* London: The Stationery Office Limited, p. 8-9.

966 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*. p. 106.

967 House of lords. *Waging war*, p. 45-46.

968 Britz. Continuity or Change?, p. 153-154; Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 102-103.

969 Lawrence Freedman (2017). Force and the International Relations community: Blair's Chicago speech and the criteria for intervention. *International Relations, 31*(2), p. 115.

> *"First, are we sure of our case? [...] Second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options? [...] Third, on the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake? Fourth, are we prepared for the long term? [...] And finally, do we have national interests involved?"*[970]

With this doctrine, the UK was willing to deploy its military in foreign conflicts and act as a force for good. Although Blair had specified conditions for such interventions, the new interventions in the Twenty-first century did not meet these criteria.[971] This willingness to forego the preconditions have been ascribed to Blair's wish to maintain the 'special relationship' with the United States.[972]

The special relationship has been a dominant theme in British foreign policy since the Second World War. Generally, it deploys its armed forces alongside the Americans'.[973] Furthermore, the UK has sought to be the transatlantic link between the United States as its principal ally and continental Europe.[974] After the 9/11 attacks, Blair professed the UK's solidarity with the United States. If the Americans would go to war, the British would follow. Coupled with his vision for 'liberal interventionism', Blair committed the UK to the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.[975] As a loyal junior partner, the UK hoped to influence the United States by acting "as a Greece to Rome".[976] At the beginning of the Twenty-first century, the UK's international security policy was one geared towards foreign interventions due to its global commitments, doctrine of 'liberal interventionism' and the reinforced 'special relationship' with the United States. In this context, the organizational culture of the British armed forces will now be explored.

5.2.1.2: *Organizational culture*

Within this context of strategic culture, the British armed forces were a relative constant factor as the military had a tradition of obedience, or even "docility", to the civilian masters. Furthermore, officers were generally apolitical and professional in the sense that the military

970 Ibidem, p. 117-118.

971 Jonathan Bailey (2013). The Political Context: Why We Went to War and the Mismatch of Ends, Ways and Means. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate, p. 11.

972 Christopher Eliott (2015). *High Command: British Military Leadership in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. London: Hurst & Company, p. 98; Bailey. The Political Context, p. 13.

973 Paul Cornish (2013). Strategic Culture in the United Kingdom. In H. Biehl, B. Giegerich, & A. Jonas (Eds.), *Strategic Cultures in Europe: Security and Defence Politics Across the Continent*. Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 377.

974 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 102.

975 Bailey. The Political Context, p. 13-15.

976 Elliott, *High Command*, p. 98.

was an all-volunteer force since 1960.[977] Beyond these common traits the British armed forces were far from a monolithical organization. At the advent of the new millennium, the services that constitute the British armed forces had vastly different outlooks. Naturally, there was always some inter-service rivalry over budget and prominence. The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were focused on the procurement of new platforms and adopting novel technologies to ensure their readiness.[978] For the British Army, the situation was more diffuse. While the other services had been deployed to missions, the brunt of those had fallen on the Army. In particular, elements of the army had recently conducted stabilization and peace support operations in Northern Ireland (see section 5.2.2.1.) and the Balkans. However, another significant part of the army had largely fulfilled garrison duty in the "British Army of the Rhine "(BAOR) during the Cold War and beyond. The BAOR was forward-deployed in Germany to bolster NATO defenses in a potential attack by the Warsaw Pact. In 1991 the army fielded a division to fight in the ground campaign of the Gulf War (operation Granby). After the Cold War ended, a smaller British force remained in Germany.[979] Thus the army combined in it two distinct strands of experiences: one of training for conventional war and another of conducting stabilization or peace support operations.

By and large, the dominant strand in British Army culture was that of war fighting. Like other armies, the Army had to balance training for conventional war while deploying in peace operations.[980] As Anthony King notes, the "warfighting ethos" is fundamental to British service members. Moreover, British officers are generally expected to demonstrate qualities associated with conventional combat such as initiative, decisiveness and offensive action. Not only are such elements central to officer education, but they are also prerequisite for promotion.[981] Combined with the "Adaptive Foundational Training" that focused on combat skills, the conventional war fighting mindset was ingrained in the army's personnel.[982] Potentially, this war fighting ethos could become problematic in other types of conflict in which deliberation, political astuteness and a thorough understanding of the environment are called for. However, this predilection to conventional warfare is disputed by others who argue that it "remains a colonial army at heart", based on the memorabilia from the imperial era displayed in regimental messes.[983] Yet, exhibiting traditions and trinkets from irregular wars gone-by do not equate to proficiency in them. Moreover, the traits of the regimental

977 Cornish. Strategic Culture, p. 380-382.

978 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 61-71.

979 Austin Long, *Soul of Armies*, p 176-178; Frank Ledwidge (2017). *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars.* New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 156-157.

980 David Ucko and Robert Egnell (2013). *Counterinsurgency in Crisis: Britain and the Challenges of modern warfare.* New York: Columbia University Press, p 38-40.

981 Anthony King (2010). Understanding the Helmand Campaign. *International Affairs, 86*(2), p. 323-325.

982 King. Helmand Campaign, p 313; See also Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 154-156.

983 Warren Chin (2010). Colonial Warfare in a Post-Colonial State: British Military Operations in Helmand. *Defence Studies, 10*(1-2), p. 241.

forebears that are celebrated are audacity and initiative rather than keen understanding and a measured approach.

Interestingly, at the time the British Army was more extolled for its proficiency in fighting irregular wars. Throughout its imperial period and the era of decolonization, the British Army had accumulated experience in fighting irregular wars. British scholars stated for instance that "the British Army has traditionally been culturally attuned to small wars"[984] and that the British Army "excelled in [...] anti-guerilla warfare [and] other aspects of counterinsurgency".[985] Another important proponent of this premise is the US officer John Nagl. In his book "Learning to eat soup with a knife" he favorably contrasts the British counterinsurgency performance in Malaya to the American experience in Vietnam. To be sure, Nagl does not posit that the British Army had some innate traits that produced positive results, but rather that it was a learning organization that was able to enhance its performance and overcome earlier mistakes.[986] However, from such readings of the British historical experience emerged the idea that this experience had coalesced into institutional memory.[987] Moreover, a central aspect in the understanding of British counterinsurgency campaigns in the 20th century was that there was a distinct British approach which emphasized the use of minimum force. Ostensibly, this contrasted with the more brutal conduct of French forces during their (unsuccessful) wars of decolonization.[988] However, more recent historical research shows that British (proxy) forces used considerable coercive measures in counterinsurgency wars such as Kenya and Malaysia.[989] Furthermore, beyond the oft-flaunted cases of Malaysia and Northern Ireland, the British success rate in modern counterinsurgency campaign was slimmer than previously stated. [990] However, by the beginning of the 21st century, these nuances were largely glossed over.

Beyond its recent experiences and general warfighting ethos, examining the British Army's culture is a difficult proposition. Like most armies, it is divided into different arms and branches with specific roles on the battlefield. However, in the British Army, the manoeuvre units are further subdivided into regiments that have their own sense of history and tradition. Every army soldier, whether an officer or enlisted, is first and foremost part of a regiment or

984 Alexander Alderson (2010). United Kingdom. In T. Rid, & T. Keaney (Eds.), *Understanding Counterinsurgency*. London: Routledge, p. 29.

985 Thomas Mockaitis (1995). *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era: War, Armed Forces and Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 146.

986 Nagl, *Soup with a Knife*, p. 192-198.

987 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 24-26.

988 Bruno Reis (2011). The Myth of British Minimum Force in Counterinsurgency Campaigns during Decolonisation (1945–1970). *Journal of Strategic Studies, 34*(2), p. 247-249.

989 See for instance Karl Hack (2018). 'Devils that suck the blood of the Malayan People': The Case for Post-Revisionist Analysis of Counter-insurgency Violence. *War in History, 25*(2), p. 222-224; Huw Bennet (2007). The Other Side of the COIN: Minimum and Exemplary Force in British Army Counterinsurgency in Kenya. *Small Wars and Insurgencies, 18*(4), p. 647-651.

990 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 29

corps.[991] Between the various infantry and cavalry regiments there existed some informal stratification and intense rivalry.[992] Some peace time aspects of this regimental identity, such as mess-rules and dress uniforms are seemingly archaic and have little relevance for performance on operations.[993] Still, this sense of shared identity is regarded as fostering unit cohesion, which is of course essential on operations and during combat.[994] When units are deployed on operations, this regimental, and sub-unit cohesion is often reinforced by the concept of "mission command" that combines centralized intent and decentralized execution and promotes initiative on lower tactical levels. Of course, mission command is familiar to most Western militaries. However, as Edward Burke shows, in Northern Ireland the combination of strong regimental identity and decentralized execution of operations can produce disparate results when the intent is ambiguous or not properly enforced.[995] A further potential pitfall of the strong British regimental system with its intraservice rivalries was the regiment was the prime conduit of information and experience. Not only could this impede formal learning processes across the army, but it also made it more difficult to enforce change that went against the grain of the institutions.[996] As such, the British Army entered the 21st century predominantly focused on conventional warfare, despite an apparent knack for irregular conflicts. Although the counterinsurgency experiences were not at the forefront of military thought at the time, some of this knowledge had been confided to doctrine.

5.2.2: Counterinsurgency doctrine

The conceptual foundation for counterinsurgency operations by the British Army at the beginning of the twenty-first century could have been the Army Field Manual 1-10: Counter Insurgency Operations (Strategic and Operational Guidelines). Published in July 2001, the AFM preceded the Western interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the lack of practical application of the field manual during operations will be examined further on in this chapter, this section assesses its contents and sources of inspiration.

The AFM defines insurgency as "the actions of a minority group within a state who are intent on forcing political change by means of a mixture of subversion, propaganda and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate the broad mass of people to accept such a

991 Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 149.

992 See Edward Burke (2018). *An Army of Tribes: British Army Cohesion, Deviancy and Murder in Northern Ireland*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, p. 41-42; Simon Akam (2021). *The Changing of the Guard: The British Army since 9/11*. London: Scribe, p. 113-119.

993 See Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 46-49. Bury, (2017). Barossa Night: cohesion in the British Army officer corps. *The British Journal Of Sociology, 68*(2), p. 318-319.

994 Patrick Bury and Anthony King (2015). A Profession of Love: Cohesion in a British Platoon in Afghanistan. In A. King (Ed.), *Frontline: combat and cohesion in the 21st century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 205-210; Burke, *Army of Tribes*, p. 41-42.

995 Edward Burke, *Army of Tribes*, p. 334-339. See also Anthony King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p 324-325.

996 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 41-42.

change."[997] It recognizes that insurgencies can have different causes such as nationalism, separatism, "maladministration" or "unfulfilled expectations".[998] With regard to religious extremism as driver for insurrection, the AFM was rather prescient in stating: "in the past few years another form of militant tendency has reappeared on the international scene; that of Islamic fundamentalism [...]this form of militant opposition to secular governments and regimes has taken much of the limelight."[999] The specific tenets of Islamism in a counterinsurgency context were further explored in an annex to the doctrine.[1000]

Although the AFM posits that the "experience of numerous 'small wars' has provided the British Army with a unique insight into this demanding form of conflict", it cautioned against using the Northern Ireland experience as a constraint to thinking about counterinsurgency. Not only was the domestic environment particular to this conflict, the intensity of the later years of Operation Banner were categorized as "Military Assistance to Civilian Authorities". While pertinent lessons could be learnt from Northern Ireland or from other British experiences, effective counterinsurgency approaches could be gleaned from other countries. Furthermore, as insurgencies continued to evolve, counterinsurgency must also continually adapt.[1001]

In order to address an insurgency, the AFM acknowledged the supporting role played by the military to a political solution. Central to any counterinsurgency effort is the contest for popular support. In this light, the tactical activities by the armed forces must be focused on severing the link between the insurgents and the population.[1002] To pursue this task successfully, military commanders must contemplate on six counterinsurgency principles (see table 5.1). The lineage from classical counterinsurgency prescriptions is clear in this list when compared to the earlier writings (see chapter 3).

997 British Army. (2001). *Army Field Manual 1-10: Counter Insurgency Operations (Strategic and Operational Guidelines)*, p. A-1-1.

998 British Army. *AFM 1-10*, p. A-1-2.

999 Ibidem, p. A-1-A-6.

1000 Ibidem, p. A-1-G-1.

1001 Ibidem, p. B-2-1.

1002 Ibidem, p. B-3-8.

Counterinsurgency principles AFM 1-10 (2001)
Political Primacy and Political Aim
Coordinated Government Machinery.
Intelligence and Information
Separating the Insurgent from his Support
Neutralising the Insurgent
Longer Term Post-Insurgency Planning

Table 5.1: Counterinsurgency principles (2001)

An additional point of interest in the 2001 AFM is the significant weight awarded to what it calls "Command and Control Warfare" (C2W), which aims to "influence, degrade or destroy" the insurgents' C2-capability while simultaneously protecting friendly capabilities. The notion of C2W encompasses integrating psychological operations, all-source intelligence, deception, electronic warfare, and physical destruction to disrupt the enemy's activities.[1003] rather than the population. Although information operations, or propaganda, should be used to win the support of the population, this integration of non-kinetic effects (in concert with kinetic activities) was predominantly aimed at the insurgents. In the same vein the field manual has an extensive section on the eminence of intelligence in counterinsurgency. Here the function of intelligence is to inform precise operations against the insurgents. Acquiring contextual knowledge of the environment is not mentioned.[1004]

With the benefit of two decades of hindsight, the most conspicuous omission in the AFM with regard to information operations is the lack of contemplation on nascent media such as the internet. While digitalization and Network Centric Warfare featured heavily in thinking on future conventional war at the time, it is notably absent in AFM 1-10. Still, with its emphasis on non-kinetic activities and the attention awarded to the role of Islamic fundamentalism, the 2001 version of AFM 1-10 offered a conceptual foundation for counterinsurgency operations in the twenty-first century.

5.2.3: Previous deployments

As the Army Field Manual of 2001 describes, the British Army had extensive experience with 'small wars'. Before deploying to Helmand in 2006, the Army had recently been engaged in

1003 Ibidem, p. B-2-9.

1004 Ibidem, p. B-6-2.

a domestic conflict spanning more than 30 years in Northern Ireland, contributed to both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and helped invade Iraq in 2003 before becoming embroiled in a vicious insurgency in Basra. By describing these recent experiences and the salient observations, the impact of the missions on the army on the eve of the Helmand campaign can be gauged.

5.2.3.1: Operation Banner: counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland

Lasting from 1969 to 2007, the British Army's campaign in Northern Ireland was its longest in modern history. Operation Banner, as the army called the campaign, saw approximately 300,000 service members deployed to the conflict over the years.[1005] At the height of the campaign in the early 1970's, 28,000 troops were active in Northern Ireland. Throughout Operation Banner, over 600 British service members were killed by enemy activity.[1006]

After an eruption of violence and civilian unrest in 1969, the army was called in to separate Irish republican nationalists and British loyalists. Initially, the deployment of several army battalions helped to restore a modicum of calm to the area, although intermittent rioting continued. However, during 1970 the situation deteriorated, and this escalated in 1971. By this time, the British Army referred to the violence as a classic insurgency waged by Irish republicans. This led to large clearance operations in catholic "no-go areas" that culminated in Operation Motorman in the latter half of 1972. During Motorman, thousands of army troops and security forces flooded these areas and rounded up hundreds of Irish republican militants. Ultimately, the operation was a success as it restored British authority over these areas. At the end of 1972, the "Official Irish Republican Army" declared a cease-fire.[1007] Still, the "Provisional Irish Republican Army" (PIRA) persisted in fighting British dominance and shifted towards a campaign waged through assassination and bombing with varying levels of discrimination. This continued throughout the remainder of the 1970's and 1980's. To be sure, acts of violence were also perpetrated by loyalists.[1008] Furthermore, the British Army has been subject to critique for heavy-handed and counterproductive responses such as interments and "Bloody Sunday" on which 12 catholic protesters were killed.[1009]

1005 Nick van der Bijl (2009). *Operation Banner: The British Army in Northern Ireland*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books., p. 229.

1006 British Army. (2006). *Operation Banner: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland*. Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, p. 1-2.

1007 A. Sanders and I. Wood (2012). *Times of Troubles: Britain's War in Northern Ireland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 62-64: Van der Bijl. *Operation Banner*, p. 65.

1008 Van der Bijl. *Operation Banner*, p. 151-154.

1009 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 2-7.

The violence subsided in the 1990's and the PIRA declared a cease-fire in November 1994. Eventually, a political settlement was reached in 1998 under the "Good Friday Agreement".[1010] Although the British Army was largely a bystander in keeping the peace after 1998, Operation Banner continued as a stabilization mission until 2007.

With the exception of the 'insurgency phase' in the early 1970's, Operation Banner was regarded by the army as a "large scale instance of military assistance to the civil power." In theory this meant that the army supported the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). In practice, the RUC largely was on its own in rural areas while army units had to take the lead in restive urban areas.[1011] This led to a somewhat diffuse situation in which the army had a mostly subservient role but was nonetheless a conspicuous presence in the most volatile parts of Northern Ireland. At the same time, coordination with the RUC and the police was often difficult. Interestingly, the army itself did not draw up a campaign plan for Operation Banner. According to the army itself, this was a consequence of the fact that no general officer had the authority to impose a campaign plan across all lines of operations.[1012]

To command its operations in Northern Ireland, the army established permanent brigade headquarters. These brigades commanded both "resident battalions" that deployed for two years and "roulement battalions" that rotated every four and a half months. With this schedule, the resident battalions could acquire a thorough understanding of the area of operations, while the roulement units were used in the more volatile neighborhoods. With this mixture of rotation schedules the army intended to ensure campaign continuity and lessen pressure on the readiness for other contingencies for the rest of the army.[1013]

From 1972 and onwards, units deploying to Operation Banner received special training that was administered by the Northern Ireland Training Advisory Team (NITAT). Over time, NITAT became proficient in delivering the predeployment training as it focused on the mission, with even providing bespoke preparation for specific areas of operations. Furthermore, the NITAT-staff itself often had experience in Northern Ireland and could bequeath their knowledge on the units under training. As NITAT had close relations with the headquarters in Northern Ireland, it was able to keep abreast of developments in tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) in theatre and incorporate them in the training. Additionally, deficiencies in equipment and doctrine were addressed through NITAT.[1014] In this way, the learning and dissemination mechanisms of the army were closely attuned with the operations in Northern

1010 Van der Bijl. *Operation Banner*, 217-218.

1011 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p 4-2.

1012 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 4-4.

1013 Ibidem, p. 7-1/7-2

1014 Ibidem, p. 7-8/7-9

Ireland. In the 1990's NITAT was rebranded as the Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) as the army had to prepare for other missions such as those in former Yugoslavia.

In the summer of 2006, just before its withdrawal, the British Army took stock of its experience in Northern Ireland. In a study on the operations in Northern Ireland, the Land Warfare Centre sought to capture the "high level general issues that might be applicable to any future counter insurgency or counter terrorist campaign [...].[1015] One of the most important observations according to the study was the lack of central guidance for the campaign. The coordination between the various agencies of government responsible for Northern Ireland was often poor and there was no clear strategy. For future campaigns, the need for a comprehensive plan was noted. Another observation was that the army successfully engaged the PIRA at the tactical level, but that strategic engagement was nonexistent. Furthermore, it identified the omission of unified information campaign as a strategic failure.[1016]

More successful was the incorporation of intelligence into the army's operations. Where on the onset of the campaign little actionable intelligence was available, the army intensified its intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination. Highly specialized units were established to gather human intelligence while concurrently regular infantry units also were tasked with surveillance operations.[1017] Another identified best practice was the extensive use of permanent observation posts. Somewhat akin to guard towers at elevated terrain features, the posts allowed for persistent surveillance and establishing of 'pattern of life' assessments.[1018] With the increasing quality of intelligence, helped by the local knowledge that accrued over time, the army was able to detain high ranking members of the PIRA and curtail its operational effectiveness.[1019]

During Operation Banner, the main threat for British service members were Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). As the campaign progressed, the PIRA became more adept in manufacturing highly sophisticated IEDs. In turn, British troops adapted to this threat by developing TTPs to discover IEDs and mitigate their effects. In particular, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel were at the forefront of this fight and they devised doctrine and equipment to counter this threat.[1020]

By its own admission, the British Army was not victorious after a campaign of more than 30 years in Northern Ireland. Rather, "it achieved its desired end-state, which allowed a political

1015 Ibidem, p i.

1016 Ibidem, 8-3.

1017 Sanders and Woods. *Times of Troubles*, p 214-215.

1018 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 5-7.

1019 Ibidem, p. 5-1.

1020 Bruce Cochrane (2012). *The Development of the British Approach to Improvised Explosive Device Disposal in Northern Ireland.* Bedford: Cranfield University p. 285-286; Interview British army warrant officer 1.

process to be established without unacceptable levels of intimidation."[1021] At the close of Operation Banner, it identified the lack of a comprehensive campaign plan and use of information operations to influence perceptions as the most glaring failures of the campaign. Other observations included the centrality of intelligence and the need for restraint in a stabilization mission. A final best practice was the expedited capture and dissemination of tactical lessons from the field through NITAT/OPTAG. Although the army recognized that most lessons from Northern Ireland would not be applicable to other theatres, it argued that the aforementioned general observations should be heeded for new counterinsurgency or stabilization operations.

5.2.3.2: *Return to Afghanistan: 2001-2005*

When the United States unleashed its military might onto Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the 9/11-attacks, the United Kingdom was one of the few allies that could provide a modest contribution to the punitive expedition against Al Qaida and the Taliban-regime.[1022] Ostensibly the British were in the position to caution the Americans on the difficulty of extricating themselves from entanglements from Afghanistan, based on the three wars and multitude of skirmishes the British empire had fought in the country.[1023] Of course, the Americans were adamant that they would not repeat the mistakes made by, among others, the British empire and the Soviet Union.

With the swift defeat of the Taliban regime, the future of Afghanistan remained uncertain. In order to secure the capital Kabul, the UK deployed a force of 200 troops in November 2001 to Bagram airfield, approximately 50 kilometers north of Kabul. After the international community and various Afghan factions had ironed out an agreement on an interim government in December 2001, the focus turned towards its implementation. Prime Minister Blair was keen to provide British troops for an UN-mandated stabilization force that would be separate from the continuing American Operation Enduring Freedom. After deliberations, the UK decided to deploy a divisional and a brigade headquarters (3rd Division and 16 Air Assault Brigade) to lead the initial rotation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). 2 Para battalion formed the main British ground force. This contribution was codenamed Operation Fingal.[1024] Other countries provided additional forces to ISAF that were to provide security for Kabul.

1021 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 8-15.

1022 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 80-86.

1023 Eric Sangar. (2016). The pitfalls of learning from historical experience: the British Army's debate on useful lessons for the war in Afghanistan. *Contemporary Security Policy, 37*(2), p. 227-228.

1024 Interview British commanding officer 16; Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 97-98.

ISAF was deployed in a tense but generally calm Afghan capital. Beyond patrolling the steers of Kabul, the British troops helped provide development assistance. An additional task was the establishment of an embryonic Afghan National Army, for which the UK deployed instructors.[1025] In June 2002, the British contingent handed over command of ISAF to Turkish troops. Although the UK remained committed to the stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, much of its military focus was shifted to Iraq (see the next subsection). In the spring of 2002, several countries parceled out responsibilities for various sections of Afghan reconstruction. The UK was to become lead nation for counter-narcotics. Over the previous twenty years, Afghanistan had become the world's primary source of opium from its extensive poppy fields. The idea was to interdict the opium flow to the West at its source while at the same time removing the illicit trade as a source of instability from Afghanistan.[1026] Essentially, this plan was still-born, as the opium production in Afghanistan sky-rocketed after 2002.[1027] However, the British lead in counter-narcotics would help shape its future commitment to Afghanistan.

At the beginning of 2003, the international coalition sought to deploy further afield than Kabul. The objective was to help the interim government under Hamid Karzai to extend its writ beyond the capital. To this end, the concept of "Provincial Reconstruction Teams" (PRTs) was adopted from American examples. Relatively small, these civilian-military teams aimed to link the provinces to Kabul by initiating reconstruction projects and engaging with local authorities and security forces.[1028]

In July 2003, the UK deployed a PRT to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in the northern province Balkh. This contribution consisted of approximately 50 troops and representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID). The military component of the PRT was organized in Military Observation Teams (MOTs), comprised of six service members. [1029] Initially, the British operation (codenamed Tarrock) was separate from the ISAF-mission (Fingal).

At the start of the PRT's operations, it focused on supporting the disarmament of the various militias in the region. Furthermore, the MOTs mediated between rivaling power brokers. During their patrols, the MOTs were accompanied by American explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) personnel for counter-IED purposes. Beyond the threat of IEDs and tense situations with militias, the British PRT could operate freely. In May 2004, an additional PRT was

1025 Interview British commanding officer 16; Farrell, *Unwinnable* p. 98-99.

1026 Jack Fairweather (2015). *The Good War: Why We Couldn't Win the War or the Peace in Afghanistan*. London: Vintage, p. 98-105.

1027 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2006, September 2). *Afghan opium cultivation soars 59 percent in 2006, UNODC survey shows*. Retrieved July 27, 2021, from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/press_release_2006_09_01.html

1028 Peter Dreist, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, *From Venus to Mars*. p. 38; Jack Fairweather, *Good War*, p. 131-132.

1029 UK Parliament. (2003, May 8). Afghanistan: Volume 404. London.

established in Faryab province.[1030] Later that year, the PRTs in northern Afghanistan came under the authority of the ISAF-mission. Eventually, operations Fingal and Tarrock were merged into a single British effort: Operation Herrick. By this stage. the UK deployed an infantry battalion for force protection and other duties between the PRTs and Kabul. These rotations were known as the Afghanistan Roulement Infantry Battalion (ARIB).[1031]

Throughout the mission in Northern Afghanistan, the British PRTs would grow to 300 troops and civil servants. The civilian staff of the PRTs acted mainly as advisers to Afghan authorities. Reconstruction efforts were limited, partly due to a lack of funds.[1032] Six months before the end of the mission, FCO and DFID withdrew their personnel from the operation, thereby ending the interagency character of the PRTs.[1033] In the meantime, detachments from the military component started to visit the southern provinces as the UK started to ponder operations in that area as part of a further ISAF-expansion.[1034] In the northern provinces, the situation was relatively calm but started to show signs of deterioration at the end of 2005. One British soldier was killed in October 2005 in Mazar-e-Sharif. In March 2006, the British PRT (Herrick 3) in Mazar-e-Sharif handed over its responsibilities to its Swedish successors. Operation Herrick would continue in the southern province of Helmand, albeit in a vastly different environment.[1035]

5.2.3.3: Operation TELIC: British experiences in Basra

Much has been written about the British decision to support the American invasion in Iraq.[1036] This has been designated as the ultimate manifestation of the United Kingdom's professed interventionist foreign policy under Tony Blair. Furthermore, the wish to maintain the UK's special relationship with the US was a key reason for the British support.[1037] For the purpose of this study, the political controversy surrounding the United Kingdom's participation in the venture to topple Saddam Hussein's regime does not need to be reconstructed. Still, as

1030 Guy Harrison (2014). The time before Helmand: British engagement in northern Afghanistan. In B. Chiari (Ed.), *From Venus to Mars?: Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the European Military Experience in Afghanistan, 2001-2014*. Freiburg: Rombach Verlag, p. 124-126; Farrell, *Unwinnable* p. 134-135.

1031 Harrisson. Time before Helmand, p. 128.

1032 Barbara Stapleton (2015). The civil-military approaches developed by the United Kingdom under its PRTs in Mazar-e Sharif and Lashkar Gah. In W. Maley, & S. Schmeidl (Eds.), *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-military experiences in comparative perspective*. Abingdon: Routledge p. 27-28

1033 Harrisson. Time before Helmand, p. 132.

1034 Interview British army staff officer 18

1035 Harrisson. Time before Helmand, p. 132-133.

1036 See for example The Iraq Inquiry. (2016). *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary.* London; Patrick Porter (2018). *Blunder: Britain's War in Iraq*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

1037 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 104.

will be discussed throughout this chapter, the political dimension of the participation in the invasion of Iraq had a profound impact on the operations in Helmand.

The main British contribution to the combat phase of the war consisted of a nominal armored division whose objective was to capture the southern city of Basra, home to approximately 1.6 million people. Although the British troops were apprehensive about engaging in urban warfare, they succeeded in capturing the city without becoming embroiled in intense street fighting. When the conventional combat operations ceased at the end of April 2003, the now infamous stabilization phase commenced.[1038]

For the British, responsible for the southeastern provinces of Iraq (or Multi-National Division South-East), the security situation was relatively calm in 2003 and 2004. To some extent, this could be attributed to a genuine relief that Saddam's regime was gone within the Shia-dominated population. According to some voices in the British military this was also a result of its measured approach in and around Basra. Here the British units operated in a manner reminiscent of the peace support operations in former Yugoslavia or the later stages of Operation Banner in Northern Ireland.[1039]

This was in marked contrast to the often heavy-handed conduct by American forces who were faced with intense resistance in places like Bagdad, Ramadi and Fallujah.[1040] According to some observers, both British and American, this difference could be explained by the British Army's aptitude in low intensity conflict, honed over long years of experience in counterinsurgency operations.[1041] Where American forces took on an enemy-centric approach, the British prided themselves on a more friendly posture towards the population. This sentiment was vented by senior British officers like Mike Jackson who was quoted as: "[...] we must be able to fight with the Americans. That does not equal we must fight as the Americans."[1042] Another British critique on the American approach was published by brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster. He stated that the American conventional prowess had led to an overly kinetic approach that "exacerbated the task [of stabilization] it now faces by alienating significant sections of the population."[1043]

However, the apparent benign security situation in Multi-National Division Southeast (MND-SE) was deceptive and had little to do with the ostensibly sophisticated approach by the

1038 Geraint Hughes (2012). Iraqnophobia. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(6), p. 57.

1039 Andrew Stewart. 2013). Southern Iraq 2003-2004: Multi-National Command. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate., p. 79; Alexander Alderson (2012). The British Approach to COIN and Stabilisation: A Retrospective on Developments since 2001. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(4), p. 64-65.

1040 Hughes, Iraqnophobia, p. 57.

1041 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in crisis*, p. 45-46.

1042 House of Commons. (2004, April 20). Defence - Minutes of Evidence. London, Q257.

1043 Nigel Aylwin-Foster (2005). Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations. *Military Review*, 85(6), p. 14.

British troops. The city of Basra was subject to widespread looting and lawlessness. As the British contingent was continually reduced after the invasion, the troops were too thin on the ground to provide security.[1044] Furthermore, some troops in MND-SE became engaged in heavy fighting in the spring of 2004. In particular, the Shia firebrand Moqtada al-Sadr and his militia, *Jaysh al-Madhi* (the Madhi's Army or JAM) asserted themselves across the south. The British commander of MND SE opted to enter negotiations rather than try to engage the militia by force,[1045] much to the chagrin of the American commanders in theatre who advocated a more forceful response.[1046] Essentially, the British troops slowly lost control of MND SE while their numbers continued to dwindle.

Beyond the shrinking military capacity, the British operations were hampered by the near absence of civilian capabilities for reconstruction and governance. Especially DfID had distanced itself from the invasion and subsequent occupation. Representation by civil servants was scarce in Iraq. Recognizing the need for civilian engagement in stability operations, and its interest to share burdens across departments, the Ministry of Defence pushed for enhanced interagency cooperation.[1047] In 2004, the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) was established to foster interdepartmental cooperation. However, the enthusiasm for the PCRU was tepid within the FCO and DfiD. While it was touted as the UK government's agency for stabilization, it was hamstrung by the fact that it answered to the three departments and had no clear mandate of its own.[1048] A first manifestation of the increased civilian contribution was the establishment of a PRT in Basra in the spring of 2006. This proved to be no panacea as the British had generally lost the goodwill of the population and the PRT had teething problems regarding mandate, staffing and resources.[1049]

In 2005 and 2006, the British bases increasingly became subject to shelling by rockets and mortars while militias such as JAM expanded their control over Basra. The remaining 7000 British troops took on a more confrontational stance against the militias, but this only inflamed the violence. By the summer of 2006, the British military assessed that its activities were stoking unrest rather than preventing it. Accordingly, the British were operations in MND SE were curtailed.[1050] Yet, when major-general Richard Shirreff took command of the British contingent in July 2006, he initiated an ambitious plan to retake the city from the militias. Originally called Operation Salamanca, the plan called for a counterinsurgency

1044 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 52-53; Warren Chin 2008). Why Did It All Go Wrong? Reassessing British Counterinsurgency in Iraq. *Strategic Studies Quarterly, 2*(4), p. 128-129.

1045 Andrew Stewart (2013). Southern Iraq 2003-2004: Multi-National Command. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (pp. 79-88). Farnham: Ashgate, p. 85.

1046 Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchack, (Eds.). (2019). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume I: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War, 2003-2006*. Carlisle: United States Army War College Press, p. 300-301.

1047 Daniel Korski (2009). British civil-military integration: the history and steps. *The RUSI Journal, 154*(6), p. 16-17

1048 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 112-113.

1049 Ibidem, p. 60.

1050 David Ucko (2010). Lessons from Basra: The Future of British Counter-insurgency. *Survival, 52*(4), p. 140-141.

approach in which districts of the city were cleared and subsequently small reconstruction activities started. However, the plan was infeasible without additional British resources that were not forthcoming. Furthermore, the Iraqi government did not back the Salamanca plan. Eventually, the plan was scaled-back and by September 2006, the revised Operation Sinbad was launched. Unable to hold territory, the clearing operations failed to make a lasting impact on the security situation in Basra. Still, the British military claimed success while the government declared a further troop reduction (towards 4,500) for 2007. This coincided with the decision by the United States to try to salvage the moribund campaign by "surging" its forces in Iraq and adopting a "population centric counterinsurgency" approach.[1051]

Although the UK faced American political pressure to maintain its troop levels, it persisted in the proposed timeline for withdrawing its commitment to Iraq and to shift its focus to the operations in Afghanistan. In 2007 consecutive British commanders drew up plans to remove British troops from the city of Basra and consolidate at the airport. Bases in the city were to be transferred to Iraqi security forces. British commanders argued that Iraqi forces would not take over responsibility unless British forces left. This withdrawal from Basra, named Operation Zenith, was also part of an agreement with JAM in which the UK curtailed its operations in the city. In return, the JAM agreed to not target the British forces. Effectively, this accommodation and the move to the airport, completed in December 2007 ceded control over Basra to the militias.[1052]

Not beholden to the agreement with the British, JAM strengthened its grip on Basra, as a substantial number of the Iraqi security forces had been infiltrated by the militias. Meanwhile, the British contingent at the outskirts of the city was unable to intervene and continuously received indirect fire. Frustrated with the British impotence, Prime Minister Maliki sought to deliver Basra from its state of lawlessness. Rather impetuously, Maliki launched Operation Charge of the Knights with American support to reclaim the southern city. Plagued by dogged resistance from the militias and lack of preparation, the operation was eventually successful in reestablishing the Iraqi government writ over Basra.[1053] After initial inaction, British troops made a modest contribution to Operation Charge of the Knights. For the remainder of the campaign, the British took on a more active role in mentoring Iraqi forces. Still, the British contingent in southern Iraq grew smaller as the commitment to Afghanistan increased. In the summer of 2009, the last British commander handed over authority to Iraqi and American forces.[1054]

1051 Daniel Marston (2019). Operation TELIC VIII to XI: Difficulties of twenty-first-century command. *Journal of Strategic Studies, 44*(1), p. 65-66.

1052 Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak (Eds.). (2019). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume II: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011*. Carlisle: United States Army War College Press, p. 352-353; Marston. Operation TELIC, p. 69-71.

1053 Rayburn and Sobchak. *US Army in Iraq, Vol II*, p. 360-368.

1054 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 71.

The British contribution to Iraq was a strategic failure. The British troops were unable to bring security to MND SE. Even though they eventually took steps to retake control of Basra, they were not effective due to a lack of resources. With the new campaign planned for Helmand, the United Kingdom proved unwilling and unable to match the American efforts in Iraq. The absence of strategy and scarcity of resources could be attributed to the British political dimensions of the conflict. The British military itself suffered reputational damage from its prosecution of the war, in particular with the American allies.[1055]

The end of British Operations in Iraq heralded a number of evaluations. Of these, the Chilcot Inquiry that examined the political decision-making processes before and during the war is the most well-known. Commissioned in 2009 by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, the "Chilcot Report" proved to be a protracted process and was finally published in 2016.[1056] A main finding in the eventual report was that the British government had chosen to resort to military action in Iraq without exhausting other options. Moreover, it had failed to attain its strategic objectives. It revealed a wide gap between the ambitions and the resources made available, while the British government had failed to reappraise its strategy over the years. Furthermore, there was a lack of coordination amongst the relevant government institutions.[1057] Beyond the political dimension, the Chilcot Report also looked at the role of senior military leadership in the Iraq war, finding that the start of Operation Herrick in Afghanistan from 2006 had overstretched the military in terms of personnel and capabilities. Additionally, the Ministry of Defence was unresponsive in recognizing and addressing capability gaps. [1058] However, the main critique of the Chilcot Inquiry remained directed at the governmental level.

Besides the public Chilcot Inquiry, two internal post-mortems were initiated in the Ministry of Defence. At the departmental level, an "Operation Telic lessons compendium" for the strategic echelons was drafted by lieutenant-general Chris Brown in 2010. Key findings of the report included the lack of a coalition strategy after the initial invasion, the absence of a comprehensive approach across government and "widespread sense that Operation Telic was a temporary distraction from normal Defence business [...].[1059] The latter observation was compounded by the six-month rotation schedule that hindered campaign continuity. A further interesting observation was that the British military "was complacent and slow in recognising and adapting to changing circumstances" and that after "a relatively benign

1055 See Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron and Hew Strachan (Eds.). (2013). *British Generals in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate p. 332-333; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 72-74.

1056 Simon Akam, *The Changing of the Guard*, p. 512-517.

1057 Iraq Inquiry. *Executive Summary*, p. 109-110.

1058 Ibidem, p. 126-127.

1059 Iraq Study Group. (2011). *Operation TELIC lessons compendium*. London: available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16787/operation_telic_lessons_compendium.pdf

decade of peacekeeping in Northern Ireland and the Balkans" it was unable to take on the challenge posed by the insurgency in Iraq.[1060]

The other internal evaluation report was instigated by the Land Warfare Centre of the British Army and published in 2010. Written in the same vein as the Operations Banner evaluation, the remit was at the tactical level.[1061] The report, published in 2010 posited that some experiences from Iraq held relevant lessons for Afghanistan but potentially also for future operations. In the summary of the events from the period from January 2005 to the withdrawal in 2009, there was no real judgment on decisions made by British commanders on the ground.[1062] Essentially, it reads as if divisional and brigade commanders were subject to external forces like the US, the Iraqi government, local militias and their own government. As a result, the extent of genuine scrutiny at the command levels in MND-SE was limited.

Still, the evaluation identified institutional failings that contributed to the difficulties the British contingents faced in Iraq. First of all, there was the misdiagnosis of the character of the conflict. The British troops in general did not recognize that they were facing an insurgency in MND SE and act accordingly. Instead, they focused on Security Sector Reform (SSR) and transitioning authority to Iraqi authorities. In large part, this was driven by the continuous pressure of reducing the troop levels in Iraq. Yet, this focus on SSR was not only misguided, but it also suffered from the inability of British troops to embed with Iraqi units due to political constraints for reducing risks. It was not until Operation Charge of the Knights that combat mentoring was allowed. [1063] Another observation was that the understanding of formal counterinsurgency doctrine was limited and mostly based on informal individual experiences from the later phases of Operation Banner. As a result, initially the campaign was approached as a peace support operation in which the army's role was more indirect.[1064] Other identified deficiencies were inadequate campaign continuity, scarcity of trained linguists and cultural understanding.[1065]

A further prime observation was that the intelligence picture was inadequate. Commanders and their units were unable to discern and target the insurgent networks across MND SE. This was caused by a lack of preparation, under-trained intelligence personnel, over-centralization of intelligence capabilities and lack of databases to ensure the building of a knowledge repository.[1066] Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were considered to be the main threat for

1060 Ibidem

1061 Actually, this evaluation comprises three volumes: the conventional phase, operations in 2004-2005 and the rotations from 2006 to 2009. The third volume is publicly available

1062 British Army. (2010). *Operations in Iraq: An Analysis from a Land Perspective.* Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, p, ii.

1063 British Army. *Operations in Iraq*, p. 73-75.

1064 Ibidem, p 1-3/1-4.

1065 Ibidem, p. 1-5/1-8.

1066 Ibidem, p. 2-2/2-5.

the British troops, especially technological sophisticated shaped charges that were provided by Iran to the insurgents. Although the army implemented new drills and eventually added better protected vehicles to its inventory, in general the counter-IED effort was deemed as insufficient. For instance, offensive operations to target the networks behind the IEDs were inadequate.[1067] Although the report is relatively mild on the Army's performance in Iraq, it states: "it appears that for every successful adaptation for Op TELIC there was an equivalent failure to adapt."[1068] Moreover, with regard to the value of intelligence, the army had failed to institutionalize this hard-won lesson from its colonial campaigns and Northern Ireland.[1069]

Both these MoD-sanctioned reports were for internal consumption and were only later made available to the wider public after requests under the "Freedom of Information Act" and in a slightly redacted form.[1070] An interesting side-note to the Iraq Compendium by general Brown is that the Ministry of Defence explicitly stated that it did not share all the judgments therein.[1071] Furthermore, the public dissemination of the LWC report was initiated by its main author, brigadier Ben Barry.[1072] As these evaluations were published in the middle of the Helmand campaign, the lessons they contained chimed with the initial observations from Op Herrick. As will be described in subsection 5.3.3, the British military increased its efforts to implement lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan from 2009.

5.2.4: Decision to deploy and preparation

Operations in Iraq loomed large over the deployment to Helmand. As the following subsections will show, the decision for the mission itself was influenced by the unpopularity of the British presence in Iraq. Furthermore, the enduring commitment to Iraq constrained the resources available to the Afghan campaign.

5.2.4.1: The political decision

In comparison to the contentious decision to invade Iraq, the political run-up to Helmand was not extensively debated in the public domain. Part of this difference was that British troops had already been deployed to Afghanistan and the campaign there was considered the 'good

1067 Ibidem, p. 4-11/4-13.

1068 Ibidem, p. 11-4.

1069 Ibidem, p 11-9.

1070 Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 502-504.

1071 Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Operation TELIC Lessons Compendium - MOD Statement (5th April 2011)*. London available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16786/operation_telic_lessons_compendiumMOD_statement_05042011.pdf

1072 Iraq Study Group. (2011). *Operation TELIC lessons compendium*. London.

war'.[1073] As early as April 2004, Prime Minister Blair announced that the UK would increase its contribution to ISAF. The British-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) headquarters would deploy and oversee the ISAF-expansion to the southern provinces. This came as a surprise, as the ARRC was preparing for a tour in Iraq.[1074] In addition to the deployment of ARRC, the Ministry of Defence initiated planning in early 2005 to shift its operations from northern Afghanistan to the south. As such, the UK would take a lead role in ISAF Stage-III with the support of Canada and the Netherlands.[1075]

The political logic underpinning the UK's commitment to southern Afghanistan cannot be separated from the war in Iraq. While operations in southern Iraq seemed to be going well in mid-2004, domestic support for the British presence there was ever declining.[1076] Therefore the UN-mandated ISAF campaign was far less controversial. If the UK would take larger responsibility for the Afghan war it could extricate itself from Iraq. A further incentive was that the Afghan campaign had been hampered by the lack of attention as the US had shifted its focus to Iraq. With the expansion to the south, Blair hoped to revive the international mission in Afghanistan and concurrently reinforce the UK's status as the US' principal ally.[1077]

For their part, the military leadership welcomed the prospect of deployment to southern Afghanistan. Lieutenant general Robert Fry, responsible for strategic planning at the Ministry of Defence, saw Afghanistan as an opportunity to draw down British forces from Iraq while retaining its stature as partner to the US military. At this stage, although unpopular, the British operations in Iraq were still seen as a relative success.[1078] Still, the Army was keen to extricate itself from Iraq. A new deployment to Afghanistan would provide the opportunity to do so.[1079]

In January 2005, the Chiefs of Staff recommended as such to the Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon.[1080] A month later, Hoon announced the government's intention to deploy troops to southern Afghanistan to parliament. In contrast to the Netherlands, this declaration did not spark a fraught debate at the time.[1081] Later on, the decision to commit forces to Helmand

1073 Nick Beadle (2011). Afghanistan and the Context of Iraq. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-2006* (pp. 73-80). Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute, p. 74-75; Jack Fairweather, *The Good War*, p. xxi-xiv

1074 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p.140-141

1075 Michael Clarke (2011). The Helmand Decision. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-2006* (pp. 5-29). Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute, p. 15-16.

1076 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 153-154.

1077 Matt Cavanagh (2012). Ministerial Decision-Making in the Run-Up to the Helmand Deployment. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(2), p. 50-51.

1078 Fairweather, *Good War*, p. 146-148.

1079 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 147-148.

1080 Ibidem, p. 141.

1081 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 155-156.

became more contentious when this process was debated during the Chilcott-inquiry. Within the government and armed forces, it was felt that a British deployment was essential to the success of the ISAF-mission. By extension, NATO's efforts in Afghanistan were seen as crucial for the functioning of the transatlantic alliance.[1082]

Although early planning efforts had already begun in 2004, the preparation to the UK's swing to southern Afghanistan shifted into higher gear in the spring of 2005. However, the choice for the area of operations was pre-empted by Canada who opted for Kandahar as a non-negotiable condition for its troop contribution.[1083] British officers saw Kandahar as the most important province in the south and thus as the right area for the British deployment. However, the deployment of a Canadian task force was crucial for the viability of ISAF-Stage III and thus the UK relented and chose to deploy to Helmand instead.[1084] As this adjacent province held the largest acreage for poppy cultivation, this aligned with the UK's role as lead nation for counter-narcotics in Afghanistan.[1085] In the literature, the choice for Helmand has been derided due to the historical enmity the population felt for the British within the area. In 1880, during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, a British brigade was annihilated by Pashtun tribe members in the Battle of Maiwand. Twenty-first century Helmandis saw the return of the British as them seeking revenge for this defeat.[1086] Of course, this would not have been different in Kandahar province where the battle actually took place. In any case there was no real alternative for the British to deploy to Helmand, given the political considerations within the alliance.

The initial strength of the first rotation to Helmand was capped at 3,150 troops, based on the advice from military planners. As described in the literature, this number was considered as "what the market would bear". Furthermore, no more troops were available at the time due to the enduring commitment in Iraq.[1087] Although there was some apprehension within the Ministry of Defence that this number was too small for the task at hand, the military leadership signed off on this number as viable. Capabilities that were in short supply such as helicopters and intelligence assets would cause some "pain and grief".[1088] With this consent of the military advisers, the government's plan to deploy to Helmand could proceed.

1082 Cavanagh. Ministerial Decision-Making, p. 50.

1083 Matthew Willis (2012). Canada in Regional Command South: Alliance Dynamics and National Imperatives. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers*. Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute p. 58-62.

1084 Elliot. *High Command*, p. 130-132.

1085 Fairweather. *The Good War*, 159-161.

1086 See Mike Martin (2017). *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict*. London: Hurst & Co, *p. 159.*; this is repeated by Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 107. and Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 156.

1087 Elliot. *High Command*, p. 163; Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 158-159.

1088 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2011, July 6). Operations in Afghanistan Fourth Report of Session 2010–12. London, Q450.

Still, the actual decision was postponed, in part by the heated parliamentary debate in the Netherlands on its deployment to Uruzgan. Within the British government, the concurrent deployment of Canadian and Dutch forces was seen as critical to the feasibility of the British mission in Helmand. Further preconditions raised by Reid were that the deployment was financed in full by the Treasury and the funding for development program would be furnished by DfID and the Americans.[1089] Satisfied that the Dutch would deploy, Reid presented the plan for deployment to a Cabinet meeting in January 2006 and secured its approval.[1090] Reid announced the deployment of the British Task Force to Helmand on 26 January 2005, although the Dutch deliberations had not yet concluded. This timing meant that deployment itself was pushed back to commence in April.[1091]

Although Parliament had not been consulted prior to the decision, the House of Commons Defence Committee did query aspects of the Helmand deployment.[1092] The British objectives as communicated to parliament were: "Enhancing stability and security through the deployment of the 16 Air Assault Brigade; Long term reconstruction through the Provincial Reconstruction Team based at Lashkar Gar (sic.); and containment of the opium trade by working with and developing the capability of the Afghan National Army."[1093] Issues that were raised included the coordination with US forces (Operation Enduring Freedom), the deployment of allies and the security situation in southern Afghanistan. While some of the questions by the committee were not resolved by the Cabinet, it generally supported the mission.[1094] While the political decision was reached over the winter of 2005-2006, the Ministry of Defence and the other relevant departments were drafting the plans for deploying into Helmand.

5.2.4.2: The Joint UK Plan for Helmand and force configuration

As the decision to deploy was pondered, the selection for Helmand province had to a certain extent been forced upon the UK. Preliminary operations for Helmand started in September 2005. Intelligence on the province was scarce at the time. The only coalition troops present in Helmand consisted of an American special forces detachment with a PRT. With the narrow scope of hunting Al Qaeda-operatives, the Americans had little understanding of the local dynamics in the largest of Afghan provinces. As such, there was little knowledge to

1089 Ibidem, p. 24-25.

1090 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 138.

1091 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 178.

1092 Ibidem, p. 178-19.

1093 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2006, April 6). The UK deployment to Afghanistan: Fifth Report of Session 2005–06 HC 558. London, p. 16.

1094 Ibidem, p. 29-31.

be transferred to the British planners.[1095] Reconnaissance missions earlier in the year had garnered some insight on the terrain, expected resistance and governance of the province.[1096] Subsequent reports advised the deployment of a 6,000 strong task force. However, this advice was rebuffed as being politically unfeasible.[1097]

The province, Afghanistan's largest in terms of land mass, consists mainly of arid desert which are more mountainous in the north. It is dominated by the river Helmand that runs from north to south, with the Helmand basin providing the water for the irrigation works that sustain the population of 1.5 million. Ideally suited for poppy cultivation, Helmand has been one of the foremost centers of opium production worldwide.[1098] Along with drug trafficking, lack of access to scarce water, inter-tribal rivalries and shifting allegiances contributed to a patchwork of local conflicts of which the British were largely unaware.

In December 2005, the UK made the fateful decision of lobbying for the removal of the incumbent provincial governor, Sher Mohammed Akhunzada. A friend of President Hamid Karzai, Akhunzada was considered a source of instability in the province as he used his militia and the police - to a considerable extent these were interchangeable - to extort the population and eliminate rival power brokers. Moreover, Akhunzada was a key player in the drug trade. Based on this intelligence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office asked Karzai to replace him as the governor of Helmand. Although the analysis on Akhunzada was correct, the effects of this decision were not thought through. He was replaced by Mohammed Daoud, a technocrat without meaningful connections in the province. In the meantime, the formal sacking of Akhunzada did little to diminish his informal influence in the province. Yet he claimed that he no longer could support his fighters who subsequently changed sides to the 'Taliban' and would fight the British troops in the next year.[1099] The effect of this British interference in local politics would have severe repercussions in 2006.

PJHQ initiated a reconnaissance and planning mission for Helmand in October. Based in Kandahar, a team comprised of 70 service members set out to draw up a campaign plan. A month later, the military contingent was joined by a planning team from the newly established PCRU. The two teams quickly coupled their efforts. With this interagency collaboration one of the key deficiencies of the planning for the Iraq War seemed to be addressed, albeit in an

1095 Valentina Soria (2011). Flawed 'Comprehensiveness': The Joint Plan for Helmand. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-2006*. Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute. p. 36; Chin, Colonial Warfare, p. 230

1096 Ed Butler (2015). Setting Ourselves up for a Fall in Afghanistan: Where Does Accountability Lie for Decision-Making in Helmand in 2005–06? *RUSI Journal*, *160*(1), p. 47.

1097 Interview British army staff officer 18; Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 163-164; See also Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars*, p. 164.

1098 Elliot, *High Command*, p. 132.

1099 Martin, *An Intimate War*, p. 153-154.

informal fashion.[1100] For their part, the FCO and DfID were reluctant to contribute to the planning and the mission itself.[1101]

The planning assumption for the Joint Helmand Plan was that the mission focus would be one of stabilization and reconstruction. Further guidance from Whitehall was limited to the constraints of the cap on force levels, a mission period of three years, a budget of 1.3 billion pounds and the inclusion of a counter-narcotics element. The interagency planners argued that, given the time frame and resources, it was unrealistic to attain the government's "Interim Aim for Afghanistan". Those goals were paraphrased as: "an effective representative government in Afghanistan, with security forces capable of providing an environment in which sustainable economic and social development can occur, without substantial security support by the international community". Moreover, the interagency planning team stated that it lacked sufficient intelligence about the province to draw up a sustainable plan. However, the planners were rebuffed by London and told that neither the aim nor the resources would be adjusted.[1102] Beyond these understandable misgivings, a more fundamental question was how the mission in Helmand would help attain these ambitious objectives.

Nevertheless, a Joint UK Plan for Helmand was produced in December 2005 that sought to work within the imposed constraints. The plan envisioned the creation of an Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) in a "lozenge" around Camp Bastion, the main British FOB, and the towns of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk in central Helmand. As the most populous part of the province, this was the natural focus for the British operations. By concentrating forces and reconstruction efforts in the ADZ, the plan envisioned to foster economic activity and improve governance within a secure environment. From here, the ADZ could be expanded over time, thereby enlarging the writ of the Afghan authorities.[1103] As such it adhered to a classical "ink-spot" approach.[1104] Despite this counterinsurgency connotation, the Joint Helmand Plan was developed for a relatively permissive environment akin to a peace support operation.

By their own admission, the planners saw that the Joint Helmand Plan was insufficiently detailed to serve as a campaign plan. Moreover, the JUKPH was based on an inadequate intelligence picture. Therefore, they recommended extended reconnaissance and intelligence gathering during the preliminary phase so that the plan could be adjusted while

1100 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace* p. 174-175.

1101 Tom Rodwell (2011). *Between the idea and the reality: the evolution and application of the Comprehensive Approach. Hollow men and doctrine in Helmand?* London: King's College, p.19; Soria, Flawed Comprehensiveness, p. 32-33.

1102 Rodwell. *Idea and the reality*, p. 20.

1103 Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon (2009). COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal*, 154(3), p. 20.

1104 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_2.

the mission was being established.[1105] However, the focus of preliminary operations in early 2006 was the construction of Camp Bastion, and intelligence assets were scarce due to the commitment to Iraq. Of course, at the same time the removal of Akhunzada eliminated a potential source of information for the UK. Although warning signs about a resurgent Taliban were communicated by sources on the ground, these did not lead to an adjustment of plans.[1106] Finally, despite the good cooperation in Afghanistan, the JUKPH was not well received in London. It was regarded as too cautious. Furthermore, the Cabinet Office was incredulous about the professed lack of intelligence on Helmand.[1107] Both aspects signify the divide between expectations in the UK and the personnel on the ground. Perhaps even more injuring to the plan was that none of the various ministries took ownership of it. Consequently, the JUKPH devolved into "an amalgamation of [...] departmental plans, stitched together at the seams."[1108]

As a consequence, the augurs for the JUKPH did not bode well. It was to be implemented by two separate entities: the interagency Helmand PRT and the military Task Force Helmand (TFH). The PRT, led by the FCO was responsible for development, governance and counternarcotics. Its initial strength was comprised of around 50 personnel from the FCO, DfiD, PCRU and the military. Still, the contribution of civil servants was limited.[1109] The PRT was collocated with the military Task Force Helmand (TFH)-staff in Lashkar Gah. To coordinate the activities of the PRT and TFH, a "Helmand Executive Group" (HEG) was established. However, there was variance in the level of buy-in from the various ministries to this HEG, while all members still had to report to their respective hierarchies.[1110]

16 Air Assault Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Ed Butler, was to form the first rotation (Herrick 4) of TFH and was thus responsible for providing security in the ADZ. It received the warning order in August 2005 to deploy in the beginning of 2006.[1111] The organization of the military task force consisted of a single battle group, formed around 3 battalion of the Parachute Regiment. Although it was augmented with light armored fighting vehicles such as the Scimitar and Spartan, the battle group relied for ground mobility mostly on soft-skinned Land Rover vehicles. A battery of 105mm light guns would provide fire support. [1112] Additionally, Task Force Helmand (TFH) included a unit of engineers, explosive ordinance disposal teams, intelligence support and combat service support elements. An Operational

1105 Rodwell. *Idea and the Reality*, p. 21.

1106 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 160-162.

1107 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 157.

1108 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2010, March 18). The Comprehensive Approach: the point of war is not just to win but to make a better peace HC 224. London, Ev. 140 paragraph 22.

1109 Rodwell. *Idea and the Reality*, p. 24: Soria. Flawed Comprehensiveness, p. 40.

1110 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_2.

1111 Ed Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 50.

1112 Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 156.

Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) formed the linkage to the Afghan National Army in the province.[1113] a Danish reconnaissance squadron and an Estonian mechanized infantry company supported the British forces. Both contingents were fully integrated into the TFH without national caveats.[1114] A Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) provided air mobility with four Lynx and six CH-47 Chinook helicopters. Eight AH-64 Apache attack helicopters were attached for air support.[1115] Furthermore, GR-7 Harrier jets were deployed for fixed wing air support. Overall, just 800 of the troops of TFH were available for operations (and these not even concurrently). The rest of the Task Force was made up of staff and combat service support.

From the perspective of Task Force Helmand, the trepidation with regard to the force configuration was felt even more keenly than back in London. Brigadier Butler and his staff continuously reported the inadequacies of the force levels. Beyond increasing levels of chagrin in London, the reporting by TFH produced little result.[1116] Another cause of disagreement for the designated task force was the lack of a campaign plan. 16 Brigade was inadequately represented in the joint planning team and had therefore no ownership of the Joint Helmand Plan. Instead, Butler and his staff produced their own plan. Although it subscribed to the ADZ and the ink-spot approach, 16 Brigade was concerned about the level of resistance it would encounter.[1117] The first rotation of TFH saw its mission as to "conduct security and stabilisation operations within Helmand [...], jointly with Afghan institutions, other government departments and multi-national partners in order to support Government of Afghanistan and development objectives."[1118]

A complicating issue for the mission from the military perspective was the Daedalian national and coalition command structure. Although the staff of 16 Brigade was to be deployed, brigadier Butler would work from Kabul as national commander for the British troops in Afghanistan and thus reporting to PJHQ. In his stead, TFH would be led by a colonel, Charlie Knaggs. This decision was based on the fact that the TFH-commander would report to Regional Command South in Kandahar that was led by the Canadian brigadier-general David Fraser. Until 1 August 2006, the forces were still under command of Operation Enduring Freedom. Consequently, in the initial months TFH would operate under OEF rather than ISAF. Simultaneously, Knaggs and his staff would in practice also report to PJHQ.[1119] Combined with the divided tasks between the PRT and TFH these command-and-control arrangements precluded a unity of command.

1113 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 48-49.

1114 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-2_2.

1115 Ibidem, p. 3-5_3.

1116 See Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 157-158, Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 50-51

1117 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 49-50.

1118 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_3

1119 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, 1-1_4 - 1-1_5; Rodwell. *Idea and the Reality*, p. 22; Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 169-170.

Thus, the Joint Helmand Plan suffered from three fundamental defects. First of all, it was based on a sketchy understanding of the local environment and the nature of the conflict. Secondly, it was too ambitious in what it could achieve in the span of three years with the resources available to the mission. A third flaw was that it was not sufficiently coordinated with the military Task Force Helmand (TFH) that was to deploy to Helmand in the spring of 2006 and responsible for delivering the security for the ADZ.

5.2.5: Sub conclusion

Before the British troops were deployed to Helmand, the mission was mortgaged due to several factors. On the political front, the deployment was the result of a combination of liberal interventionism and the wish to augment the special relationship with the United States. Both aspects were prime political considerations during the governments of Tony Blair. At the time of the decision, deployment to Southern Afghanistan seemed to provide an exit from the unpopular campaign in Iraq. As Afghanistan was considered to be the "good war", this deployment did not lead to a contentious political debate. From the perspective of the armed forces, and in particular the British Army, the move to southern Afghanistan was welcomed as they felt constrained in Iraq. Operations there were hampered by a lack of resources, negligible interagency support and ever-decreasing political attention.

Ostensibly, the British Army was well placed to conduct a stabilization mission in Afghanistan based on its extensive experience in Northern-Ireland. The lessons from this campaign were enshrined in a recent counterinsurgency doctrine. However, as events in Iraq later proved, this knowledge was applied selectively if at all. Despite the vaunted British knack for 'small wars', the army's culture was more conducive to conventional warfare. Its war fighting ethos, underpinned by the "manoeuvrist approach" and "mission command", espouses initiative and offensive action. After 2005, the British inability to contain the violence in Basra showed that there was no innate proficiency for counterinsurgency in the army. Instead, the situation there started to highlight some of the deficiencies such as understanding of the environment and non-kinetic capabilities.

However, as the British Army sought to deploy to Helmand, the enduring operations in Iraq constrained its resources. Consequently, the Task Force was capped at slightly more than 3,000 service members, of which approximately 600 were available for patrolling. Despite misgivings of military planners and the brigade that was to deploy, the military leadership was unwilling to challenge their political masters and signed off on these numbers. In an attempt to redress a deficiency in Iraq, the UK also deployed a PRT to support TFH with fostering governance and economic development. The newly established Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit even assisted the military planners for the Helmand deployment.

Together, the civilian and military planners wrote an ambitious plan for Helmand yet warned that the mission was under-resourced and still lacked a clear intelligence picture on the local dynamics. However, the Cabinet could not be discouraged from its ambitions nor moved to provide more personnel. Therefore, the mission to Helmand was weighed down from the outset by an overoptimistic outlook of what the British troops could achieve there.

5.3: The Campaign

With the context of the British deployment established, the examination of learning processes at the campaign level largely follows the structure of the Dutch case study. Again, a broad overview of the British operations is provided to analyze the adaptations at the campaign level. Furthermore, attempts to develop a form of operational analysis are assessed. The final part of this section analyzes the conscious effort by the British Army to enhance its learning process through Operation Entirety and its effects. All these aspects are naturally examined through the theoretical lens offered in chapter 2.

5.3.1: Overview of the campaign and its plans

5.3.1.1: Initial rotations, 2006 -2007

The decision to postpone the deployment of Task Force Helmand due to the Dutch handwringing in parliament had adverse effects on the security situation in the province. With the removal of Akhunzada, the internecine rivalries in Helmand caused a power vacuum that anti-government forces could exploit. In the first half of 2006, outlying district centers in Helmand were on the verge of being overrun by insurgents. Compounding the security situation was that the former governor, Sher Mohammed Akhunzada, had cut his powerful militia loose and set his men to work against the British forces. Ironically, the well-intentioned removal of Akhunzada thus further destabilized the province.[1120]

Beset by a degrading security situation and lacking a power base of his own, the new provincial governor Daoud was dependent on the British forces to help exert his authority. However, the troops slowly trickled in from April 2006 and thus their operational reach was limited. Moreover, an incredulous Daoud found out that just a small portion of TFH was available for combat operations. Still, the governor cajoled the British to move to the beleaguered district centers in northern Helmand. Eventually, Butler relented and dispatched troops in May to Now Zad and Musa Qalah in the north. Subsequently, Daoud asked for British troops

1120 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p 153-154.

to help secure Sangin, a district to the northeast of the ADZ. Later on, Kajaki in the North and Garmsir in the south were graced by British presence in small outposts.[1121]

Much has been written on the decision to parcel out the available troops in platoon houses in northern Helmand, including individuals in military hierarchy.[1122] However, as Butler himself and others have indicated, the decision to move beyond the "lozenge" was not taken in isolation.[1123] As fateful as this move was, the exact attribution of the decision in itself is not relevant for the purpose of this study. Instead, it is indicative of the command-and-control structure in which the British forces operated.[1124] In his own words on the decision on platoon houses Butler was probably correct when he stated that 16 AASB would be: "damned if we did, damned if we didn't".[1125] It is hard to fathom what the political repercussions of denying Daoud's requests would have been.

Over the summer, the various platoon houses came under heavy assault by insurgents. The British soldiers came under siege in their outposts in the far-flung district centers. Although some of these locations came close to being overrun, the troops held fast. However, the heavy fighting wrought much destruction in the vicinity of their small bases, especially as the British forces had to rely on air support and indirect fire to beat back the assaults.[1126] For instance, the town of Now Zad was virtually razed.[1127] In this way, fire power had to compensate for the lack of troops on the ground. Furthermore, the platoon house concept fixed the British troops in place, thereby ceding the initiative to the adversary. An additional strain on the British was the need to resupply the platoon houses; often, the only viable way was to ferry supplies by the scarce helicopters as the roads were too insecure.[1128]

As such, the occupation of the platoon houses had profound effects on the fledgling campaign. First of all, the gradual approach as envisioned in the Joint Helmand Plan was immediately jettisoned. This impeded the ability to develop the ADZ around Lashkar Gah and Gereshk as most troop were committed to the attempt to secure peripheral districts.[1129] Secondly, the heavy fighting over the outposts had wrought much destruction and displaced many Helmandi citizens. As such, the British presence had a destabilizing effect

1121 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 134

1122 See Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 54; David Richards (2014). *Taking Command*. London: Headline Publishing Group, p. 207 and 243. Michael Clarke and Valentina Soria (2011). Charging up the Valley: British Decisions in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal*, *156*(4), p. 84-85.

1123 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 54.; Elliott. *High Command*, p. 135.

1124 Clarke and Soria, Charging up the Valley, p. 86.

1125 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 54-55.

1126 Chin, Colonial Warfare, p. 236-237.

1127 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 191.

1128 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p.175-178.

1129 Antony King (2010). Understanding the Helmand Campaign. *International Affairs*, *86*(2), p. 315.

on the province. Naturally, these effects were at odds with the professed stabilization and reconstruction mission. A third consequence was that after the summer of hard fighting, the platoon houses could not be easily abandoned lest this was seen as a defeat for the British and the wider ISAF-effort.[1130] To be sure, in Musa Qala an accommodation was reached with local elders that allowed British troops to withdraw from the district under the condition that they would keep the Taliban at arm's length. Crucially, governor Daoud supported such agreements, although other Afghan authorities had their misgivings. However, in the winter of 2006-2007 it became clear that the Taliban roamed Musa Qala at will and the elder that had brokered the deal had been murdered.[1131] By then, President Karzai had sacked governor Daoud and replaced him with Asadullah Wafah

In the meantime, 16 Air Assault Brigade was succeeded by 3 Commando Brigade in October 2006. TFH's headquarters was now relocated from Kandahar airfield to Gereshk. As a further course correction, the commanding officer of 3 Cdo Brigade was to command TFH in theater.[1132] This formation had 5200 troops under command in recognition of the adverse security situation. Although 3 Cdo Brigade had largely prepared for a stabilization mission, according to the commander classical counterinsurgency concepts had nevertheless been integrated throughout the preparation phase. When fighting erupted in Helmand, the brigade was just conducting its final exercise at Salisbury Plains. This timing precluded an overhaul of predeployment training at the eleventh hour.[1133]

Undeterred, the new Herrick rotation opted for a change of tack as its staff sought to retake the initiative against the insurgents. The incoming commander was free to develop his own campaign plan for the rotation.[1134] Instead of becoming fixed in platoon houses, 3 Cdo Brigade created company-sized "Mobile Operations Groups" (MOGs). Although the "MOG-concept" allowed for aggressive operations, the insurgents still initiated most engagements. Moreover, British presence was inherently transitory as the MOGs were unable to hold ground and control areas for development.[1135] The second rotation had even more firefights with the enemy than 16 Brigade. As a result, the focus was on combat rather than development.[1136]

This did not change with the incoming rotation by 12 Mechanised Brigade. Again, the new rotation (Herrick 6) saw an increase in strength as it numbered 6,500 troops with three battle groups. In addition to numbers, adjustments were made in terms of equipment that were indicative of the character of the mission. First of all, a number of newly acquired Mastiff-

1130 Clarke and Soria. Charging up the Valley, p. 84. See also Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 81-83.

1131 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 166-167.

1132 See in: British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, section 1-1: "Command and Control".

1133 Interview British commanding officer 4.

1134 Interview British commanding officer 4.

1135 King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p. 317, Chin. Colonial Warfare, p. 235.

1136 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 200.

vehicles were brought into theatre to protect troops against the growing IED-threat (see section ....). Secondly, TFH received a Guided Multiple Rocket Launch System (GLMRS). This indirect fire system was able to deliver high explosives over vast distances.[1137] Dispatching the GLMRS to Helmand further reinforced the notion that the mission was a far cry from the envisioned stabilization mission.

The new rotation saw a novel approach to the mission. 12 Brigade was to focus on the ADZ and Sangin to maintain a "persistent presence" among these more populous areas. The staff of TFH professed that counterinsurgency theory had been at the forefront of their conceptual preparation.[1138] In reality, the battle groups were often conducting offensive operations. During this rotation, more patrol bases were established, but this did not translate into increased security, let alone development.[1139] If anything, the level of violence only increased from approximately 500 attacks during 16 Brigade's tour to more than 1000 during 12 Brigade's rotation. Despite the increase in troop levels, the British were spread too thinly to hold the ground they cleared. This was further compounded by the lack of capable Afghan security forces and the lackadaisical attitude of governor Wafa. Furthermore, the reinforcement of the British PRT to 30 civil servants had a limited effect as the security conditions precluded development work in the province.[1140] Therefore, 12 Brigade's commander lamented that the operations had no lasting effect and were like "mowing the grass".[1141]

The arrival of 52 Infantry Brigade in October 2007 under Brigadier Andrew Mackay has been hailed as a step change in the campaign.[1142] 52 Brigade was a "regional brigade" based in Edinburgh, responsible for logistical and administrative tasks. Given the ongoing commitment in Iraq, 52 Brigade was activated for Helmand. This formation was expanded to almost 8,000 troops.[1143] When the new rotation arrived in Helmand, Mackay set out to write his operational design for his tour, as directed by PJHQ.[1144] Yet, guidance from PJHQ or further up the chain of command was not forthcoming.[1145]As with his predecessors, Mackay utilized classical counterinsurgency texts but acknowledged that hitherto the campaign had been too focused on kinetic operations. Although the operational design did not deny the

1137 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 201-202.

1138 Theo Farrell, (2010). Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006–2009. *Jornal of Strategic Studies, 33*(4), p. 577-578.

1139 Chin. *Colonial Warfare*, p. 235

1140 Farrell, unwinnable. p. 204-205.

1141 Anthony King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p. 317.

1142 See Tom Dyson (2020). *Organisational Learning and the Modern Army: a new model for lessons-learned processes.* Abingdon: Routledge, p. 109-110; Farrell. Improving in War, p. 581-582, Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p 96-97.

1143 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 207.

1144 Interview British commanding officer 2

1145 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 209.

value of enemy attrition, it stated that "body counts are a particularly corrupt measurement of success". Instead, the local population was the prize and had to be won over.[1146]

To an extent, David Petraeus had influenced Mackay's thinking, as he had collaborated with Petraeus in Iraq. Later, Petraeus sent Mackay an early copy of FM 3-24.[1147] The influence on Mackay's operational design is apparent as it emphasized the "clear, hold and build"-sequence. Furthermore, it included the American manual's paradoxes that "the more force is used the less effective it is and counterintuitively the more we engage in force protection the less secure we may be."[1148] To win over the population, the British forces essentially had to conduct an influence campaign, based on thorough understanding of the local dynamics. As such, all operations, including the use of force should be working towards effects in the information environment. In support of this operational design, 52 Brigade introduced two innovations: the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF) and the Non-Kinetic Effect Teams (NKET). The former represents an effort to acquire an enhanced understanding of the environment throughout TFH, while the latter implemented non-kinetic influence operations at company level. Importantly, the influence campaign was centrally overseen within the TFH-staff.[1149] These novel aspects in the mission will be analyzed in-depth further on in this chapter.

As a vignette of 52 Brigade's approach, the operation to reestablish control over Musa Qala (operation Mar Karadad) stands out.[1150] It was initiated on request of President Karzai, who had been approached by a certain Mullah Salam in October 2007, posing as a prominent Taliban commander. Salam indicated that he was willing to join the government and could assist in retaking the town under the condition that ISAF would launch an operation to this effect. Moreover, Salam demanded to be named as district governor.[1151]

Despite some misgivings on the British side, Task Force Helmand initiated Operation Mar Karadad to oust the Taliban from Musa Qala. Although the operation was to be led by international forces, TFH was adamant that the Afghan National Army would be the first to enter the town and take credit for the operation. In the preparation phase, Mackay and his OMLT coordinated with the ANA to plan the operation.[1152] True to its rhetoric on the centrality of influence rather than kinetic action, 52 Brigade deployed in force around Musa Qala in November, in a bid to discourage resistance by the Taliban. This was not successful,

1146 Operational Design 52 Brigade

1147 Interview British commanding officer 2

1148 Commander British Forces Op HERRICK 7. (2008). *Counterinsurgency in Helmand Task Force Operational Design*. Lashkar Gah; see also Theo Farrell, unwinnable, p. 211.

1149 Interview British commanding officer 2; British army staff officer 7; American Scholar 1

1150 To be sure, this operation preceded the publication 52 Brigade's operational design.

1151 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 253.

1152 Interview British commanding officer 1; British commanding officer 2.

as the insurgents ramped up violence across the province. Moreover, the operation did not commence in earnest until December as the required Afghan and American forces were not available before then. The operation saw three days of intense fighting before the Taliban skulked away. As had been the plan, the ANA-brigade drove into the town on 12 December.[1153] Ostensibly, the military part of operation Mar Karadad had been successful.

However, as the British leadership in theater recognized, the political aspect was paramount in counterinsurgency. Unfortunately, the venture had been fundamentally derailed on the political plane. First, Mullah Salam was a fraud. Bearing the same name as a more influential Taliban commander, the Salam that was installed after the operation could boast a following of a mere 30 fighters. However, he was well-connected to Sher Mohammed Akhunzada who had vouched for him to Karzai. In the end, Salam proved an ineffective district governor, whose militia clashed with other local powerbrokers such as the new district chief of police.[1154] The effect of the Musa Qala operation was further derailed by the scuttling of the reconciliation process by governor Wafa. In anticipation of rehabilitating former Taliban fighters, a plan was drawn up by the Afghan government and the UN to provide them with vocational training to help their reintegration. This was supported by TFH who prepared to build a camp for this purpose. However, governor Wafa vetoed this and through Karzai had the UN-representatives expelled.[1155] Consequently, operation Mar Karadad's effects were negligible. It shows that despite sound preparation and measured execution, the British understanding of the environment remained woefully inadequate. Moreover, influencing the actions of local authorities proved complicated.

Despite this setback, 52 Brigade, in collaboration with the PRT, endeavored to make a more lasting impact on the mission by drafting a new campaign plan. This Helmand Road Map was based on the operational design and sought to align the British civilian and military activities within a counterinsurgency context. As was the case with his predecessors, Mackay lamented the deficient collaboration between the military and civilian partners.[1156] It lowered expectations from the Joint Helmand Plan to more realistic levels and encompassed the "understand-shape-clear-hold-build"-concept. As such it was more in tune with counterinsurgency concepts than the 2006 Helmand Plan. The Road Map coordinated the activities within nine themes: "Governance and Politics; Rule of Law; Counter-Narcotics; Population Engagement; Health; Education; Agriculture; Infrastructure and Private Sector Development".[1157] Through these themes, the population had to gain trust in the local (informal) authorities and subsequently be linked to formal government structures.

1153 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh; Farrell, unwinnable, p. 219-221.

1154 Mike Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 169-170.

1155 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 221-223.

1156 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh.

1157 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3.

The military effort was to provide security to the communities so that governance and development could take root.[1158] The plan, essentially a bottom-up project, was bought-into across Whitehall. One of the most visible effects was that from 2008 a senior civil servant (equivalent to the rank of major-general) would be the head of the PRT and thus, at least nominally, be responsible for TFH. Additionally, the civilian contingent was increased.[1159] A crucial element of this civilian reinforcement was that Stability Advisers were assigned to districts and cooperated with the Battle Groups there.[1160]

The drafting of the Helmand Road Map forms an, albeit arbitrary, end to the first two years of the Helmand Campaign, spanning four rotations. When the Joint Helmand Plan did not survive its contact with reality on the ground, the successive rotations struggled to come to grips with the increasing violence in the province. As has been described extensively in the literature on the campaign, the rotations had distinct approaches for their mission, sometimes based on regimental culture.[1161] Campaign continuity, or lack thereof, was recognized as a core deficiency in the British mission by the Army.[1162] However, suggestions to remedy this situation by extending or changing the rotation system fell on deaf ears as this would affect unit cohesion within the brigades and the timetable of predeployment training.[1163] Thus this problem was identified, but remained unaddressed. In the meantime, the violence in Helmand only escalated and the kinetic response had a further destabilizing effect. When 52 Brigade emphasized the integration of non-kinetic effects, this was an informal adaptation that could take place through a lack of guidance and campaign supervision. However, the operation to retake Musa Qala proved that, despite a more measured approach, critical factors remained beyond the influence of the British forces. Furthermore, if this change were to bear fruit the British and their coalition partners had to ensure campaign continuity. Whether the Helmand Road Map marked a new phase in the campaign will be explored in the following section.

5.3.1.2: The campaign in limbo, 2008-2009

In the spring of 2008, 16 Air Assault Brigade returned to Helmand. By this time, TFH had grown to more than 8,500 troops. The commander of the brigade, Mark Carlton-Smith,

1158 Farrell and Gordon. COIN Machine, p. 21.

1159 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 231.

1160 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1161 See King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p. 325-326; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p 144.

1162 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_11; Interviews British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 1; British commanding officer 2; British commanding officer 14; British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 13.

1163 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p 258; David Betz and Anthony Cormack (2009). Hot War, Cold Comfort: A Less Optimistic Take on the British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal*, 154(4), p 27.

stated before his deployment that instead of fighting the insurgents, he sought to undermine their influence. Securing population centers and enhancing governance would be the focus of the new rotation.[1164] With this outlook 16 Brigade would adhere to the Helmand Road Map and continue the approach taken by 52 Brigade. [1165] A seemingly positive development for the British was that the erratic Wafa was replaced by the more competent Gulab Mangal as provincial governor. However, Mangal's past as a communist was regarded negatively among the Helmand population.[1166]

Simultaneously, an American Marine Expeditionary Unit arrived in Helmand to secure southern Garmsir district. The 1,200 U.S. Marines with organic fire support and aircraft were tasked to seal off the border with Pakistan that the ISAF headquarters considered the Taliban gateway into Afghanistan. Although the MEU temporarily provided more boots on the ground, the British were apprehensive about the presumed kinetic focus of the Americans. When they were unleashed in May, the Marines encountered fierce resistance. With eventual support from British forces, the Americans dislodged the Taliban from Garmsir.[1167] In the aftermath, the American troops garrisoned the district until they were relieved by British and Afghan forces in September. This American tactical success underlined the British inability to muster sufficient personnel and resources to secure the province.[1168]

For its part, the new TFH rotation focused on kinetic operations from the start, despite the Helmand Road Map and the rhetoric preceding the tour. In June, the British had yet again mounted an offensive to bring Musa Qala under control, as the reconstruction process never came off the ground due to Afghan politicking. Ultimately, 16 Brigade cannot be blamed for this situation, but it was indicative that TFH was still not able to "hold" and "build".[1169] Other actions by 16 Brigade were more conscious departures from their predecessors; for instance, TCAF was discarded after a few months as unworkable and superfluous.[1170]

More iconic, and unfortunate was 16 Brigade's effort to transport a hydroelectric turbine to the Kajaki dam. The operation, Oqab Tsuka (Eagle's Summit), was a well-intentioned exercise in futility. The idea underpinning the operation was that with a new turbine in place, the Kajaki dam could increase its output and provide over a million Afghans with electricity, help drive development across the south and instrumental in winning the support of the

1164 Farrell and Gordon. COIN Machine, p. 22-23.

1165 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 233.

1166 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 175.

1167 Carter Malkasian (2016). *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 120-124.

1168 Ibidem, p. 128-129.

1169 Chin. Colonial Warfare, p. 236.

1170 See David Wilson and Gareth Conway (2009). The Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework: A Short-lived Panacea. *RUSI Journal*, *154*(1), p. 15.

population.[1171] Misgivings by the PRT and the British ambassador that this project would not deliver on its promises for the foreseeable future went unheeded and the operation was launched in August 2008. As Theo Farrell shows, Carlton-Smith's decision was at least partly informed by the wish to forestall further American critique about British performance.[1172]

To deliver the turbine component from Kandahar Airfield up to Kajaki, a convoy of over a hundred vehicles had to traverse the most volatile parts of Afghanistan. More than 4,000 coalition and Afghan troops were needed for the transport and its security. After a road move of five days, the convoy reached the Kajaki dam. However, the turbine would never be installed and in 2015, the Taliban conquered the district. As such, operation Oqab Tsuka was a drain on scarce personnel that consequently were not available for development and reconstruction activities by TFH. Moreover, as an influencing operation, it displayed the wrong message as it proved the impotence of the international mission to develop Afghanistan. At the end of his tour Carleton-Smith was realistic in his assessment that the war in Afghanistan could not be won militarily but had to be brought to a manageable level to facilitate a political settlement.[1173]

The resilience of the insurgency was demonstrated in subsequent rotations. When 3 Cdo Brigade arrived for their second tour in October 2008, the Taliban launched an offensive against Lashkar Gah. The disposition of TFH's battle groups meant that they were placed in the outlying districts of the province. As such, the Brigade headquarters had to scramble to defend its position. Although the assault was defeated, primarily through employing Apache gunships, it drove home the precarious position of the British in the province. Commanded by one of the authors of the Joint Helmand Plan, the brigade had prepared to focus on protecting the population and fostering development. Again, the conditions in Helmand quickly derailed these plans. To secure the area around Lashkar Gah, TFH launched operation Sond Chara in December 2008.[1174] After heavy fighting, TFH established additional patrol bases to ensure presence in the district of Nad-e Ali. While this stretched the British troops even thinner, it was seen as a start to develop the area and bring it under government control. It shifted the focus from northern Helmand to the central area of the province. To this end, a new battle group was formed, assisted by a stability adviser. Shura's were held with local elders to advertise ISAF's willingness to help them. However, the police commander that the British had in tow was hated by the population and did nothing to endear the international forces. Before long, the British troops were fixed in their new patrol bases by the deployment

1171 See N. Arjomand (2013, January 25). *Eagle's Summit Revisted*. Retrieved July 23, 2021, from Afghanistan Analyst's Network: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02/20130125_Arjomand_Kajaki_Dam_final1.pd

1172 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 239.

1173 Ibidem, p. 240-243.

1174 Ibidem, p. 244-250.

of IEDs.[1175] Yet again, the aftermath of operation Sond Chara demonstrated the ephemeral effects of such operations and the limited ability to secure areas.

The incoming rotation by 19 Light Brigade sought to continue the work by 3 Cdo by focusing on central Helmand. As had become custom by now, the 19 Brigade launched a totemic operation, Panchai Palang (Panther's Claw). The preparation for this operation was helped by the arrival of a new Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) in May 2009. This new American contingent was part of a first step of increased American commitment to Afghanistan by the new US president Barack Obama who wanted to salvage the moribund ISAF-mission.[1176] Numbering over 10,000 troops, the MEB at first deployed to Garmsir and Now Zad, thereby freeing up British units for the new offensive.[1177] Panchai Palang would take place in the vicinity of Nad-e Ali where a number of villages had not been under control of the Afghan government. By clearing this area, TFH aspired to enable its population to vote for the upcoming presidential elections in the summer.[1178]

Panchai Palang was launched mid-June 2009. The operation was met with stiff resistance and the British incurred heavy losses. Panchai Palang was concluded at the end of July with dubious results; July 2009 proved to be the bloodiest month of the Helmand campaign with 22 British soldiers killed. That less than half of those had died during Panchai Palang was indicative of the level of violence throughout the province.[1179] Most emblematic of these was the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Thorneloe, battalion commander of the Welsh Guards. Thorneloe and his driver were killed on 2 July when an IED struck their Viking-vehicle, which was not designed to withstand such blasts.[1180] These sacrifices notwithstanding, TFH could mark little progress. Between the areas that were the objectives of operations Sond Chara and Panchai Palang, less than a thousand Afghans, a small percentage, registered to vote in the presidential elections of August 2009.[1181] Even more damaging to the international effort, although beyond the competency of national task forces, was the widespread fraud in the election which saw Hamid Karzai re-elected.[1182]

Back in the UK, the combination of heavy losses and an apparent lack of progress caused a severe decline in public support for the mission. Although this unpopularity did not extend to the troops themselves, the Helmand campaign was a political liability for the Labour

1175 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 183-189.

1176 See Bob Woodward. (2010). *Obama's Wars*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 11-12.

1177 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 314-318.

1178 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 255-257.

1179 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 320-326.

1180 See Toby Harnden (2011). *Dead Men Risen: The Welsh Guards and the Real Story of Britain's War in Afghanistan*. London: Quercus Publishing

1181 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 262-263.

1182 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 330-350; Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 263.

government. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who took over from Blair in 2007, had inherited a war in which he did not himself believe.[1183] Furthermore, the ever-increasing costs of the mission had to be balanced against other concerns in the light of the ongoing global financial crisis.[1184]

Meanwhile, the military leadership kept requesting additional resources such as extra troops. Although Brown initially denied those requests, the generals took an indirect approach by letting the Americans ask for additional British troops in 2009. With the arrival of the US Marines in Helmand, Brown relented and over the year troop levels were raised up to 9,500 personnel. However, this did not prevent a public fall-out between the government and military leadership in the summer. As Chief of the General Staff, general Richard Dannatt had been vocal in requesting additional resources for the mission to the government. Not satisfied by its response, Dannatt then went to the opposition and media to vent his frustration over the political unwillingness to resource the war adequately. By his comments, Dannatt brought the issues with the Helmand campaign further into the public domain.[1185] These remarks were indicative of strained civil-military relations at the time in which the military asked for additional resources to pursue the campaign. Although the military received additional material resources, domestic political considerations precluded increasing the troop levels to the requested levels for the increasingly unpopular mission.[1186] However, military leadership, of which Dannatt was a prominent member, shared much of the blame. To be fair to general Dannatt, he had recognized the need for institutional change in the British Army for counterinsurgency operations, yet he was unable to remedy identified shortcomings.[1187]

Ironically, his eventual successor general David Richards felt compelled to put the Army on a genuine campaign footing in April 2009, as he found that a part of the Army was "in denial that we were in a war".[1188] To resolve this deficiency, Richards initiated Operation Entirety (see section 5.3.2.). 2009 would prove to be a pivotal year for the Helmand campaign. On the ground, the British mission seemed to be stuck in a rut. Throughout the campaign TFH tried to stamp out resistance in ever new places but was largely unable to hold and develop previously cleared areas. Although TFH grew to 9,500 troops and the Helmand Road Map was drafted, the campaign had still no viable road to success. If the summer of 2009 was the nadir of the British mission in Afghanistan, developments as the initiation of operation Entirety; the American decision to "surge" its commitment to Afghanistan and the proposed

1183 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 269.

1184 See National Audit Office. (2009). *Support to High Intensity Operations.* London, p. 6-7; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 127-28.

1185 See for instance Max Hastings (2009, July 20). General Dannatt is a principled man guilty of telling the truth. *Daily Mail.*

1186 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 272

1187 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 130-131.

1188 David Richards cited in: British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxv.

implementation of population-centric counterinsurgency held the promise of improvement. The effects of these changes will be explored below.

5.3.1.3: Surge, concentration, and transition, 2009-2014

In June 2009, just before operation Panchai Palang, President Obama had replaced general David McKiernan with General Stanley McChrystal as commander of ISAF. McKiernan was sacked as Obama was not confident in his ability to reinvigorate the mission through employment of the vaunted population-centric counterinsurgency approach that had been successful in Iraq.[1189] In truth, McKiernan had emphasized counterinsurgency concepts in ISAF plans throughout his command; what was lacking at this stage from a military perspective was a unity of effort within ISAF. The various national task forces operated in their provinces as if they were national fiefdoms with accompanying caveats.[1190] The British troops' somewhat flippant referral to "Helmandshire" had a serious undertone that was indicative of this general ailment of the ISAF-mission. While this had operational consequences, McKiernan's remit to address this political issue was inherently limited.

As the incoming ISAF-commander, McChrystal was confident the situation in Afghanistan could be resolved. In his initial assessment he stated: "While the situation is serious, success is still achievable".[1191] The key objective was to win over the Afghan population. To achieve this, a comprehensive campaign was needed that combined military efforts towards security with economic development and enhancing governance by inter-agency partners.[1192] In July 2009, McChrystal issued a tactical directive for his troops, emphasizing that the war in Afghanistan was not a conventional battle for territory but one for the support of the Afghan people. To this end, he asked that ISAF-personnel exercise restraint in the use of force.[1193] Within ISAF this directive became known as 'courageous restraint' which was somewhat controversial as it increased the risks to the international troops.[1194] Furthermore, new directives iterated that each operation had to be conducted with Afghan Security Forces.[1195] This meant that international troops not only had to engage with Afghan forces in training and combat mentoring through OMLTs but also had to include them in the planning processes. For TFH this meant that the OMLTs had to be expanded to a Brigade Advisory Group to also mentor

1189 See David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 220-225

1190 Soria. Flawed comprehensiveness, p. 45.

1191 Commander ISAF (2009, September 21). *COMISAF Initial Assessment (Unclassified)*. Retrieved July 23, 2021, from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.htm

1192 Ibidem

1193 Headquarters International Security Assistance Force. (2009, July 6). Tactical Directive. Kabul.

1194 See Sergio Catagnani (2012). 'Getting COIN' at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army. *Journal of Strategic Studies, 35*(4), p. 531-532; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 153-154.

1195 Interview British commanding officer 5

the ANA-brigade and its staff functions. The idea was that this should help the ANA-brigade to become self-sufficient over time.[1196]

These ideas were not novel, but McChrystal's hand was strengthened by the fact that President Obama staked considerable political capital on the Afghan war. Of course, Obama's willingness to commit resources to Afghanistan was far from limitless. Overall, the American troop levels were raised with 30,000 additional forces assigned, although this was less than McChrystal had requested.[1197] Furthermore, in his address to announce the new American policy for Afghanistan in December 2009, the President explicitly stated the limits of American resolve by announcing that US troop levels would start to draw down after 18 months.[1198] For Helmand, this meant that close to 10,000 US Marines would be deployed there. With this reinforcement the American contribution eclipsed TFH by a wide margin.[1199]

While the Americans debated their role in Afghanistan, the UK took over command of Regional Command South in Kandahar. Under Major-General Nick Carter, RC-South would try to stabilize the provinces and integrate the influx of the additional American forces. As McChrystal's sub-commander, Carter aligned with the new ISAF-directives,[1200] having the Helmand Road Map updated into the "Helmand Implementation Plan" to reflect this. Its most significant shift was the emphasis on "transition of all civil governance and development processes to sovereign [Afghan] agencies and the transfer of all security to licit indigenous government forces."[1201] Crucially, the plan was coordinated with Afghan authorities.

While the new ISAF-leadership tried to revive the mission, a new TFH-rotation by 11 Light Brigade deployed in September 2009. Its commander, Brigadier James Cowan, had drawn-up the rotations campaign plan in accordance with Nick Carter. As such there was more cohesion between the plans at the various levels of command than previously.[1202] While 11 Brigade subscribed to the notion of courageous restraint, fighting in Helmand continued unabated and over its tour, the brigade lost 64 service members.

A central concern for ISAF and TFH was the lack of trustworthy Afghan police officers. As Mike Martin describes the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Helmand were often the cause for conflict rather than the solution. In an attempt to enhance the ANP, Brigadier Cowan and Governor Mangal established a police academy in-province. Interestingly, this was not

1196 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p. 2-4_2

1197 Woodward. *Obama's Wars*, p. 300-306.

1198 See: Barack Obama (2009, December 1). *The New Way Forward - The President's Address*. Retrieved from Obama Whitehouse: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/12/01/new-way-forward-presidents-address

1199 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 367.

1200 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 296.

1201 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3

1202 Interview British commanding officer 14

coordinated with the Afghan Ministry of Interior, but the academy was later embraced. The result was a somewhat improved cadre of police officers that acted as a paramilitary force.[1203] Although TFH had mentored the Afghan Police over the years, it now became a more concerted effort and for the next rotation a Police Mentoring and Advisory Group (PMAG) was established.[1204]

Meanwhile, central Helmand continued to be an irritant to the international troops despite the large clearance operations of 2008 and 2009. In February 2010, operation Moshtarak ("Together") was launched to secure Marjah (by US Marines) and Nad-e Ali (by TFH). Although it was part of a larger effort to secure Kandahar-city, this operation was perceived to be a litmus test for the new approach under McChrystal.[1205] Planned in collaboration with the Afghan security forces, operation Moshtarak was the largest offensive in the Afghan war to date with over 15,000 troops. Underpinning the operation was the thesis that, with the additional troops, ground could be held 'indefinitely,' and its population brought under control by fostering development and governance. In McChrystal's confident words: "We've got government in a box, ready to roll out".[1206] To limit the risks to civilians and give insurgents the chance to lay down their weapons, the offensive was announced publicly before it started. [1207]

When operation Moshtarak was launched, it met with some resistance, but no coordinated defense was mounted by the insurgents. Thus, coalition forces were able to install a new district government in Marjah. However, the Afghan support for the operation was tepid and there was a shortage of capable administrators for the district. When unpacked, the contents of the 'box' proved to be less complete as had been flaunted. To make matters worse, resistance was stiffer in Marjah's hinterlands.[1208] In Nad-e Ali, efforts by TFH fared better. Through key-leader engagement prior to the operation, TFH was able to secure parts of the district by identifying and targeting insurgents with the consent of local elders. The collaboration with the new ANA-brigade's headquarters left much to be desired, but its establishment provided TFH with a genuine partner formation. Regarding reconstruction, the Helmand PRT planned its activities in an integrated way with TFH. This combination of non-kinetic engagement measured security operations and a competent district administration paid dividends. After

1203 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2011, July 17). Operations in Afghanistan Fourth Report of Session 2010–12 HC 554. London p. 48; Interview British commanding officer 14

1204 British Army, *Herrick Campaign study*, p. 2-4_3.

1205 Anthony King. (2021). Operation Moshtarak: Counter-insurgency command in Kandahar 2009-10. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *44*(1), p. 41-43.

1206 Dexter Filkins (2010, February 12). Afghan Offensive is New War Model. *The New York Times*.; See also: Antony Cordesman (2010). *The Afghan Test Bed in "Marja": Key tests of victory are still months and years away.* Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

1207 Thomas Ruttig (2010, February 13). *An Offensive Foretold.* Retrieved July 23, 2021, from Afghanistan Analysts Network: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/an-offensive-foretold/

1208 Fairweather, *Good* War, p. 380-387. Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 320-324.

Moshtarak, violence in Nad-e Ali dropped to around 15 percent of the incidents that were recorded before the operation.[1209] As such, the operation yielded a mixed picture: it was not as successful as advertised but also showed that progress was attainable.

As more US Marines poured into Helmand, the dynamics of the British mission changed profoundly. First, the Americans took over most of the districts that the British had clung onto. After Garmsir, the British handed over the responsibility over Musa Qala, Kajaki, Sangin and other districts. Accordingly, the British TFH area of operations contracted to the central districts of Helmand. This allowed the British to finally concentrate their forces. Of course, there was some irony here as the eventual British area of operations resembled the "lozenge" that had been in the initial plan in 2006. Another change was that 'Helmandshire' was subsumed by 'Marineistan' in May 2010. With the influx of thousands of Marines, ISAF redrew its lines and created a new Regional Command South-West (RC-SW) that encompassed Helmand and desolate Nimroz. RC-SW was to be led by a two-star American Marine General. This owed more to American inter-service rivalry than to operational considerations as the US Marines sought their own discrete battle space. However, it further cemented the importance afforded to Helmand province in the Afghan campaign that was out of proportion to its actual strategic significance.[1210]

For TFH, the arrival of the Marines manifested that the British troops were now the junior partner in Helmand. Domestically, political changes were afoot as David Cameron from the Conservative Party became Prime Minister in May 2010. Cameron inherited the war from his Labour predecessors, but largely subscribed to the British presence in light of the American surge. Maintaining the UK's standing as a dependable partner continued to be paramount for the Cabinet. Still, Cameron announced in July 2010 that British forces would cease combat operations before 2015. In large part this decision was based on the combination of the increasing unpopularity of the campaign among the British public and by its ever-rising costs. Furthermore, new British parliamentary elections were scheduled for 2015. Not wanting to withdraw abruptly, the UK would continue its operations and further help improve the Afghan security forces. President Karzai agreed with this proposal. At a NATO summit in November 2010, the troop contributing nations to ISAF had drawn up a gradual transition plan.[1211] While the transition was nominally "conditions-based", such as on the competence of Afghan authorities and security forces, the international timetable was the prime consideration.

4 Infantry Brigade (Herrick 12) deployed in this new environment. The brigade commander appreciated this and stated that the brigade had to consolidate the gains made by previous

1209 Theo Farrell (2010). Appraising Moshtarak. *RUSI Briefing Note*, p. 7-9.

1210 Chandrasekaran. *Little America*, p. 57-60.

1211 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, 372-373.

rotations rather than engage in new "totemic operations". Despite this outlook, Helmand remained intensely violent as 4 Brigade suffered 55 soldiers killed in action.[1212] During 4 Brigade's rotation, McChrystal was sacked by Obama over the infamous article in Rolling Stone magazine. He was replaced by general David Petraeus in June 2010.[1213] With this change, ISAF's approach shifted as well. 'Courageous restraint' was replaced by 'relentless pursuit' of the insurgents. Petraeus' new emphasis seemed to be a change in nuance, as he was the preeminent progenitor of population-centric counterinsurgency but in essence promoted kinetic operations. By killing or capturing large numbers of insurgents, ISAF attempted to mark progress. As a result of ramped-up targeting operations, increasing numbers of innocent Afghan civilians were killed. Unsurprisingly this fueled Afghan resentment against the international forces, not in the least by President Karzai.[1214]

Mirroring the new ISAF-approach under Petraeus, 16 Brigade discarded 'courageous restraint' and replaced it with 'front-footed precision'. The emphasis on restraining the use of force had always sat uneasily within TFH, as soldiers felt that this incongruent with the volatility of Helmand.[1215] As the British intelligence processes improved, in part due to better surveillance equipment, TFH was increasingly able to identify and target insurgent leadership. Besides strike operations by special forces, insurgents were also targeted by attack helicopters and artillery. Given the destructive power of the weapons used, the targeting process hinged on the accuracy of intelligence and margins of error were slim. Despite apparent successes, the insurgent proved to be resilient and often returned to previously cleared areas.[1216] This is not to say that TFH just unleashed its kinetic capabilities on its area of operations; non-kinetic influencing became more pronounced and reconstruction efforts had improved (see sections 5.3.4.1 and 5.3.4.3). Moreover, precise targeting was to be fused with non-kinetic influencing, based on understanding the environment.[1217] However, as Sergio Catignani demonstrates, troops at the battle group-level and below were often skeptical about some the aspects of population-centric counterinsurgency. Furthermore, offensive operations were more in line with much of their training.[1218]

For British operations in Helmand, from the latter half of 2010 the situation seemed to be improving. In September 2010, 16 Air Assault Brigade returned for its third tour in Helmand. At this stage, TFH was at a "highwater-mark" in the campaign: [1219] Operation Entirety had

1212 Interview British commanding officer 6; Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p 325-326.

1213 See Michael Hastings (2012). *The Operators: The Wild and Terrifying Inside Story of America's War in Afghanistan*. London: Blue Rider Press.

1214 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 390-392.

1215 See Catagnani. Getting COIN, p. 531-532.

1216 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 353-355.

1217 Task Force Helmand. (Undated). COIN Conceptual Model (Herrick 14). Lashkar Gah.

1218 Catagnani. Getting COIN, p. 533.

1219 Interview British commanding officer 6.

improved the predeployment training, copious quantities of new equipment had been delivered into theater and the influx of US Marines had allowed TFH to concentrate in Central Helmand. By now TFH numbered approximately 10,000 troops. Still under the command of a brigadier, the task force encompassed six ground holding battle groups (including one Danish), a Brigade Reconnaissance force and two further battalions responsible for mentoring and advising the Afghan army and police. Moreover, the brigade had access to a panoply of capabilities normally reserved for the divisional or even corps levels of command. In particular, the access to ISTAR-assets (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) were a novelty for the brigade level. As such, TFH was described as "a brigade on steroids."[1220] Additionally, throughout campaign the battle groups and even companies saw many further capabilities bestowed upon them in order to operate as independently as possible in their areas of operations. Thus, there was a trend that commanders acquired a wider remit and had to coordinate more capabilities such as stabilization, non-kinetic influence, additional intelligence assets and local partner forces during their tour.

A further development during this rotation was the establishment of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in Helmand. The ALP had been an initiative under Petraeus in which local militias would be coopted or formed to protect their villages. The idea was that the ALP would be answerable to local *shuras* and thereby have more legitimacy than the Afghan National Police. At the same time, ISAF would oversee and train these sanctioned militias while the Afghan authorities would sustain them. The first ALP-unit in Helmand was formed late 2010. Subsequently, the number of ALP-units grew, although they had a mixed record of success.[1221]

3 Cdo Brigade adopted 'Front-footed precision' when they returned for their third tour in the spring of 2011. By now the campaign had matured and continuity between rotations was enhanced.[1222] Furthermore, the capability of the partnered ANA-brigade was enhanced, and plans were made for transferring the responsibility for security of Lashkar Gah to the Afghan authorities later that year. This was part of the international community's decision to end combat operations by the end of 2014. To enable the international withdrawal, the Afghan security had to take over the security role in selected districts. Lashkar Gah was identified as one of seven districts across Afghanistan as a showcase for this transition.[1223] Situated in the most violent province, Lashkar Gah was to be a symbol for progress. At the same time, by the spring of 2011, Lashkar Gah was essentially a garrisoned town with a forward perimeter by

1220 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_8. Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 13.

1221 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p 377-380.

1222 Interviews British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 6.

1223 House of Commons. (2012, July 9). Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition. London, p. 9.

30,000 international troops. Nevertheless, an attack on governor Mangals motorcade in May 2011 showed that the security was far from impregnable.[1224]

For TFH, the transition plans meant that its role changed from providing security to enabling Afghan security forces to take over this responsibility. This became the overriding consideration for British operations. Central to the mission, therefore, was the need to develop the capabilities of the partnered ANA-brigade to ensure that they could operate independently before the British troops left. As a result, the later TFH rotations worked ever more closely with the ANA-brigade, including at the staff-levels. Although operations against insurgents continued, the ANA would be in the lead to plan and execute them.[1225] With its sophisticated capabilities, TFH could provide logistical support, air support and intelligence to these operations, as well as assistance by the battlegroups. A related task was the closure of much of the outposts and forward operating bases in Helmand. This was an intricate logistical process while TFH still had to contend with insurgent attacks and IEDs.[1226]

During this final phase of the ISAF-mission, a new threat emerged: the so-called "green-on-blue attacks". In such attacks, Afghan security (green) forces targeted international (blue) troops. From 2009 to 2012, the number of these attacks steadily rose, as did the ISAF-victims. Whether these attacks were perpetrated by disgruntled Afghans to avenge Western insensitivities or the result of deft infiltration by Taliban-operatives was a matter of debate within ISAF.[1227] Regardless, the Taliban naturally claimed these attacks as they were detrimental to the trust between international and Afghan forces. The British armed forces responded to this threat by developing new procedures and enhanced awareness of signs for an impending attack (called Operation Cardel). In 2013, the number of attacks saw a marked decline. To an extent, this was attributed to prevention measures of operation Cardel, but also to improved vetting processes and leadership within the Afghan forces.[1228]

In September 2012, the Taliban unequivocally demonstrated their continued prowess in Helmand during a bold attack on the agglomerate of bases that had grown out of Camp Bastion. Using deception and stealth, 15 insurgents infiltrated the base. Before most insurgents were killed, they managed to kill two American troops and wound a further 16 British and American service members. Moreover, they succeeded in destroying or damaging parked jets and helicopters. Although British forces were responsible for the security of the

1224 Jean Mackenzie (2011, May 27). *The Enteqal Seven (3): Lashkargah – Southern Poster Child for Transition.* Retrieved July 23, 2021, from Afghanistan Analysts Network: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/the-enteqal-seven-3-lashkargah-southern-poster-child-for-transition

1225 Interviews British commanding officer 13; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 12.

1226 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p. 6-5_1.

1227 Farrel. *Unwinnable*, p. 380-381.

1228 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 6-2_1.

complex, no disciplinary action was taken by the British armed forces. This stood in stark contrast to the US Marines where two general officers were asked to resign.[1229]

Thus, while the insurgents remained a force to be reckoned with, the later Herrick rotations continued their operations while at the same time the end of TFH approached inexorably. By now, PJHQ ensured campaign continuity and the commanders of the later rotations coordinated among themselves to this end.[1230] Gradually, force levels were reduced, and capabilities withdrawn from theater. In June 2013 Afghan authorities took over responsibility for security from ISAF across the country while the eighteenth Herrick-rotation was in theater.[1231] Officially, ISAF-troops were limited to "train, advise and assist" Afghan security forces. With this over watch support by ISAF, the Afghan security forces kept the insurgency at bay in 2013. Yet, the attrition rate among the government's forces was frightful. Furthermore, the ANA-brigade commander in Helmand warned that his formation lacked essential capabilities such as intelligence, medical support and counter-IED. Despite assurances otherwise, these deficiencies were never resolved for the ANA.[1232]

In the meantime, TFH further contracted. Its headquarters was moved from Lashkar Gah to Camp Bastion in August 2013. During that year's fighting season, the insurgents offensive exerted intense pressure on the Afghan security forces in Helmand. With allied assistance, the Afghan security forces held onto most of their positions.[1233] However, in 2014's offensive the government forces ceded much control of rural Helmand to the Taliban.[1234] Yet, the withdrawal of British forces was subject to other considerations than the security situation. In February 2014, the Helmand PRT was closed, while in April TFH was disbanded. A remaining British battlegroup was subordinated to RC-SW.[1235] The British mission came to a symbolic end when Camp Bastion was handed over to the ANA in October 2014 and the last British troops left Helmand for Kandahar. After 2014, the UK retained a military presence in Afghanistan under NATO's Resolute Support mission that aimed to mentor the Afghan security forces.

Thus came an end to Operation Herrick, in the most violent of Afghanistan's provinces. Over 450 British service members had lost their lives while many more were wounded. Under these conditions, the British Armed Forces had to adapt to the operational challenges, both in theater and in the UK. Beyond the effects of Operation Entirety and adaptations in relation to certain themes and capabilities, a pertinent manifestation was the increase in

1229 Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 128-130; Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 382-383.

1230 Interviews British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 13.

1231 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p. xxv.

1232 Farrell. *Unwinnable* p., 386-387.

1233 Carter Malkasian (2021). *The American War in Afghanistan: A History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 354-355.

1234 Malkasian. *The American Wars*, p. 365-372.

1235 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxv.

troop numbers over the years. Whereas TFH was initially capped at 3,150 troops, this number increased to almost 10,000 by 2009. Only with the influx of the US Marines and the related concentration of TFH in central Helmand did this number become sufficient. With regard to campaign plans, the UK had developed three iterations. The Joint Helmand Plan of 2006 had been a product developed by a civil-military team, but it had been hampered by political intervention that had made it overly ambitious in relation to the committed resources. Furthermore, it was drafted without taking into account the perspective of the unit that would initially deploy. As a result, the plan was discarded almost instantly. The Helmand Road Map of 2008 had been developed in-theater by TFH and the PRT and subsequently been sanctioned across the departments. It had been updated over the next rotations until the Helmand Implementation Plan was drawn up. The main benefit of this latter plan was that it was congruent with developments in the ISAF chain of command and was sponsored by general Carter who led Regional Command-South. Furthermore, with the American surge, population-centric counterinsurgency became more feasible due to increased resources. An additional boon was that by this stage, adherence to the plans by the TFH-rotations was more enforced by PJHQ. As such, exogenous factors were more important to the efficacy of the campaign than the substance of the plans.

Learning at the campaign level	**Manifestations**	**Stage of learning**	**Influencing factors**
Campaign plans	Plans were adjusted by interagency efforts based on experiences	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, organizational culture, leadership
Strategic guidance	Disconnect between strategic level and theater: TFH rotations had significant leeway in their operational approach	Identified deficiency	Organizational culture: PJHQ was initially unable to impose campaign continuity on rotations
Troop levels	Significant quantitative and qualitative reinforcements.	Formal adaptation	Alliance politics, domestic politics,
Configuration	Increase in civilian representation and dual command (2008). More emphasis on non-kinetic aspects	Formal adaptation	Organizational culture, civil-military relations
Rotation schedule	Six-month tours to spread broad (command) experience, but detrimental to depth of knowledge	Identified deficiency	Organizational politics, culture

Table 5.2: Learning processes at the campaign level

5.3.2: Operational analysis and campaign assessment

At the initiation of operations in Helmand, assessing the efficacy of operations was included in the campaign design. To this end operational analysts were attached to the headquarters of Task Force Helmand, staffed mainly by civil servants detached from Defence Science Technology Laboratory (DSTL). Their task was to gather data in-theatre and provide advice to the headquarters of TFH.[1236] In the early rotations, the data gathering was hampered by the inability of the analysts to engage with the population due to the level of violence. Therefore, operational analysis was initially not a primary input for the commanders' decision-making process.[1237]

Interestingly, the most advertised products that the operational analysts generated in Helmand were databases that collected kinetic activities. For instance, the "Significant Actions" (SIGACTS) database recorded all enemy activities.[1238] The SIGACTS database was replaced in 2009 by the "Land Operational Reporting Database (LORD).[1239] It captured, among others, all data pertaining to IEDs that involved British troops from various sources. This provided a reach-back capability that could be interrogated throughout the Ministry of Defence. Although LORD was valued for its contents on IEDs, it had little influence on the campaign planning as it was just an indication of enemy activity. Two other initiatives on campaign assessment sought to address this: the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF) and the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP); these represented different types of approach and are described next.

Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework

An informal attempt at campaign assessment was the use of the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF) by 52 Brigade (Herrick 7). TCAF was introduced in Helmand through a serendipitous meeting of supply and demand. In an earlier deployment to Iraq, one of the staff officers at 52 Brigade, then lieutenant-colonel Richard Wardlaw had been disenchanted by the campaign assessment there. He saw that the British division used an incoherent myriad of metrics that were measuring activities instead of their impact. Moreover, Wardlaw witnessed that analysis of developments in the Iraqi theater did not represent the actual situation on the ground. Instead, progress was invariably recorded as units fulfilled their rotations, only to regress with a new rotation coming in. In turn, the new rotation

1236 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-3_1,

1237 Interview British commanding officer 4; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p- 1-3_3.

1238 See T.J. Ramjeet (2008). Operational Analysis in Support of HQ RC(S), Kandahar, Afghanistan, September 2007 to January 2008. *Cornwallis XIII: Analysis in Support of Policy*. Nova Scotia: Cornwallis Group, p. 51-61.

1239 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Background Quality Report: Improvised Explosive Device (IED) events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014*. London.

witnessed incremental improvements throughout its tour.[1240] At best, this form of campaign assessment amounted to self-delusion.

For 52 Brigade's tour in 2007-2008, Wardlaw was assigned to the J9-position in the Task Force staff, although his remit was broader than the organic staff-billet. [1241] When he met Brigadier Mackay and vented his frustration over his experience with campaign assessment, Mackay connected him with James Derleth. An American scholar working for USAID, Derleth had developed a four-questions model to assess reconstruction and development projects.[1242] During one of 52 Brigades preparatory exercises, Derleth briefed the staff on his model. Several the staff members were skeptical and raised comments. With this feedback, Wardlaw and Derleth adapted the tool for use in a conflict environment, which resulted in the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF).[1243]

The objective of the TCAF was to identify the causes of instability and try to address them, thereby denying support for insurgency. Furthermore, it aimed to measure the impact of TFH's activities. Both aspects would combine to yield a deeper understanding of the environment and help guide TFH's operations, emphasizing non-kinetic activities.[1244] For its practical use, TCAF was designed as a tiered model that aimed to capture perceptions by posing straightforward questions to the local population. A prime consideration underpinning TCAF was that it would allow TFH to learn the perspectives of the local population instead of those of the "key leaders" with which the PRT normally engaged. As such, both approaches should be complementary.[1245] At the most basic level, TCAF sought to answer just four questions during patrols: Has the population changed and why?; What are the major problems facing your village?; Who do you believe can solve your problems?; What should be done first?[1246] The idea was that in this way any soldier could contribute to the collection of data in a consistent way. Moreover, given the relative simplicity of the questions, the data collection did not require additional patrols.[1247] Advanced questionnaires were developed for more highly-trained personnel.[1248] The acquired data was analyzed by the TCAF Analysis Working Group which consisted of personnel from intelligence, information operations, planning, PRT and operational analysts.[1249] The resulting analyses informed activities such

1240 Interview British army staff officer 7; See also Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p, 213.

1241 Generally, the J9 position is civil-military interaction, but in this instance it was called "Reconstruction and Development".

1242 Interviews American Scholar 1; British army staff officer 7; British commanding officer 2.

1243 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh, p. 13.

1244 Task Force Helmand. (2008). *Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework: Trial Report*. Lashkar Gah.

1245 British army staff officer 7; British commanding officer 2

1246 See Task Force Helmand J9. (2008, March 4). Presentation: TCAF Trend Analysis. Lashkar Gah

1247 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 10.

1248 Task Force Helmand. (Undated). TCAF: Advance Assessment Questionaire. Lashkar Gah

1249 TFH. TCAF Trend Analysis, p. 4; Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh

as operations and population engagement. As such, TCAF was used to steer another of 52 Brigade's innovations: the Non-Kinetic Effects Teams (see section 5.3.4.3).

The pilot of TCAF was rolled out in Lashkar Gah at the end of 2007; given the presence of the TFH-staff and the PRT, this was considered a natural starting point. Furthermore, security in this area was relatively good, so troops could engage with the population and pose the questions. To gauge the effects of the TCAF, a 'control-area' was established in which the framework was not implemented. In addition to processing the collected data into spreadsheets, it was plotted onto digital maps. This helped to visualize different perceptions and dynamics throughout the various areas. In their own reporting, 52 Brigade touted the effectiveness of TCAF. Within Lashkar Gah, the access to potable water was revealed as the main concern for the civilians. Over, time the centrality of this concern decreased as coincidentally water pumps had been repaired. From here TFH improved its understanding of the local dynamics and could measure the effects of its activities.[1250]

Despite the apparent strengths of TCAF, the limitations of the concept were recognized at the time. First of all, the utility of TCAF required good training, understanding and discipline, both with the collectors as with the analysts, to ensure uniform application. A second concern was the validity of the data as the TFH staff thought that the population could be inclined to provide 'agreeable' answers to the questions;[1251] even more so, because most questions were posed by heavily armed soldiers on patrol. A third limitation was demonstrated when TCAF was introduced in Sangin, where the security situation was far more volatile. Here, the violence was the overriding concern for both the British troops and the local population.[1252] In other words, violence was the main driver of instability in Sangin, and this assessment could be established without TCAF. Although TFH was cognizant of these limitations, they could not be entirely resolved. As a counterbalance, the trends derived through TCAF would have genuine value in a longitudinal analysis over the course of two years.[1253] While 52 Brigade was pleased with TCAF's results, they were keen that their successors would continue their work and suggested that TCAF should be incorporated in the new British counterinsurgency doctrine and the predeployment training for subsequent rotations.[1254]

TCAF was handed over to the subsequent rotation by 16 Air Assault Brigade in April 2008. However, its personnel had to be trained in-theater and although the personnel who oversaw the use of TCAF for 16 Brigade stated that they "embraced [TCAF] wholeheartedly",

1250 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 7-8; Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh.

1251 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 13-15.

1252 Interview British army staff officer 7.

1253 LWC. Interview Commander Herrick 7, p. 13.

1254 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 19.

they ultimately discontinued the program.[1255] One of the further identified problems with TCAF was that it led to inconsistent data as the soldiers made variations in how they queried Afghans. Moreover, despite the simplicity of the model, soldiers were not trained sufficiently to conduct the interviews. More fundamentally, 16 Brigade questioned the reliability of the answers to questions asked by foreign troops and the self-selection of individuals who could be interviewed. Another aspect of concern for 16 Brigade was that they introduced TCAF in more insecure districts where engaging in conversation with Afghans was at odds with force protection.[1256] Finally, the detractors of TCAF argued that the framework did not measure against the lines of operation as had been set out by the new Helmand Road Map. Thus, 16 Brigade abandoned TCAF and instead opted for key-leader engagement through more in-depth conversations.[1257] The subsequent rotation by 3 Commando Brigade had been instructed on TCAF during its predeployment training by personnel of 52 Brigade. However, when this rotation arrived in theater in the autumn of 2008, its personnel found that TCAF had been rejected by their predecessors. Understandably, the TCAF-initiative withered in Helmand and was seemingly abandoned by the British Army.[1258] Curiously, TCAF did feature in the glossary of the new Army Field Manual on counterinsurgency more than a year later, but the concept did not appear anywhere else in the text.

Still, despite the failure to implement TCAF across the British Army, it was adopted by the United States. When David Petraeus visited 52 Brigade in Helmand, he was impressed by the promise of the concept. Petraeus advocated its use to the US military and other government agencies and subsequently Wardlaw and Derleth were asked to brief on their experiences with TCAF.[1259] It was quickly adopted by USAID (United States Department for International Development), who had shunned it previously, and the US military, as the Tactical Conflict Analysis and Planning Framework (TCAPF).[1260] Although it was not used for campaign-level analysis, TCAPF was extensively used by American units throughout Afghanistan. In 2010, it was renamed the District Stability Framework.[1261] Ironically, through this American connection, TCAPF even found its way back into British doctrine on operational intelligence. Here it was mentioned as a useful tool to acquire a basic understanding of the environment

1255 See Conway and Wilson. Short-lived Panacea, p. 11.

1256 Ibidem, p. 12-14.

1257 Ibidem, p. 14-15.

1258 Interview British army staff officer 7

1259 LWC. Interview Commander Herrick 7.

1260 See: Department of the Army. (2008). *FM 3.07: Stability Operations*. Washington DC: Combined Arms Center, Appenix D ;USAID Office of Military Affairs. (2009, December 15). Presentation: Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework. Washington DC; Joint Staff, J-7. (2011). *Commander's Handbook for Assessment Planning and Execution.* Suffolk, Appendixes D-G.

1261 Ben Connable (2012). *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency.* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 16.

that is to be used in conjunction with other tools.[1262] As such, TCAF became a widely used framework, albeit in a roundabout way.

Weighing the practicality and merit of TCAF during a few Operation Herrick rotations, with vastly different outlooks between them, is hard given the fleeting period that it was trialed. Of course, the framework was not a silver bullet, but with refinement and consistent application it perhaps could have provided a valuable additional source of insight on the local dynamics and the effects of TFH's activities. Indeed, the later adoption by the US military and British Army intelligence indicates that it was written off too early. Regardless, the example of TCAF provides an interesting case on the difficulty of propagating informal adaptations. Despite the efforts of 52 Brigade, TCAF was eventually rejected by 16 Brigade and fizzled out during 3 Brigade's tour. TCAF had not been adopted by the wider Army and was thus not incorporated into doctrine or predeployment training. Moreover, the application of TCAF in the field required soldiers to engage with the population, while their primary concern was for their own force protection in the more violent parts of Helmand. In other words, the long-term trend analysis from TCAF was trumped by more immediate concerns of the troops.

Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme

In early 2010, the PRT initiated the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP). Overseen by a development sector third party, Coffey International Development, the HMEP was designed to support the Helmand Implementation Plan that was being drafted.[1263] By collecting and analyzing primary data, HMEP should inform the effectiveness of the activities by the PRT. It set out to do this through several products. First, quarterly polls would be conducted to gauge the perception of the local population. A second product was a database on all reconstruction and development activities within Helmand province, including by NGOs. Thirdly, quarterly reports and ad-hoc reports were to be used to "develop new knowledge" for the PRT on the province. To facilitate this, the HMEP needed to establish a baseline of data that did not yet exist.[1264] As such, the HMEP was an indictment of earlier campaign assessment-efforts for the PRT as the campaign had been active for over three years at this point.[1265]

1262 See: 1 Military Intelligence Brigade. (2011). *Operational Intelligence Best Practice Handbook*. Bulford, p. 2-26. Here the British doctrine refers to US Army FM 3.07 Stability Operations as its source.

1263 See Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Doctrine Note 2/12: Assessment*. London, p. 3-29. HMEP was developed by Coffey International Development and executed by an Afghan company. Part of the dataset is available at https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/dataset-for-the-helmand-monitoring-and-evaluation-programme-hmep

1264 Stabilisation Unit. (2014). *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*. London, p. 25-26.

1265 Stabilisation Unit. (2010). *Responding to Stabilisation Challenges in Hostile and insecure environments: Lessons Identified by the UK's Stabilisation Unit*. London, p13-14.

Underpinning HMEP was a "theory of change" which posited that enduring security and stability is possible if the government demonstrates that is responsive to the needs of its citizens and thereby is a viable alternative to insurgency or instability.[1266] This premise adhered to the prevalent population-centric counterinsurgency concepts of that time and thus to the Helmand Implementation Plan. In order to assess the competency of the Afghan authorities, perceptions of Helmandi citizens were polled. HMEP established numerous indicators, divided over the lines of security, governance, and development. In theory, if sufficient progress was measured in a certain district, it would become viable for transition to the responsibility of Afghan authorities.[1267]

Although the introduction of HMEP was a clear improvement from the lack of reporting on developments in Helmand, it was undercut by inherent flaws. One of the main defects was that the comprehensiveness and veracity of the collected data has been questioned. Given the insecurity in large parts of Helmand, the survey personnel could not reach all districts. Consequently, the perceptions that were polled were somewhat skewed.[1268] Furthermore, most interviewed individuals were men, as women could only be queried in a discrete fashion.[1269] Additionally, as the surveys were not conducted by PRT personnel, the veracity of information could not be checked. A further defect was that research showed that surveys of this kind produced "socially desirable" answers; in Helmand, this mechanism was even more pronounced due to the insecurity of the province. For instance, this led to assessment in which just five percent of the polled Helmandi households in 2013 indicated that they acquired revenue through opium production, whereas given the extent of poppy cultivation in the province this number seems improbable.[1270] Despite efforts for improved quality assurance, the extent to which the HMEP-data was useful for steering the campaign has been doubted.[1271] Finally, the various agencies whose activities were being examined were not always keen on candid and critical evaluations. As such, highlighting deficiencies through assessment did not always lead to improvements. [1272] Of course, this was a wider problem throughout the ISAF-mission.

1266 Sammy Ahmar and Christine Kolbe (2011). *Innovative Approach to Evaluating Interventions in Fragile and ConflictAffected States: The Case of Helmand*. London: Coffey International Development, p. 11-12.

1267 USAID. (2012). *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*. Washington DC, p. 27-29.

1268 Ibidem, p. 67.

1269 Ibidem, p. 29.

1270 David Mansfield (2015). *Effective Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict-affected Environments: Afghanistan Post-2014*. Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, p. 8; Interview British civil servant 7

1271 Interviews British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6; British civil servant 7; Foreign & Commonwealth Office. (2014). *Capturing the lessons from the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)*. Steyning: Wilton Park, p. 27-28.

1272 Jon Moss (2015). Basing Stabilisation Efforts on Evidence of What Works: Lessons from Afghanistan. *Small Wars Journal*, p. 2

Beyond these deficiencies, the HMEP was primarily a tool for the Helmand PRT and less so for TFH.[1273] Despite the alignment with the campaign plans of ISAF and TFH, its impact on the military operations was limited. Given the continued violence in Helmand province and the emphasis on the capacity of Afghan security forces, the perception of security was no primary consideration for TFH. Furthermore, the HMEP was seen as overly complex to be of use for TFH.[1274] Tellingly, HMEP is not mentioned in the extensive Operation Herrick Campaign Study; this is despite the finding that, in general terms the study indicated that operational analysis alone is regarded with skepticism within the military.[1275]

Thus, despite its merits, the impact of HMEP was constrained by inherent weaknesses, of which its late inception in 2010 was perhaps the most profound. One influencing factor is that, by this stage in the Afghan war, campaign assessment was highly topical. The American surge and the emphasis on security transition put additional pressure on assessments to exhibit progress.[1276] In a 2012 report, RAND Corporation analyzed the limits of current assessment practices in Afghanistan that essentially harked back to the US war in Vietnam. It argued that it was too focused on quantitative data, too centralized and therefore ill-suited for capturing the complexity of a counterinsurgency campaign.[1277]

Although the problems with campaign assessment were never resolved both within Helmand and ISAF writ large, the UK noted the lessons in a doctrinal document: Join Doctrine Note (JDN) 2/12 Assessment. This document was drafted jointly by the Ministry of Defence and the Stabilisation Unit with input from other departments. It underlined the imperative to include campaign assessment at the planning stages of a stabilization mission. According to JDN 2/12, consistent and integrated campaign assessment should support planning, evaluation, strategic communications, and the lessons learned process.[1278] With the experience of Helmand and the HMEP, the doctrine called for including training at formation level in order to ensure familiarity with assessment by commanders and their staffs.[1279] Of course, JDN 2/12 looked beyond Helmand and was of no consequence for the operations there. Overall, the formal assessment efforts had limited impact on the execution of the Helmand campaign.

Assessing these instruments, operational analysis and campaign assessment were relatively marginal therefore throughout the British Helmand campaign (table 5.3). Whether informally initiated as TCAF, or formally mandated like HMEP, the programs were generally regarded with skepticism by the British military. The continuous violence in the province meant that

1273 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 27.

1274 Stabilisation Unit. *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p. 27.

1275 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-3_3

1276 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 374.

1277 Connable. *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 208-211.

1278 Ministry of Defence. *JDN 2/12*, p. 1-2.

1279 Ministry of Defence. *JDN 2/12*, p. 3-3

the focus by TFH was very much on combat and force protection and not on gathering data. Furthermore, the utility of the resulting analyses was not always clear for the military as the programs were not linked with the campaign plans. This changed with HMEP where the instrument aligned with the Helmand Implementation Plan, but it still had limited influence on how military operations were conducted. As a result, the contribution of operational analysis and campaign assessment to the understanding of the environment by TFH was overall reduced.

Operational analysis (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Integration in TFH	Limited clout of analysis in TFH	Recognized deficiency	Distinct organizational cultures
TCAF	TCAF was central element in HERRICK 7's operational approach	Informal adaptation, discontinued in subsequent rotation	Leadership, organizational culture
HMEP	Evaluation program for Helmand PRT, limited use at TFH	Formal adaptation	Organizational culture, civil-military relations

Table 5.3: Developments in operational analysis

5.3.3: Operation Entirety: learning to adapt, adapting to learn

As established in the previous section, the British campaign in Helmand was initially prosecuted in a haphazard fashion. To be fair, this can be said of virtually all national contributions to the ISAF-mission and as a logical result, the mission itself.[1280] Yet, arguably the British forces suffered the most from this lack of direction as they were deployed to the most volatile and violent province. From May 2008, the British Army changed tack under guidance of the incoming Commander in Chief of the Land Forces Command general David Richards. As the previous ISAF-commander, Richards had firsthand knowledge of the challenges of the overall campaign. To his dismay, he found that to the British Army headquarters the war in Afghanistan "was little more than a passing distraction and there was little need to re-orientate existing plans around it."[1281] Richards asserted that this was an institutional problem and asserted that the army should be put on a campaign footing to support the troops in Helmand. The turn towards a campaign footing was to be called

1280 McChrystal. *COMISAF Initial Assessment*

1281 Richards, *Taking Command*, p. 307

Operation Entirety. This effort to salvage the mission in Helmand officially started in April 2009.[1282]

Although some formal and informal adaptations had already been initiated since 2006, these measures lacked overall coherence and institutional support. Consequently, these had only minor impact on the campaign in Helmand. Operation Entirety sought to "ensure that Land Forces are resourced, structured and prepared - conceptually, morally and physically - for success in Afghanistan and then subsequent other subsequent hybrid operations."[1283] The envisioned measures under Entirety were to be short term (1-5 years) and reversible. Furthermore, this effort took the calculated risk that the British Army would be less ready for other contingencies.[1284]

While the British Army now sought to more support the Helmand campaign more comprehensively, formations were tasked to retain knowledge and proficiency on conventional warfare and combined arms tactics.[1285] Indeed, when in 2011 the political decision was made to end combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the order for Operation Entirety was amended to increase the emphasis on future operations.[1286]

To be sure, the Army's shift to a campaign footing was not universally embraced within the organization, as skeptics felt that this would mortgage its ability to fight conventional wars.[1287] Despite the broadly felt need to change the Army's approach for executing the Helmand campaign, this apprehension was not without merit. Faced with "an austere financial environment", Operation Entirety and the concomitant measures had to be cost-neutral;[1288] in other words, the Ministry of Defence, and the Army in particular, had to reallocate its own budget to resource the war in Afghanistan. Naturally, this constrained the ability to invest in (materiel) projects for the longer term.

In essence Operation Entirety set out to accomplish two interrelated tasks. First, the predeployment preparations of the army units from task force level and downwards was to be revamped. The second tenet was the rigorous collection and "exploitation of lessons from operations, experimentation and training into the 'institution' of the Army."[1289]

1282 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxv

1283 Ibidem, p. xxxvi

1284 Ibidem, p. xxxvii

1285 Interviews British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 3; British army staff officer 9; British commanding officer 17.

1286 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxix

1287 Richards. *Taking Command*, p. 308-309; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxvi; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 130.

1288 British Army (6 May 2011) Fragmentation Order VI, Land Forces, Field Army/2900; Interviews British commanding officer 17; British commanding officer 16.

1289 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxvii

An important element in bringing about the necessary changes to the army's day-to-day operations was the establishment of Force Development and Training (FDT), commanded by a lieutenant general. With an extensive mandate, the FDT set out to harness bottom-up experience through firm top-down direction.[1290] By accommodating "force development, capability development, training, equipment, doctrine and lessons under one [...] organisation", the FDT sought to deliver improvements in the preparation and execution of the Helmand campaign.[1291] In large part, this arrangement was inspired by the *Training and Doctrine Command* (TRADOC) of the U.S. Army. Although the FDT largely mirrored TRADOC in terms of mandate, it had to assert its new authority to enact change. Fundamentally, FDT was superimposed on the organizational structure of the army to overcome bureaucratic barriers and internal reluctance.[1292]

As the effects of Operation Entirety were far-reaching, even beyond the Helmand campaign itself, the repercussions will form a recurrent theme in this chapter. In the next subsections the specific impacts on the lessons learned process, predeployment training, doctrine and equipment will be analyzed. The effects on broader capabilities in theatre and on the British Army after the conclusion of the ISAF-mission will feature further on in this chapter.

5.3.2.1: Learning mechanisms

At the onset of Operation Herrick, the British Army had a formalized learning mechanism in the form of the Mission Support Group. Established in 2003, the Mission Support Group (MSG) was the Army's institutional effort to remedy operational challenges during the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent occupation phase. It had a broad remit: improving the Army's cooperation with the other services (joint warfare); remedying health and safety issues in relation to equipment; and identifying lessons from operations to enhance tactics, techniques, and procedures across the force. In 2006, it was placed under the Land Warfare Centre which oversees collective training, doctrine, and concept development for the Army. To collect observations and adaptations from the field, the MSG conducted post-operation interviews among returning officers and reports from the Brigade commanders. Occasionally, staff from the MSG visited the theatre to actively collect lessons, but personnel caps precluded forward deploying officers to Iraq.[1293] A main product of the MSG was the so-called "Lesson Pamphlet" - short publications with lessons identified or best practices based

1290 Paul Newton, (2013). Adapt or Fail: The Challenge for the Armed Forces After Blair's Wars. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British General in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate., p. 297.

1291 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxix

1292 Interview British commanding officer 3; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 123-124.

1293 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 78-79.

on experiences from Iraq and Afghanistan. To facilitate a wide dissemination, the pamphlets were written with enlisted personnel in mind.[1294]

Still, this institutional effort to learn from experience was considered "under-resourced and ill-conceived", as the observations were not systematically analyzed and subsequently disseminated throughout the Army.[1295] Although some improvements in equipment and doctrine were attained through the MSG, it lacked the influence to implement lessons in a coherent way. This problem was exacerbated when the British ventured into Helmand in 2006. Now the Army had to contend with challenges from two demanding theatres.[1296] As such, the MSG was stretched in terms of personnel and had limited capacity to disseminate lessons. When observations required additional resources, the efficacy of the learning process was even more constrained.[1297]

In 2008, the Army sought to improve its learning process by establishing the Lessons Exploitation Centre as a replacement for the MSG, with increased resources and expanded authority. This was mandated by Director-General Land Warfare, Major-General Andrew Kennett.[1298] Further impetus for the new Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC) came with the initiation of Operation Entirety and the establishment of the FDT-command.[1299] The head of the FDT, lieutenant-general Paul Newton, subscribed to the importance of lessons learned process and accordingly awarded increased resources to the LXC in terms of personnel and funding. At its heyday in 2012, the LXC numbered 20 officers and NCOs.[1300] Furthermore, the formal learning process was awarded an enhanced status and consequently the LXC acquired more authority within the Army's organization.[1301]

With the additional resources and improved mandate, the LXC sought to bring more coherence to the Army's learning process. To this end, monthly meetings between the various organizations responsible for distinct aspects of learning such as training, doctrine development and safety were initiated.[1302] As a result of these meetings, the LXC developed new instruments to actively collect lessons from theatre. For instance, staff officers from

1294 Interviews British staff officer 24; British army staff officer 9

1295 Robert Foley, Stuart Griffin and Helen McCartney (2011). 'Transformation in contact': learning the lessons of modern war. *International Affairs, 87*(2), p. 262.

1296 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1297 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 129

1298 Foley, et al. Transformation in contact, p. 263.

1299 Interview British commanding officer 3, British army staff officer 9

1300 Foley, et al. Transformation in contact, p. 262, British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4

1301 Interview British commanding officer 3, Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p.81

1302 Tom Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 82.

the LXC were permanently deployed to Task Force Helmand to gather observations.[1303] In Helmand, these officers worked with scientific advisers from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) and other staff officers tasked with countering threats such as IEDs. Additionally, under guidance of the FDT the Army sent out "hunting parties" to allied task forces in Afghanistan. These were essentially liaison officers that were tasked with looking out for adaptations by allies that the British could emulate.[1304]

Other learning mechanisms that were used were more passive, as these required the input by service members. For instance, the British Armed Forces use an IT-database for best practices called the Defence Lessons Identified Management System (DLIMS). Yet, the utility of this system is curtailed as its access is restricted to accredited officers.[1305] This means that other service members, in particular enlisted personnel, must go through an intermediary to record their observations and best practices. A more 'democratic' platform for knowledge sharing is the Army Knowledge Exchange (AKX) that allowed any service member to contribute to it.[1306] Introduced in 2009, the AKX was an emulation of American efforts provide a platform for open knowledge exchange. However, as some observers noted, the AKX was not rigorously moderated and the submitted knowledge was generally not utilized to implement adaptations in the organization.[1307] Although the platform is still in use and contains a wealth of observations and lessons identified, it does not have a central role in the formal learning processes.[1308]

A more structured source for observations into the learning process was instituted in the mandated evaluations by deployed units. The first of these was the Initial Deployment and Post-Training Report that units had to produce when they were six weeks into their rotation to Helmand. This allowed units, battalion level and up, to share observations about their predeployment training and issues they faced while rotating into Afghanistan. Beyond the LXC, this report was sent to the Training Branch and PJHQ's J7 who could take remedial action to identified problems. A constraining factor of this report was that the observations were limited to those made by company commanders and staff officers.[1309] Although this was a conscious decision to prevent a deluge of (redundant) observations by all personnel in a unit, the obvious inherent trade-off was that observations would be missed by the LXC.[1310] Additionally, commanding officers at the levels of the Task Force and Battlegroups were

1303 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 1 British army staff officer 2, British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 9

1304 Interview British commanding officer 3; British army staff officer 9.

1305 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p.84.

1306 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 5.

1307 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 125; Tom Dyson, p. 87.

1308 Interviews British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 5; Catagnani. Coping with knowledge, p. 54-55.

1309 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 85.

1310 Interviews British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 18.

interviewed after their tour by a retired brigadier who was contracted by the LXC.[1311] This was a marked improvement from earlier post-operation interviews at the Ministry of Defence where Task Force commanders felt they received a lack of interest in their perspective.[1312] Moreover, the LXC continued to seek to capture the experiences of officers and NCOs who had been deployed to positions at ISAF headquarters and Regional Command South.[1313]

One of the most pertinent developments in the learning process was the establishment of the "Mission Exploitation Symposium" in 2009. These were one-day events held at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst with approximately 1200 individuals in attendance. During a symposium, the returning Task Force Helmand staff and its sub-units could share their experiences with the LXC and other interested parties. Its participants included delegates from the services, PJHQ, the various Regiments and Corps, academia and Defence industry. The latter participants were included as they could seek to deliver technological solutions to challenges that were raised by the presenting Herrick rotation. According to the organizers, the initial iterations of the symposium were at maximum capacity as the interest was high.[1314] During the morning, the Task Force commander and selected officers offered their observations, identified deficiencies and best practices. In the afternoon, the participants formed syndicates to delve deeper into specific details such as intelligence, counter-IED, army aviation, and other topics. Consequently, this part of the program was more interactive and more slated towards capturing lessons and thinking about remedial actions.

The establishment of the Lesson Exploitation Centre was a crucial learning mechanism during the Helmand campaign. Under Operation Entirety it helped to capture the experiences from Afghanistan in a structured manner. Still, the process had some inherent limitations such as the (lack of) breadth of input into the process. The Army Knowledge Exchange did not remedy this, for the reasons given and furthermore because it focused on lessons for the tactical and technical levels. Operational level observations were ostensibly the mandate of the adjacent Afghanistan COIN Centre (see the next subsection). Still, the volume of lessons from Afghanistan were considerable and the (internal) political capital invested into salvaging the mission in Helmand were substantive. Moreover, the LXC personnel were faced with the pressure that unaddressed organizational deficiencies were costing lives of deployed service members. To enact the solutions provided through these mechanisms (table 5.2), improving the dissemination mechanisms of doctrine, training and equipment procurement were next crucial steps in the learning process.

1311 Interview British army staff officer 9.

1312 Interviews British commanding officer 2; British commanding officer 4

1313 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 5.

1314 Interview British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 9; British scholar 1.

Learning processes (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Learning process	Perceived to be insufficient across armed forces. Impetus for Operation Entirety	Formal adaptation	Leadership, organizational politics/ culture, resource allocation
Capturing lessons	Mission Exploitation Symposium	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation
Implementation of lessons at joint level	LXC ensured collaboration across Army and MoD.	Formal adaptation	Organizational politics

Table 5.2: Lessons learned process

5.3.2.3: Doctrine and the Afghanistan COIN Centre

As established earlier in this chapter, the British Army possessed a doctrinal publication on counterinsurgency operations. Generally, it was felt that this doctrine was "fit for purpose" but could use some updating on the character of insurgents and the influence of the 'information revolution'.[1315] Its main defect however was that it was not taught and read. According to a survey in 2009, just 31 percent of deployed British officers had read the 2001 iteration of Army Field Manual 1-10 on counterinsurgency operations.[1316] While British counterinsurgency campaigns from the past featured in lectures at Sandhurst and to some extent at the advanced career courses at Shrivenham, intellectual engagement with the concepts in a contemporary context was lacking.[1317] As a result, counterinsurgency did not always inform operational planning in the early Helmand rotations.

The Mission Support Group, headed by Colonel Alexander Alderson between 2004 and 2007, sought to deploy initiatives towards an updated counterinsurgency doctrine.[1318] Beyond the publication of a document, Alderson wanted to produce a conceptual foundation which the British Army could use to inform its campaign and operational designs.[1319] At the time, there was some sense among officers that the British Army had missed the boat with the development of the American counterinsurgency field manual.[1320] As the primary ally and

1315 Interviews British army staff officer 17; British army staff officer 24; American scholar 2.

1316 Claudia Harvey and Mark Wilkinson (2009). The Value of Doctrine: Adressing British Officers'Perspectives. *RUSI Journal*, 154(6), p. 29

1317 Interviews British civil servant 4, British army staff officer 24; American scholar 2; Alexander Alderson (2012). The British Approach to COIN and Stabilisation: A Retrospective on Developments since 2001. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(4), p. 64-65.

1318 Tom Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 98

1319 Interview British army staff officer 24: British army staff officer 17; American scholar 2.

1320 Alderson. the British Approach, p. 65.

contributor to the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Brits were the most obvious partner for a combined doctrine. Moreover, the American writing team explicitly looked at the British 2001 doctrine for inspiration. However, according to Conrad Crane, the British Army could only spare "two officers and a bulldog" for the collaborative effort and ultimately refrained from making a formal contribution.[1321] Furthermore, the newly established joint Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre opted out of the writing process as it considered its own efforts to draft doctrine on "counter irregular activity" as discrete from the American process. On an informal level, officers like Colonel Alderson received drafts of the text and provided commentary.[1322] Thus, the somewhat ironic situation emerged at the end of 2006 in which the U.S. armed forces produced a revamped counterinsurgency doctrine inspired in part by a virtually unread British publication and to which British officers made a small informal contribution, while the British Army had no equivalent document.

This did not mean that British Army doctrine writers were sitting on their hands. In June 2006, the initiative to update the 2001 AFM "Counter-Insurgency Operations" was mandated by the army. By 2007, the MSG was well underway in the process of drafting a new counterinsurgency doctrine for the army. It mirrored the American approach for FM 3-24, by extensively consulting external partners such as the U.S. Army's TRADOC and King's College London's Insurgency Research Group.[1323]

Furthermore, the British Army looked with interest at how the Americans vigorously debated counterinsurgency principles amongst themselves in an effort to salvage their campaign in Iraq. The British recognized that such an exchange of ideas was generally lacking in their own army. Furthermore, the Americans had set up a "Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence" in-theatre where commanding officers had to take a course before they moved toward their areas of operation.[1324] While the British doctrine writers recognized that an equivalent deployed education center was a bridge too far, they decried the lack of institutional enthusiasm to enroll officers for its counterinsurgency course or deploying a permanent staff member for lectures. Furthermore, they concurred that education on doctrine was crucial if it was to be applied in practice.[1325]

Despite the backing by the British Army and the example set by the Americans, the doctrine project was hampered by the lack of counterinsurgency doctrine at the joint level and disagreements on the mandate of the army to write this doctrine with DCDC. Where the MSG and by extension the Land Warfare Centre were chiefly concerned with using the lessons from

1321 See Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, p. 52-53.

1322 Alexander Alderson (2013). Too Busy to Learn: Personal Observations on British Campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (pp. 281-296). Farnham: Ashgate p. 288.

1323 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 115.

1324 Alderson. Too Busy to Learn, p. 290.

1325 Interview British staff officer 24; British staff officer 17; American Scholar 2,

current operations for organizational change, DCDC focused more on future capabilities in the vein of Network Centric Operations and the Revolution in Military Affairs. This resulted in a physical and conceptual disconnect between both elements that were responsible for doctrine.[1326]

At the end of 2007, this chasm between DCDC and the Land Warfare Centre proved insuperable. By this stage, the Army Doctrine and Concepts Committee had approved the draft of the new Army Field Manual, but DCDC intervened however, on the grounds that the AFM was not compatible with its publications on peace support operations and countering irregular activity. Much to the chagrin of Alderson, the army allowed DCDC to make amendments to the draft. According to the initial writing team, this made the AFM irrelevant and unfit for publication. Therefore, with the harbor in sight, the new doctrine was scuttled. [1327]

Still, the need to revamp the AFM and disseminate it remained undiminished given the concurrent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. During their deployment to Iraq in 2008, Alderson and another British officer regularly contributed to the American courses in Iraq. Based on this experience, Alderson proposed the establishment of a British COIN center in the UK. In his own words: "the Army needed a focal point to analyse, develop and teach COIN, and function as its COIN advocate."[1328] It found its champion in general Richards and gradually support was acquired throughout the Ministry of Defence's bureaucratic apparatus. An essential element in the broader support for counterinsurgency doctrine and other general measures was the widely felt sense that the British Army had not lived up to its reputation in Basra. Furthermore, the initial rotations in Helmand had not provided the success that was expected to ameliorate this image.[1329]

In the spring of 2009, close to the formal initiation of Operation Entirety and with the evident backing of the higher echelons of the British Army, the Afghanistan Counterinsurgency Centre was established as a subunit of the Land Warfare Centre.[1330] Headed by colonel Alderson, who had returned from a tour in Iraq under general Petraeus, the COIN Centre was tasked with processing higher tactical and operational level observations into doctrine and disseminating it as broadly as possible. As such the Afghan COIN Centre was to collaborate closely with the LXC, and accordingly both elements were collocated in the same building in Warminster.[1331] The support from the army's hierarchy for the COIN Centre was tangible

1326 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 99.

1327 Ibidem, p. 113, Interviews British staff officer 24; American Scholar 2.

1328 Alderson. Too Busy to Learn, p. 292.

1329 Stuart Griffin (2011). Iraq, Afghanistan and the future of British military doctrine: from counterinsurgency to Stabilization. *international Affairs, 87*(2), p. 319-320; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 113; Alderson. Too Busy to Learn, p. 292.

1330 Interestingly, the exact date differs in various sources.

1331 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 24.

as Alderson had the pick of his own staff officers. Furthermore, the COIN Centre was well funded and had an extensive external network with allies, think tanks and academia.[1332] Operation Entirety and the establishment of the Afghan COIN Centre provided a new impetus for a new Army Field Manual. With a larger cadre of staff officers and with empirical insight of the application of counterinsurgency principles in Iraq, Alderson could start from where he left off with the abortive effort from 2007. Equally important was the change of leadership at DCDC. Under then major-general Paul Newton, who would go on to command the FDT, the relationship with the army's doctrine writers became more productive. Moreover, DCDC proceeded to write a new doctrine on stabilization operations that was to serve as a capstone for the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine. The DCDC doctrine was published in November 2009 under the name *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (JDP 3-40). This publication removed a primary prior hindrance for the Army's field manual by ensuring compatibility between the two documents.[1333]

Beyond deployed senior commanders (theater or formation-level) and staff officers at PJHQ, JDP 3-40 was explicitly aimed towards instructors and students at the officers' career courses in Shrivenham and at the military academies. As such, it explicitly referred to the vital role of officer education in the dissemination of doctrine. Another prospective audience were civilian partners and academics. [1334] For its inspiration, JDP 3-40 explicitly referred to classical texts about counterinsurgency, among which Frank Kitson served as a main source. Fused with this older thinking were newer ideas such as those espoused by Rupert Smith, Frank Hoffman, and David Kilcullen. Although the authors aimed at a distinctively British publication, they acknowledged the impact of the American FM 3-24. Of course, the British armed forces recognized the importance of interoperability with their American ally.[1335]

Crucially, the JDP 3-40 saw the military contribution as to make the adversary irrelevant and allowing other agencies to "deliver their elements of the solution", rather than decisively defeat the enemy in battle".[1336] It considered stabilization not as a discrete type of operation but instead an activity within a conflict that must be executed concurrently with other tasks.[1337] Furthermore, the JDP 3-40 cautioned against specious concepts such as the "Revolution in Military Affairs", as adept adversaries had found ways to negate the technological advantages of Western countries. Therefore, past experiences - if studied with due regard for both the historical as the contemporary contexts - were still relevant.

1332 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 9; American Scholar 2.

1333 Interviews British army staff officer 24; American Scholar 2; British commanding officer 3.

1334 Ministry of Defence. (2009). *Joint Doctrine Publication 3/40 Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*. London, p. V

1335 Ministry of Defence. JDP 3-40, p. V-VI.

1336 Ibidem, p. xvii

1337 Ibidem, p. XVIII-XIX

For instance, the role of "influence" or "narratives" are nothing new, although the velocity of global communications has increased dramatically over the last years, making the ability to shape perceptions even more pertinent. To provide a frame of reference for the military commander tasked with stabilization, the JDP enumerated nine principles for security (see table 5.5 below).[1338] In essence, most of these were inspired by, if not copied from classical counterinsurgency maxims (see chapter 3). Moreover, the influence of FM 3-24 was evident, as well as the recent experiences from Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, it drew critique for being too focused on current conflicts and obfuscating the distinction between stabilization and counterinsurgency.[1339] JDP 3-40 nevertheless provided a joint doctrine under which the Afghan COIN Centre could produce its more applied documents.

Nine principles for security JDP 3-40	**Ten principles of counterinsurgency AFM 1:10**
Primacy of Political Purpose	Primacy of Political Purpose
Understand the Context	Understand the Human Terrain
Focus on the Population	Secure the population
Foster Host Nation Governance Authority and Indigenous Capacity	Operate in Accordance With the Law
Unity of Effort	Unity of Effort
Isolate and Neutralize Irregular Actors	Neutralize the Insurgent
Exploit Credibility to Gain Support	Gain and Maintain Support
Prepare for the Long Term (Perseverance and Sustainability)	Prepare for the Long Term
Anticipate, Learn and Adapt	Learn and Adapt
-	Integrate Intelligence

Table 5.5: The principles listed in JDP 3-40 and AFM 1:10. Note that the principles from the Field Manual are reordered to match its equivalent from the Joint Doctrine Publication.

With the support of the higher echelons of the Ministry of Defence, an expanded staff and a capstone joint doctrine, the Afghan COIN Centre could publish a new Army Field Manual 1-10: Countering Insurgency (AFM 1-10) in January 2010. This was essentially an updated version from the abortive 2007 draft. With its list of ten counterinsurgency principles (see table 5.5),

1338 Ibidem, p. XX-XXI

1339 Griffin. British military doctrine, p. 332-333.

the influence of FM 3-24 is apparent.[1340] Securing the population from violence is portrayed as the military's primary task and "a pre-requisite for improving both governance and the population's prospects."[1341] In order to attain a sustainable security situation, the military's contribution must contain several elements, such as: presence among the population, continuity of approach, intelligence, influence activities and developing the host nation's security forces through embedded training. A further crucial element is education of service members to ensure that they can adapt the doctrine when circumstances demand it.[1342]

While the AFM 1-10 was considered a necessary update for British counterinsurgency doctrine, the writers emphasized that the broad strokes of the concepts had remained the same since the Second World War. The list of principles could largely be traced back to various formal and informal publications.[1343] Still, the new version identified several omissions, such as the institutional failure to adequately capture the lessons from Northern-Ireland and the lack of analytical tools to examine the nature of insurrections.[1344]

In the chapter on insurgency, five types of insurgencies are categorized: popular insurgents (from the "Maoist prototype"), militias, clan or tribal rivalries, feral gangs, and global insurgents. For the latter category, Al Qaeda served as the prime example. Interestingly, no comments are made in the chapter about the Taliban or the nature of the insurgency in Afghanistan.[1345]

For the conduct of counterinsurgency operations, AFM 1-10 used the conceptual framework of "shape-secure-develop". The elements of this framework were considered to be interdependent and not necessarily sequential. Of the three themes, "secure" was where most of the kinetic activities would be executed. For instance, the framework of "clear-hold-build" fell into this theme. As such, the AFM adhered to classical and contemporary concepts.[1346] In a broad sense, "shape" can be equated with non-kinetic influence activities, while "develop" resembles aspects of host nation capacity building. These aspects were elaborated upon in the field manual's chapters six and ten, respectively.

Throughout the field manual historical case studies and vignettes are used to illustrate the various concepts. Most of these examples refer to British experiences with counterinsurgency operations, like Malaya, Aden, Dhofar and Northern-Ireland. These campaigns are subjected

1340 British Army. (2010). *Army Field Manual 1-10: Countering Insurgency.* Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, p. 1-1.

1341 British Army. *AFM 1-10: Countering Insurgency*, p. 1-1.

1342 Ibidem, p. 1-3.

1343 Ibidem, p. CS2-2

1344 Ibidem, CS1-4.

1345 Ibidem, chapter 2.

1346 Ibidem, p. 4-6.

to historical scrutiny and unsuccessful operations are analyzed with candor.[1347] With the combination of a historical foundation and integrating contemporary elements, the Afghan COIN Centre succeeded in its objective to publish a relevant British counterinsurgency doctrine. Furthermore, the large format with colored charts, maps, and photographs, it was intended to be easy to read.[1348] Still, its reception was not universally positive with the British Army. The main critique was that it was too high-brow and of little practical value for operations in Afghanistan.[1349] However, the Afghan COIN Centre also published lower-level doctrine that addressed specific areas of interests such as: "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan - The Essentials", "Operational Insights - Company Level Tactics in Afghanistan" and doctrine notes on for instance the Afghan Local Police and the use of Female Engagement Teams. Throughout the campaign the Afghan COIN Centre, in collaboration with LXC, kept itself abreast of operational developments in the field and strove to write accessible publications to address these topics.[1350]

The publication of AFM 1:10 was a milestone in the early existence of the Afghan COIN Centre, especially following the previous frustrating experience. Still, the staff recognized that the mere publication of a new doctrine was insufficient for its inculcation. To ensure consistent distribution of field manual's content, the COIN Centre staff were prolific in their propagation throughout the British Army and beyond. Accordingly, over 22,000 hard copies of the AFM 1:10 were distributed among service members and associated civilians.[1351] Chief among these dissemination mechanisms was the "Herrick study period". Before the establishment of the COIN Centre, each brigade that formed a Helmand-rotation was responsible for understanding the Afghan context by itself. As a result, the substance and quality of these periods varied.[1352]

At the end of 2009, the Afghan COIN Centre became responsible for the study period in the mission-specific training for the rotations headed for Afghanistan. This led to a consistent and consolidated conceptual preparation. The study period started with one introduction day on which study materials were distributed for further reading by officers and senior NCOs. Besides doctrinal publications, relevant books and a "bespoke mission study pack" were distributed. Whereas academic literature was used to gain a broader perspective, the study packs were internal publications that represented the recent developments in Afghanistan. Two weeks after the introduction day, a study week was held with the assigned homework serving as background knowledge. During this week, diverse perspectives were

1347 Interview American Scholar 2

1348 See Tom Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p 115.

1349 Interview British army staff officer 3; Catignani. Coping with knowledge. p. 519-521; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 187

1350 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-8_4.

1351 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p, 5-8_2; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 117-118.

1352 Interviews British commanding officer 2; British commanding officer 4; British army staff officer 13.

offered to highlight the Afghan context with a focus on the situation in Helmand. For instance, the latest intelligence updates on Helmand and the wider mission were provided by the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre - Afghanistan (LIFC-A, see section 5.3.4.2). Furthermore, individuals from the Afghan diaspora, academia, NGOs, allies, and media were invited to offer their perspectives.[1353] Although the structure and content of the study period improved, some observers are skeptical on whether this was sufficient to get the counterinsurgency principles across and make up for the overly kinetic outlook of predeployment training and education.[1354]

Ultimately, the impetus for a British counterinsurgency doctrine was in large part an informal process, spearheaded by colonel Alderson and several likeminded officers at the Land Warfare Centre (see table 5.6). Yet, this effort only bore fruit by 2009 when the dynamics of Operation Entirety and a change of leadership at DCDC aligned to overcome bureaucratic hurdles. With the establishment of the Afghan COIN Centre, the British Army acquired an organization that could produce doctrinal publications incorporating the latest insights from the field. How doctrine affected operations in Helmand and the predeployment training will be explored further in section 5.4.2.2.

Doctrine (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Doctrine	Tortuous publication process of AFM 1:10	Formal adaptation	Organizational politics, leadership
Conceptual thinking on counterinsurgency	Establishment of Afghanistan COIN Centre	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation (personnel)
Dissemination of doctrine	Study week in mission specific training	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation (time)

Table 5.6: Adaptations with regard to doctrine

5.3.2.3: Predeployment training

One of the most dramatic and concrete manifestations of change during operation Herrick was the predeployment training for TFH units. For the first two rotations (Herrick 4 and 5) that deployed in 2006, the preparations had in large part been slanted towards stabilization and facilitating reconstruction.[1355] Of course, the situation in Helmand was far less benign than anticipated and the training had to be adjusted accordingly. Another impediment for

1353 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-8-A_2

1354 See Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 204-209; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 118.

1355 Butler. Setting Ourselves Up, p. 51; interview British commanding officer 4.

the predeployment phase was that in the first years of Operation Herrick (2006-2008) the training establishment also had to prepare the troops that were allocated to Iraq. For the training audience, the distinction between these theaters were not always clear. Instead, there was a generic training package for both missions.[1356]

In total, the preparation time for TFH units was 18 months. Of this period, the first 12 months were spent in Hybrid Foundation Training.[1357] As the name indicates, this training phase seeks to inculcate the foundational skills for individual soldiers and units. Before 2009, this period was primarily focused on conventional war fighting capabilities. Consequently, this period resembled training cycles of the Cold War and had limited connection to the requirements of the Afghan theater.[1358] Underpinning this philosophy was the idea that the units would be trained to a level of proficiency that could be exploited in any type of mission. To be sure, a sizable portion of this training still emphasized conventional combat capabilities.[1359] Furthermore, the Foundation Training would serve as a starting point of the 6-month Mission Specific Training in which the units would be oriented towards the deployment and receive more specialized instructions.

With the onset of Operation Entirety in 2009, the Foundation Training was adapted to be more aligned to operational realities in Afghanistan. For instance, exercises started to include a mix of conventional and irregular training adversaries.[1360] Additionally, training events included aspects of key leader engagement.[1361] Furthermore, the Army increased its number battle group exercises at the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK) as the terrain there better resembled conditions in Afghanistan than jungle training in Belize.[1362] At a more fundamental level, the live firing exercises (LFX) were altered to enhance their realism. Previously, marksmanship training was centered on hitting static targets at 100 to 300 meters. This was deemed as insufficiently reflecting the realties on the ground in Helmand where combat occurred at either shorter or longer ranges with fleeting targets.[1363] By infusing LFXs with more dynamic and realistic scenarios, the training establishment sought to improve operational marksmanship.[1364] Furthermore, different weapon systems were integrated into

1356 Richard Iron (2017). Case studies of adaptation in the British Army: Northern Ireland and Southern Iraq. *The Skill of Adaptability: the learning curve in combat* (pp. 234-250). Canberra: Army History Unit, p. 240-241.

1357 This was called Adaptive Foundation Training until 2009, see Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 523.

1358 See for instance Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p23-30.

1359 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 118-119; Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 523.

1360 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 177.

1361 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 116.

1362 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 118.

1363 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_13.

1364 Interviews British commanding officer 3; British army staff officer 18.

a LFX to train fire and manoeuvre and refinement of fire control at platoon or even company level.[1365]

While the improvements in the Hybrid Foundation Training were important for the predeployment training, the adjustments in mission-specific training inherently had a larger effect on operations in Helmand. To an extent, improvements here preceded Operation Entirety. For instance, the aforementioned OPTAG, by no means solely responsible for predeployment training, started to focus on the Afghan theatre by the end of 2007. The new commander, with experience in Afghanistan himself, recruited NCOs with recent operational deployments in Afghanistan to share their knowledge. Crucially, the prestige of instructing new rotations was raised within the army and OPTAG secured support from the personnel center.[1366] Furthermore, funding was procured for new realistic training areas, including a simulated Afghan village in Thetford.[1367] Beyond building a typical Afghan village with *qualas*, scenarios were drawn up based on real vignettes in Helmand. Gurkha troops were seconded to roleplay as Afghan troops and Afghan expats posed as the local villagers. This allowed for dynamic training in which military instructors and cultural advisers could evaluate the scenarios and provide feedback.[1368] Fed with information from the operational theater, intelligence reporting and the Lessons Exploitation Centre, OPTAG kept abreast of developments in Helmand and adjusted their trainings accordingly.[1369] After initiation of Operation Entirety, funding, and attention for predeployment training increased further.[1370]

Over time, an intense training program was established, optimized for the Helmand campaign. With the various exercises of the "Pashtun-series" various aspects of the mission were trained and evaluated, culminating in two exercises: "Pashtun Dawn" and "Pashtun Horizon". Pashtun Dawn was a battle group-level field training exercise in which all elements, including augmentees were integrated and trained. As the TFH rotations were comprised of multiple battle groups, this exercise was almost a continuous occurrence at Salisbury Plains. Pashtun Horizon was a Command Post Exercise in which the TFH-staff could hone their procedures with realistic scenarios.[1371] Participation by Afghan National Security Forces, interdepartmental partners and PJHQ helped prepare the task force staff with familiarization of the environment and the reporting lines. Mentors from preceding rotations could coach new staff members with their experiences.[1372]

1365 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1-A_1.

1366 Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 373; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_5.

1367 Interview British army staff officer 18; British civil servant 8.

1368 Interviews British army staff officer 14; British civil servant 8.

1369 Interviews British army staff officer 18; British army staff officer 14.

1370 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_5.

1371 Ibidem, p. 5-1-A_1

1372 Ibidem, p. 5-1_12; Interview British civil servant 8.

A final element from the predeployment training was the so-called "Reception, Staging and Onward Integration" (RSOI) at Camp Bastion, Helmand. Here the incoming rotations were in-processed into theater, received the latest information on developments in the area of operations and final instruction.[1373] To this end, units were welcomed by their assigned instructors from OPTAG that had trained them during Mission Specific Training. In this way, the units saw familiar faces that helped their final preparations for operations. Moreover, this way the instructors were kept informed of the latest developments.[1374] As an evaluation tool, the deployed units were asked to complete a post-training survey after three months in Helmand to rate the training they had received. This provided information that the instructors could use to adjust their curricula.[1375] These forward deployed members OPTAG saw some duplication of effort in information gathering with those required from the LXC.[1376] Still, their role in RSOI, helped the final preparations of the deployed units.

The sequential progressive predeployment training up unto the RSOI-phase was built into a conveyor belt of mission preparation, where individuals and units were fed through the various training stages. By and large, commanders at various levels regarded their predeployment training as the best they had encountered during their careers.[1377] To be sure, challenges remained for predeployment training. According to various observers, it was still too focused on kinetic activities. The conceptual training on counterinsurgency such as the Herrick Study Week (see sub section 5.3.2.2) was deemed insufficient to inculcate units with the required mindset.[1378] Furthermore, the adaptations in predeployment training were geared towards combat and combat support units. Preparation for more specialist capabilities such as information operations and civilian-military cooperation meant that these individuals were not available for collective training, thereby hampering the integration with their units.[1379] Finally, equipment that was present in theatre was not always available in training so that troops had to familiarize themselves during the RSOI-phase to address such deficiencies.[1380] This was only resolved under Operation Entirety with the establishment of the "land training fleet".[1381] While reaching an impressive state of incorporating learning by

1373 Ibidem, p. 5-1_11.

1374 Interviews British army staff officer 18; British commanding officer 3.

1375 D. Johnson, J. Moroney, R. Cliff, M. Markel, L. Smallman and M. Spirtas (2009). *Preparing and Training for the Full Spectrum of Military Challenges: Insights from the Experiences of China, France, the United Kingdom, India, and Israel.* Santa Monica: RAND, p. 168-169.

1376 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 46-47.

1377 Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 5 British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 13; British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 14; British staff officer 3.

1378 Catignani. Getting COIN, p. 29; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 119. Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 116-117. Interview British commanding officer 7

1379 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_10.

1380 Ibidem, p. 5-1_8.

1381 Ibidem, p. xliii

2011-2012 (see table 5.7), the predeployment training had had to evolve from an inauspicious start in 2005-2006, thereby having an adverse effect on operations well into the campaign.

Training (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Incorporation of experience from the field	Incorporated in training scenarios and RSOI	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation
Reinvigoration of OPTAG	Training support increasingly geared toward Afghanistan	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation

Table 5.7: Developments in predeployment training

5.3.4: Vignettes

Mirroring the structure of the previous chapter, the following sub sections will provide an in-depth examination of the learning processes in four vignettes. As such the Helmand PRT will serve as a vignette of interagency cooperation; subsequently, the learning processes with regard to intelligence, non-kinetic activities and counter-IED efforts are analyzed. By applying the theoretical framework from chapter 2, the dynamics of these processes can be assessed.

5.3.4.1: *The Helmand PRT*

The Helmand PRT forms an interesting case in the constellation of various PRT models that operated in Afghanistan. Initially, the Helmand PRT was commanded by the deputy commander of TFH and overseen by the PCRU. In the Joint UK Plan for Helmand, the PRT was to be responsible for fostering governance and development, while TFH was to provide security. Concurrently with the initial plan, the civilian component of the British mission had been resourced to work around Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, with less than ten civil servants from FCO and DfID. The rest of the positions were filled by the military.[1382] As such, the PRT was dependent on the resources provided by the military such as transport and force protection. With this configuration, the PRT was to be a conduit for the integrated approach.[1383] However, as the plan was subsequently discarded in the spring of 2006, the civilian contribution was naturally affected.[1384]

1382 Rodwell. *Theory and the reality*, p. 24.

1383 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 4.

1384 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

As a result, the PRTs operations were marred from the outset, as the civilian members were not allowed, due to security considerations, to venture beyond Lashkar Gah. This drew some ire from the military as this undermined an integrated approach to operations. At the same time, the heavy fighting in the early rotations precluded constructive work on development and governance. Consequently, the PRT had limited contact with the population.[1385] An additional impediment to integrated working was the cultural differences between the military and civil servants from the FCO and DfID. This divide manifested itself in the planning processes: where the military plans for relatively short periods of time with concrete objectives, their civilian counterparts tend to take a more longitudinal view with an iterative approach. Given the predominance of military personnel in Helmand, their planning procedures prevailed.[1386] Moreover, in the early Herrick-rotations, the incoming TFH-commanders generally brought their own six-month plans that were not coordinated with the PRT.[1387]

This is not to say that the civilians in the PRT were themselves always of the same mind. By design, the civil servants from DfID and FCO reported back to their own departments instead of PRT-leadership. Of course, all these organizational barriers hindered unity of effort within the PRT. As the mission progressed, the coordination between the various elements in the PRT improved. However, PRT-member found to their frustration that their resolved arguments were often rehashed at the UK Embassy in Kabul and in Whitehall.[1388] Finally, the PRT had insufficient understanding of Helmand and its dynamics. As there was no transfer of knowledge between the American and the British PRTs, the latter were at a significant disadvantage at the start of operations in 2006.[1389] Despite the touting of a comprehensive approach for Helmand, the mission was dominated by military operations that tried to enhance the security situation.[1390]

The deficiencies in the civilian contribution were recognized both within Helmand and in the UK. Over the course of 2007, the civilian staff of the PRT was expanded to 30 individuals, yet tensions between the PRT and TFH persisted.[1391] At the end of that year, Whitehall resolved to further increase the civilian contribution. Moreover, the British activities in Helmand would be brought under civilian leadership in the form of a senior civil servant as head of the PRT. As the civilian equivalent of a major-general, this individual would be of higher rank than TFH's commanding brigadier. In June 2008, Hugh Powell, assumed this mantle as

1385 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3

1386 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6.

1387 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 15.

1388 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 13-14; Interviews British civil servant 3; British civil servant 6.

1389 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 6.

1390 James Pritchard and M.L.R. Smith (2010). Thompson in Helmand: Comparing Theory to Practice in British Counter-insurgency Operations in Afghanistan. *Civil Wars Journal*, *12*(1-2), p. 78-79.

1391 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 204.

head of the "civil-military mission Helmand" (CMMH). In this way there was a nominal unity of command of all British activities in Helmand.[1392] The TFH commander at that time, Mark Carlton-Smith (Herrick 8) even moved his brigade planning cell to the PRT in an effort to improve the planning cycles.[1393] Additionally, the strength of the PRT was increased to more than 200 individuals, of which around 80 were civilians.[1394]

From the military's perspective, its role in stabilization activities was also reconsidered. In 2008, the MoD added "Military Assistance to Stabilisation and Development" to its formal tasks. Stabilization operations were exemplified by complexity, collaboration with various actors and varying levels of volatility. This new task further enshrined in the Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40: *Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*, discussed earlier. The JDP 3-40 emphasized the need for collaborative planning for stabilization operations between Mod, FCO and DfiD. [1395]

A further adaptation at the institutional level regarding the comprehensive approach was made in 2007 when the PCRU was succeeded by the Stabilisation Unit (SU). In essence, the SU was established as an executive agency for stabilization of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.[1396] It was better resourced than the PCRU had been and was jointly owned by FCO, DfID and the MoD.[1397] Its role was to develop deployable civilian capacity, facilitate cross-governmental planning and to identify and learn lessons from experience.[1398] By 2009, this new agency numbered over a 1000 individuals who worked on stabilization, of which 70 were deployed overseas.[1399] Although the establishment of the Stabilisation Unit should have removed interdepartmental barriers, seconded personnel still reported to their respective parent departments, despite being funded independently from the departments.[1400] For the armed forces, the Stabilisation Unit provided an improved interface with the FCO and DfID for operations. While members of the Stabilisation Unit were deployed to other conflict-affected areas, Afghanistan was its main focus.[1401]

1392 Robert Egnell (2011). Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan: what now for British counterinsurgency? *International Affairs, 87*(2), p. 305

1393 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 232.

1394 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3.

1395 Jennifer Baechler (2016). *Operationalizing "Whole-of-Government" as an approach to state fragility and instability: case studies from Ottowa, Canada and London, United Kingdom.* Halifax: Dalhousie University (Doctoral Dissertation), p. 324-325.

1396 J. Connolly and R. Pyper (2020). Developing capacity within the British civil service: the case of the Stabilisation Unit. *Public Money & Management*,), p. 1.

1397 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 5; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 96.

1398 House of commons. Comprehensive Approach, p. 30.

1399 Ibidem, p. 38-39.

1400 Connolly and Pyper. Developing capacity, p. 4-5.

1401 Interviews British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6; British staff officer 21.

In practical terms, the Stabilisation Unit provided additional personnel for the PRT in Lashkar Gah, thereby enlarging the civilian contribution. A further important change was the employment of "Stabilisation Advisers" in 2008 to some of the outlying districts by the SU. A key driver to this development was the recognition that the conflict could not be resolved from the provincial capitals, instead the local dynamics and grievances had to be addressed at the district level.[1402] Stabilisation Advisers deployed to districts such as Sangin and Musa Qalah where they served as an adviser to the incumbent battle group commander on governance and development. A key benefit of the Stabilisation Advisers was that they generally stayed in theater for prolonged periods of time, thereby becoming an important source of local knowledge for incoming rotations. Furthermore, these advisers liaised with the local district authorities and mentored them.[1403] While the Stabilisation Advisers were a marked improvement for civil-military cooperation at the battle group/district level, their ability to affect governance and development was naturally limited, as the PRT did not bequeath sufficient additional personnel to the districts.[1404] Nevertheless, some civilian specialists, for instance on agriculture or education and political advisers were deployed to the districts.[1405]

In theater, the military sought to remedy the lack of PRT personnel at the district level by setting up the "Military Stabilisation Support Teams" (MSSTs) in 2008. To be sure, military CIMIC-personnel had been deployed to Helmand from the outset to interact with civilian agencies - during the initial rotations, CIMIC-personnel were attached to TFH-units and started projects and paid compensation to locals caused by firefights.[1406] Since 2005, the CIMIC-personnel had been organized in the Joint CIMIC-group and included reservists with relevant experience in aspects as agriculture, development, and infrastructure. With the establishment of the MSSTs, the PRT acquired military personnel that could support the district Stabilisation Adviser on the ground and foster civil-military cooperation.[1407] The MSSTs consisted of four to eight soldiers from all services, including reservists with the functional specialists. Besides the British MSSTs, American and Danish teams were operating in districts like Garmsir and Gereshk.[1408]

To enhance the capacity and preparation of the MSSTs, the Joint CIMIC Group was reorganized in 2009 into the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG). The MSSG was commanded by a colonel and grew to a strength of 400 personnel. It recruited and trained personnel for CIMIC-roles, prepared the MSSTs for their missions and deployed staff-officers to the PRT

1402 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3; Stabilisation Unit. *Lessons Identified*, p. 8.

1403 Stabilisation Unit. (2008). *The UK Approach to Stabilisation*. London), p. 7; House of Commons. Comprehensive Approach, ev, 90

1404 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3

1405 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 16; Campaign Study, p. 5-4_4.

1406 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p 5-4_5.

1407 House of Commons. Comprehensive Approach, ev 162; Baechler. "*Whole-of-Government*, p. 325.

1408 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_5.

in Lashkar Gah. Although its main effort was in Helmand, the MSSG deployed personnel to various other countries such as Kosovo, Libya, and Sierra Leone.[1409]

While the deployment of Stabilisation Advisers and the MSSTs improved the ability to mount reconstruction projects and improve local governance, there was a lack of coherence between the activities in the districts.[1410] During Operation Herrick 13 (2011), a "Stabilisation Cell" was established in the TFH staff to coordinate the stabilization efforts across the districts.[1411] This is indicative of the lack of control that the headquarters of the PRT had over its sub-units, as by this move TFH mirrored the mandate of the PRT.

Throughout its operations in Helmand (and beyond), the personnel of the MSSG acquired much experience in stabilization operations. Yet, the teams did not always see eye-to-eye with battle group commanders. Whereas the former were trying to build Afghan capacity, the latter generally had a shorter time-horizon that focused on security. This resulted in tension between the two viewpoints, where the military perspective normally prevailed due its predominance. [1412] Compounding this issue was that the members of the MSSTs, despite their specialist skills and knowledge, sometimes lacked military credibility with their collocated battle groups. As such, they were not always valued. Furthermore, like the rest of the military, their tours were capped at six months which curtailed their local understanding and the continuity of it in general.[1413]

A further fundamental change within the operations of the PRT was the shift in focus from reconstruction towards political aspects of the mission. Within TFH, there was a tendency to start projects such as the building of schools and healthcare centers, partly based on experiences from the Balkan and Iraq, which had been more developed areas. Moreover, military commanders preferred such projects as they were tangible and indicated a form of progress. However, it gradually dawned on them that Helmand lacked the institutional capability to maintain such infrastructure. Instead, the British efforts should concentrate on building the institutional capacity of Afghanistan, starting with empowering local authorities.[1414]

A prime example of this was the Afghan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP), which was set up in collaboration with the Afghan central government in 2009. Under this Afghan-British initiative, the Helmand PRT sought to link the Afghan authorities with local communities

1409 Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Structure of the MSSG*. London

1410 Interview British civil servant 2

1411 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p 5-4_5.

1412 Ibidem.

1413 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1414 Stabilisation Unit. *Lessons Identified*), p. 6, British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_5

via the districts. The ASOP created *shuras* (councils) between community leaders and district and provincial authorities to help resolve local problems and disputes. Furthermore, the PRT provided funding and assistance for additional staff at the district level.[1415] With dedicated funds, local authorities could improve their service delivery that was tailored to the needs of the communities. As security around district centers improved, linkages between communities and Afghan governmental agencies were strengthened. Although this represented a marked improvement over the initial efforts by the PRT, the ability of local governance to administer their inhabitants remained insufficient to function independently. In part, this was caused by the fact that most developmental funds were initiated outside of the purview of the provincial governance and the PRT. As a result, such projects were not coordinated and had the negative effect of increased corruption. In turn, this adversely affected how local authorities were perceived by their constituents.[1416] An additional fundamental problem was the scarcity of competent administrators on the local (or provincial) level who could bridge difference between the various tribal communities.[1417] This of course was a challenge that would require decades rather than a few years to overcome.

Naturally, the deployment in force of more than 20,000 US Marines in 2009 also affected the work of the Helmand PRT. Indeed, because of the increased troop presence, the security situation in population centers was improved.[1418] Although the American presence eclipsed the British contingent by 2010, the newly-established Regional Command South-West deferred largely to the British PRT for governance and development at the provincial level. By virtue of their presence since 2006, the British had gained a modicum of experience with working with the communities and local authorities.[1419] However, this British prominence was far from absolute. For instance, the Americans brought far more resources to bear on the province and therefore decided how to spend the development funds. Given that the American Surge was under a time pressure to produce results, their development projects were geared towards quick impact and highlighting of progress.[1420] This was at odds with the (belated) recognition in the PRT that resolving political issues among local communities and capacity building at the district-level was paramount. Unsurprisingly, Afghans were perceptive enough to recognize the changed dynamics in the province and leverage the difference between the British and Americans.[1421]

1415 House of Commons. Comprehensive Approach, ev 90.

1416 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 24-25.

1417 Interviews British civil servant 3; British civil servant 2.

1418 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 9.

1419 Jeffrey Dressler (2009). *Securing Helmand: Understanding and Responding to the Enemy.* Washington DC: Institute for the Study of War p. 35.

1420 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 16.

1421 See Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 225-231.

To be sure, the American mission in Helmand initiated a broad range of initiatives for reconstruction and development such as alternative livelihood programs to curtail poppy production, a cash-for-work to stem recruitment for the insurgency and large infrastructural projects. By and large, these efforts had little lasting effect on the development of Helmand; indeed, the influx of funds without competent Afghan political oversight fueled corruption. Furthermore, it was highly doubtful whether the Afghans could maintain these efforts[1422] A further element that undermined the long-term political stability of Helmand was the British and American inability and unwillingness to sponsor reconciliation insurgents with local authorities. In Sangin, the British Stabilisation Adviser had helped broker an agreement with tribal leaders who had hitherto backed the insurgency in 2009. However, when the FCO demurred and the formalization of the agreement was stalled, the leaders who had subscribed to this truce were assassinated. A last-ditch effort to salvage the agreement when the US Marines took over Sangin came to naught as the Americans were equally disinclined to a deal with insurgents.[1423]

In retrospect, producing viable political and economic solutions for Helmand's manifold woes was beyond the competence of the Helmand PRT (see table 5.8). Despite the various adaptations of the British civilian-military efforts, the interplay between security, governance and development was never adequately resolved. As acknowledged by some of its members, the Helmand PRT had lost valuable time in the early years of the campaign in which its activities had not been aligned with TFH and had been marred by a lack of understanding of its environment.[1424] Even with better coordination and understanding, the PRT had to cope with both Afghan and alliance dynamics that it could not influence. In a bleak recognition of the inability of the Afghan authorities to sustain many of the initiated programs after the end of the ISAF-mission, the PRT concentrated its efforts towards managed decline after 2012.[1425]

1422 Dressler. *Securing Helmand*, p. 37.

1423 See Fairweather, *The Good War*, 394-396.; Interview British civil servant 3.

1424 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 10.

1425 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 6.

Provincial Reconstruction Team	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Civilian contribution	Increase in civilians attached to PRT and civilian command of the PRT (2008)	Formal adaptation	Learning mechanisms, civil-military relations
Cooperation PRT – TFH-elements	District Stabilisation Advisers	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, organizational culture
Military support	Military stabilisation support teams/group	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, organizational culture, resource allocation

Table 5.8: Learning processes in the PRT during the Helmand campaign

5.3.4.2: Intelligence and understanding

The initial inability to understand the local dynamics of Helmand by the British Task Force has been well documented. In the analysis of the inadequacies of the intelligence process, several causes were identified. Primarily, the British troops generally lacked interaction with the local population as they were spread too thinly and were predominantly conducting clearance operations.[1426] A second deficiency was that the focus of the intelligence process was on the adversary instead of the operational environment as a whole. As a result, the intelligence process in the initial years was insufficient in providing a thorough understanding of the dynamics in Helmand. Thirdly, the intelligence process was not organized for a counterinsurgency campaign. Initially intelligence was structured top-down instead of bottom up. This meant that the headquarters of TFH had access to highly classified intelligence from sensitive sources that originated at higher echelons. Consequently, intelligence personnel were preoccupied with analyzing this stream of information, to the detriment of intelligence derived from patrols and other open sources. Essentially, the deficiencies in the intelligence process in Afghanistan were a continuation of those experienced in Iraq. Best practices picked up in Northern Ireland, such as decentralized intelligence processes, the importance of interaction with the local population and the study of open sources, had seemingly been forgotten. [1427]

In comparison to the Dutch Army, the British Army had a separate intelligence corps at the time of the ISAF-campaign. The Intelligence Corps thus could serve as a natural anchor point for knowledge acquired in Helmand. As such, intelligence personnel received consistent

1426 See for this notion: Martin. *An Intimate War*; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*; Emile Simpson (2012). *War from the ground up: Twenty-first-century comabat as politics*. London: Hurst.

1427 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_5.

training in their specialty. Moreover, these service members could pursue an established career path in this branch and build experience. However, these specialists were initially concentrated at the TFH/brigade level.[1428] In contrast, in the battle groups, the intelligence section (S2) were staffed by officers and NCOs from the own regiments (thus mainly infantry and cavalry). In theory, these personnel were trained for their intelligence roles prior to deployment. Unfortunately, this was not always the case due to last minute shifts in personnel. Moreover, intelligence positions in battle groups were not necessarily coveted by the organic battalion personnel, as command or operations (S3) billets were perceived to hold more allure. At the company level, the problems with intelligence position were even more pronounced as the small number of positions had to be filled by relatively junior personnel.[1429] As such, the preparation and quality of the intelligence personnel at the battle group level and below were inconsistent. This factor impeded the processing and analysis of the information that was acquired by the units in the field and thus affected the intelligence position of TFH as a whole.

The lack of understanding of Helmand was widely recognized in the early rotations. For instance, battle group commanders requested to embed personnel from the intelligence corps in their units. This became practice after 2009 as part of Operation Entirety. The battle groups were reinforced with intelligence support detachments (BGISD). This was replicated at replicated at the company level with intelligence support teams (COIST).[1430] These small detachments consisted of officers and enlisted personnel from the Intelligence Corps and were meant to augment the organic intelligence sections.[1431] In practice, many battalion intelligence officers were repurposed to fill other billets or replace casualties. The establishment of BGISDs and COISTs resulted in mixed teams of Intelligence Corps personnel and organic battalion personnel.[1432]

In essence, the BGISD and COISTs meant a qualitative improvement of the intelligence process at the tactical level. Quantitatively speaking, their contribution was modest with just one or two individuals per unit.[1433] As TFH increasingly concentrated in central Helmand, the interaction with local population increased and patrols generated more data. With the eventual augmentation of specialized personnel, processing and analysis of this enlarged data flow improved.[1434] Still, the addition of Intelligence Corps personnel to manoeuvre units meant that they had to be integrated during their predeployment phase. Consequently, personnel had to receive specific training while at the same time help to prepare their new

1428 Interviews British army staff officer 13; British army staff officer 11.

1429 Interviews British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 13; British army staff officer 11.

1430 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_7.

1431 Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practices*, p. 10-3.

1432 Interviews British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 13; British army staff officer 11.

1433 Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practices*, p. 10-3.

1434 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_5.

units with understanding their area of operations. Within the Intelligence Corps it was acknowledged that attachment to an infantry company or battalion required different competencies from its personnel than a position as an analyst at higher headquarters. Therefore, personnel for the BGISDs and COISTs were specifically selected for their ability to connect with tactical commanders and work in austere conditions.[1435] Additionally, BGISDs and COISTs were attached to Afghan National Army units to enhance their intelligence processes.

As the campaign progressed in time, the training of intelligence personnel was slowly adapted. However, this lagged behind the developments in-theater. For instance, the training of battalion S2s in 2008 was overwhelmingly geared at finding and fighting insurgents; it had little to offer on local dynamics and identifying IED networks. Consequently, these officers found that they were ill-prepared for their role in Helmand.[1436] Curiously, the secondary training of new Intelligence Corps officers was even more hidebound. During this training, the focus was on the role of intelligence in conventional war. The junior officers had to study the Military Intelligence Field Manual (colloquially known as the "pink pillow" due to its size and hue of the pages) that was essentially a relic of the Cold War, focused on the organization and doctrine of Soviet Army formations.[1437] This did little to prepare the young officers for deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan. By 2010-2011 a shift became visible in these training efforts towards more contextual understanding of the wider human terrain.[1438] Gradually, the population and the social dynamics became the subject of intelligence training, driven by demand from the field and by instructors who had served in Afghanistan and Iraq.[1439] In 2011, the centrality of comprehensive understanding of the human terrain was incorporated into various doctrinal documents.[1440]

The increased attention for the human terrain and cultural knowledge for understanding of the operational environment in Helmand is further illustrated by the establishment of the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit (DCSU) in 2010. This new unit was the result of a combination of formal and informal processes within the armed forces.[1441] Recognizing the value of linguistic skills in-theatre, service members could volunteer to attend courses in Dari or Pashtu. There was a basic course of ten weeks and a proficiency course of 18 months. Although this initiative was commendable it was initially impeded by a lack of cultural awareness. This

1435 British Army. (2012). *The Company Intelligence Support Handbook*. Warminster: Land Warfare Centre; Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practices*, p. 10-2.

1436 John Bethell (2010). Accidental counterinsurgents: Nad E Ali, Hybrid War and the Future of the British Army. *British Army Review, 149*(Summer), p. 1-2.

1437 Interviews British Army staff officer 11; British Army staff officer 13.

1438 Interview British Army staff officer 15: Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice*, p, 2-13.

1439 Interviews British Army staff officer 15; British Army staff officer 11; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*. p. 3-1_5.

1440 See Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations* . London, p. 4-18; Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice*, p. 3-13.

1441 Interview British army staff officer 14; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 120

"resulted in some individuals involved in mentoring arriving in theatre having learnt the wrong language as it was discovered that within the ANSF, Dari was spoken at Lieutenant Colonel rank and above with Pashtu spoken at the lower levels."[1442] Moreover, the language training was in itself no silver bullet; understanding the local dynamics required immersion in the field. Language skills were no substitute, but rather an indispensable tool to acquire this insight.[1443]

Recognizing the limits of the linguistic training, one of the officers enrolled in this program, captain Mike Martin, took the initiative to establish a unit with a broader remit. As such, the DCSU was not an intelligence asset by design, but it was indicative for a shift towards a more comprehensive understanding of the environment. Martin envisioned a corps of 'political officers' akin those of the colonial era. The idea was that with linguistic skills and cultural acumen, cultural specialists could advise tactical commanders and form their interface with local leaders. A further consideration was that such cultural specialists needed to have a military credibility in order to have traction with their commanders. Thus, the cultural specialists were to be recruited from military personnel with additional linguistic and cultural training, rather than militarized anthropologists.[1444] The idea was embraced within the British Army and supported by the Afghan COIN Centre (Martin was nominally provided with a billet there) and more senior officers.[1445]

In 2010, this led to the establishment of the DCSU. Not only would the cultural specialists advise commanders in-theater, but they would also play a pivotal role in the cultural training of their rotations.[1446] The cultural advisers (CULADs) were attached to the headquarters of TFH and the battle groups.[1447] As such, the contribution of the CULADs was highly valued by commanders as they helped enhance their understanding of the environment and gave them more options to influence it.[1448]

Still, the CULADs and the DCSU were limited by a few constraints. One aspect was that the number of eligible officers capable (and willing) to perform this role adequately was inherently limited.[1449] A related characteristic was that as the CULADs were a scarce commodity, they had to spread themselves thinly in theater. Given that most interactions with local civilians

1442 Op Herrick Campaign study, p. 5-3_13

1443 Interviews British army staff officer 14; British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 19.

1444 This was in marked contrast to the American Human Terrain Teams that employed anthropologists to the Afghan and Iraqi theaters. Interviews British army staff officer 14; British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 19.

1445 Interviews British commanding officer 3; British Army staff officer 24; British army staff officer 14.

1446 Ministry of Defence. (2010, February 24). Military develops its cultural understanding of Afghanistan. *Defence Policy and Business*

1447 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 6-9_1.

1448 Ibidem, p. 5-3_10.

1449 Interviews British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 19.

occurred at the lower tactical levels, cultural expertise was in high demand at the multitude of patrol bases.[1450] Furthermore, the training of the CULADs was still focused on linguistic skills in Dari or Pashtu, while cultural training was truncated to 5 weeks.[1451] Consequently, the actual cultural knowledge for some of the CULADs was limited. Finally, CULADs felt the inherent tension of understanding the local population, the requirements of the intelligence process (of which they were no formal part) and influencing the environment through their knowledge.[1452]

A further formal adaptation was the establishment of the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre Afghanistan (LIFC(A)) in early 2010. Again, this was the result of requests by tactical commanders for better intelligence support in their Post-Operation Reports from both Iraq and the early Helmand rotations. It had to provide improved tactical intelligence, both for predeployment training as use in-theater. [1453] The LIFC(A) was based in the UK and thus a reach-back facility. This had the benefit that the analysts were somewhat removed from operational pressures in Afghanistan and could provide continuity, write in-depth assessments, and identify long term trends.[1454] Of course, the LIFC(A) still had to be responsive to requests from Afghanistan. Its structure reflected the various districts of Helmand where TFH operated. Small teams provided a narrative for their districts through fusing intelligence from all sources, ranging from patrol reports to sensitive intelligence from the UK's intelligence and security services. Additionally, there were several teams that were organized thematically such as for narcotics and the insurgency. [1455] Furthermore, LIFC(A) forged links to both OPTAG and the LXC. It provided current input to predeployment training and debriefed returning intelligence personnel. Publications from the LIFC(A) on insurgent tactics and other topics were widely disseminated throughout the Army.[1456]

For all the adaptations in intelligence that were either initiated or supported by the British armed forces, several aspects diminished the effects of these changes (see table 5.9). First, the introduction of a flurry of new acronyms reflects that the BGISDs, COISTs, the LIFC(A), the DCSU and the wider shift in emphasis to understanding the environment took approximately four years to manifest and even longer to pay off. Secondly, the general lack of campaign continuity meant that successive TFH rotations struggled to understand the local dynamics of the conflict. Critics contend that this lack of understanding was never resolved despite the

1450 Catignani, Getting COIN, p. 526.

1451 Interview British army staff officer 19; House of Commons. (2014, October 27). Written Questions and Answers: Defence Cultural Specialist Unit. London

1452 Interviews British army staff officer 14; British army staff officer 15.

1453 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_6.

1454 Interview British army staff officer 13.

1455 Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice* p. 1-15; Interviews British civil servant 6; British army staff officer 13.

1456 British Army. *COIS Handbook*, p. 8-7; Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice*, p. 1-15.

ameliorating efforts.[1457] A third element was that significant intelligence efforts pertained to making advancements in precision targeting of insurgents at the TFH and battle group levels.[1458] While the precise application of force adheres to counterinsurgency doctrine (as opposed to indiscriminate force), the continuous targeting of rank-and-file insurgents did little to stabilize Helmand.[1459] Leveraging intelligence for non-kinetic operations proved to be more difficult.[1460]

Intelligence	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Cultural understanding	Defence Cultural Specialist Unit and increased attention for comprehensive intelligence	Formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms; resource allocation
Enhancing intelligence support for battle groups and companies	Detachments from the intelligence corps: BGISD's and COIST's	Formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation; Anchor point in Intelligence Corps
Knowledge retention and sharing on Helmand	Establishment of Land Intelligence Fusion Centre - Afghanistan	Formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation; Anchor point in Intelligence Corps

Table 5.9: Learning processes on intelligence during the Helmand campaign

5.3.4.3: Non-kinetic effects

From the outset of the Helmand campaign, TFH and the PRT were expected to deliver non-kinetic effects. Indeed, the Joint UK Helmand Plan envisioned a stabilization mission in which combat operations were secondary to attaining the objectives on security, governance, development, and counter-narcotics. Of course, reality on the ground proved far more volatile. Still, there was a nascent capability embedded in the first rotation, one which increased in size in the subsequent rotation. However, as they were faced with intense violence, TFH's focus was understandably on kinetic activities in those first rotations. The difficulty of delivering non-kinetic effects was compounded by the precarious intelligence

1457 See Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 240-245; Christian Tripodi (2021). *The Unknown Enemy: Counterinsurgency and the illusion of control.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 165-167.

1458 See British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, section 3-3; Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 13; British army staff officer 3.

1459 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 328-332; Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 200-202.

1460 Interviews British commanding officer 15; British army staff officer 12; Catignani. Getting COIN, p. 526.

position and the scarcity of specialized personnel. Moreover, the inability of the PRT to accompany the troops on the ground further impeded influencing the population through non-kinetic means.[1461]

The rotation by 52 Brigade sought to make non-kinetic influence activities central to their operational design. Influence activities were integrated to the general staff-processes. To deliver influence activities at the battle group-level, Development, and Influence Teams (DITs) were established. The teams consisted of four individuals and encompassed a CIMIC and psyops-specialists, an engineer and an interpreter.[1462] However, such personnel were scarce and so to fill this gap, Non-Kinetic Effects Teams (NKET's) were established. The NKETs were two-man teams, repurposed from their organic tasks within the battle group or company.[1463] As a result, junior personnel found themselves conducting information operations and "CIMIC-lite".[1464] Given that these soldiers were not specifically trained for these roles, their effectiveness often varied.[1465] These non-kinetic activities were to be guided by the analysis from TCAF.

Whereas TCAF was quickly discarded, the NKETs and other associated adaptations endured. Company commanders were "encouraged" to establish NKETs, but the practical employment of the NKETs differed in each unit. Not only was implementation contingent on the aptitude of the soldiers executing these additional tasks, but also on the importance that the commanders awarded to the non-kinetic activities.[1466]

There was some further capability within TFH to conduct non-kinetic activities. Members from the Media Operations Group (MOG) and 15 Psychological Operations Group (POG) were embedded in the task force. Officers from the MOG were essentially facilitating journalists. Their remit was to coordinate messaging on the British activities through formal media but to have inherently no direct influence on the content itself.[1467] A particular example of this is the initiative to bring in Arab media for Operation Mar Karadad in an attempt to convey how the British forces were operating in Afghanistan and thus influence the wider Muslim audience's perception.[1468]

1461 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_2.

1462 DSTL. (2010). *Delivering Strategic Communications and Influence in Afghanistan: A UK Perspective.* London; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_2

1463 Commander British Forces Op HERRICK 7. (2008). *Counterinsurgency in Helmand Task Force Operational Design.* Lashkar Gah, p. A-1.

1464 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh, p. 4.

1465 Interviews British commanding officer 2; British army staff officer 7.

1466 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_5.

1467 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_15.

1468 Steve Tatham (2009). Tactical Strategic Communication!Placing Informational Effect at the Centre of Command. *Small Wars Journal*, p. 8.

In contrast, the "Information Activities & Outreach" (IA&O) process was more proactive as it sought to influence the perception of the Helmand population. Through target audience analysis, bespoke messaging should be created to influence attitudes and behavior.[1469] The resulting messages were mostly disseminated through leaflets and radio broadcasts; ISAF set up Radio Tamadoon in Helmand, this station featuring music, news, and education in Pashtu. Radio Tamadoon was considered an effective medium as it reached an audience of 1.5 million listeners. Still, the British Army recognized that the insurgents were more effective in sharing their messages by using mobile phones and social media.[1470]

A further adaptation was the establishment of Female Engagement Teams (FETs) in 2010. This move was not based on a perceived capability deficiency by the British forces but had been the result of diktat from ISAF headquarters that every task force should deploy a FET.[1471] The twin ideas underpinning this development were that female soldiers could interact with the Afghan population in a different fashion than their male counterparts and that FETs would give (better) access to Afghan women and children. Through the FETs ISAF would be better positioned to understand local dynamics and subsequently influence the local population.[1472]

The British Army adopted the FET-concept and endeavored to deploy four teams on each rotation. Initially, the FETs were prepared by the MSSG. In-theater, the FETs were to establish contacts with local communities, which could then be followed up by an MSST.[1473] However, it proved hard to recruit female soldiers who could conduct foot patrols in Helmand in sufficient numbers.[1474] Instead, commanders scrounged for female troops who were regularly beyond the wire for other tasks. As such, these soldiers were performing a secondary task without sufficient preparation.[1475]

In practice therefore, the initial FETs proved to be less effective than envisioned. An important deficiency that was identified was that the FETs required a female interpreter. To ameliorate this, FET members should enroll in a ten-week Pashtu course. Furthermore, they had to be proficient in basic close combat skills and receive cultural training. A further consideration was that the battle group commanders to which they were attached had to get used to this new capability.[1476] Given the specific training requirements for the FETs, there was limited

1469 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_2.

1470 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_17.

1471 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London, p. 6.

1472 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London, p. 2

1473 Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Joint Doctrine Note 11/08 Female Engagement Team.* London, p. 4.

1474 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_4.

1475 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London

1476 Brigitte Rohwerder (2015). *Lessons from Female Engagement Teams.* Birmingham: GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services, p. 4-5.

time to integrate with the battle group during the pre-deployment training. By 2012, DCSU had become responsible for the training of new FET-members, which made sense due to the linguistic and cultural training requirements.[1477] Although in the end the FETs were largely unable to engage with women in rural Helmand, the British Army considered this capability successful in engaging with children. As such, the Herrick Campaign Study recommended to assess the requirement for FETs for new operations.[1478]

In 2012, during Herrick 12, non-kinetic effects were integrated with kinetic targeting in the Joint Effects Cell in the TFH-staff. This cell was commanded by an artillery officer who by definition would be more well versed in kinetic effects. Within this cell, a lieutenant-colonel oversaw information operations. This section encompassed information operations, the CULADs and a PSYOPs element.[1479] This integration was an improvement, as now non-kinetic effects were to be considered throughout the targeting process.[1480] However, there was an inherent tension between the temporal dimensions of immediate kinetic strikes and more ambiguous 'soft effects'. Moreover, there was a lack of understanding among commanders and staff officers on how to integrate IA&O in planning and operations.[1481]

Despite the increased attention for "Information Activities and Outreach" as the Helmand campaign progressed, its effectiveness was curtailed by three fundamental deficiencies (see table 5.10). A first issue was of course the limited understanding of the environment through which influence activities could be directed. Secondly, the personnel involved in these 'non-kinetic' roles were largely "enthusiastic amateurs". As there was no real career path in the British Army for specialists in information or psychological operations, there was no incentive for soldiers to invest in these skills.[1482] Furthermore, staff officers responsible for integrating IA&O with kinetic effects were naturally better acquainted with the latter.[1483] Finally, ISAF struggled with the vectors through which to apply non-kinetic activities and messaging; essentially, this was limited to leaflets, radio broadcasts and formal (Western) media.[1484] Officers involved in IA&O stated that Helmand's information environment was underdeveloped in the sense that formal media outlets were scarce. At the same time, they recognized that British capabilities were immature, as they for instance lacked the ability to leverage social media.[1485] The combination of these factors meant that non-kinetic IA&O was

1477 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London, p. 6.

1478 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_4.

1479 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_5

1480 Interviews British army staff officer 12; British commanding officer 10.

1481 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_6.

1482 Ibidem, p. 5-3_8.

1483 Interview British army staff officer 12; British Army staff officer 25

1484 Andrew Mackay and Steve Tatham (2012). *The Effectiveness of US Military Information Operations in Afghanistan 2001-2010: Why RAND missed the point.* Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom., p.2.

1485 British army staff officer 12; British army staff officer 19; British commanding officer 13

limited in its effectiveness throughout Operation Herrick. Although these deficiencies were identified, they could not be resolved during the campaign.

Non-kinetic effects	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Integrating non-kinetic effects	Increased attention, lack of capacity and capability	Recognized deficiency, limited formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture
Specialized personnel for non-kinetic effects	At best associated task for personnel, reservist units	Recognized deficiency	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics; no real anchor point
Employing non-kinetic activities at tactical level	Non-kinetic Effects Teams	Limited formal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture; no anchor point in organization

Table 5.10: Learning processes on non-kinetic activities during the Helmand campaign

5.3.4.4: Counter-IED efforts

The British Army had prior experience with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Northern Ireland and Iraq. The longevity of operations in Northern Ireland had led to a highly qualified cadre of Ammunition Technical Officers (ATOs) and Explosive Ordinance Disposal Teams. Here, the threat was technologically sophisticated IED that generally were targeted at security forces or specific individuals. [1486]

Although there was significant institutional knowledge on IEDs, this was concentrated in the British Army with the EOD and ATOs. Moreover, the British Counter-IED capability was focused on domestic aid to "civil power," a legacy of operations in Northern Ireland. As such, the British Army faced difficulties when it had to deploy counter-IED capabilities concurrently to both Iraq and Afghanistan when this threat proliferated. By 2006, just two Counter-IED teams were available in Helmand, with four being deployed in Iraq. With the expanding of TFH and the wide area of operations, these teams were hard pressed. [1487]

1486 See Cochrane. *British Approach to IEDD*.

1487 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_1.

Yet the threat posed by IEDs was not manifested from the outset of the campaign. Initially, the main emphasis was on repelling insurgent attacks on platoon houses and foiling ambushes. Taliban tactics adapted after the violent summer of 2006 and more extensive use was made of IEDs.[1488] The first British fatality due to an IED strike occurred in October 2006. ISAF data reveals that the number of IEDs (both discovered and exploded) were relatively few in number in 2006 and 2007 but then showed a steady increase. In July 2008, the number of incidents reached over a hundred per month, after which the increase accelerated to multiple hundreds per month. [1489]

A marked difference with the IED threat in Northern Ireland and Iraq was that in Afghanistan the devices were of a lesser level of technological sophistication. In Helmand, most devices were crude contraptions with either unexploded ordinance or home-made explosives (HME). However, this lack of sophistication did not diminish their lethality nor insurgent proficiency in utilizing IEDs to significant effect. If anything, the relative simplicity of the IED s fostered their proliferation.[1490] Furthermore, most IEDs in Helmand were victim-operated by pressure plates, which meant that jamming equipment was ineffective.[1491] There was thus a mismatch between the small number of highly trained ATOs and EOD operators and the increasing numbers of crude yet lethal IEDs in Helmand.

To make up for this deficiency of trained personnel, ATOs and EOD operators trained engineers to destroy discovered IEDs instead of the more intricate process of neutralizing the devices. The trade-off of this expedient was that this destroyed potential forensic evidence that could be used to target the networks responsible for these devices.[1492] Furthermore, the British troops adapted TTPs to search for IEDs and thus mitigate the threat. These drills, colloquially known as "Operation Barma" included sweeping roads with "Vallon" metal detectors and probing probable IED-locations. The natural effect of this was that the British troops were restricted in their mobility and lines of communication.[1493] Additionally, insurgents successfully fixed troops at their patrol bases by emplacing IEDs at the approaches to these locations.[1494] Not only did the IED threat thus pose risks to the troops, but it also hindered their ability to engage with the local population.[1495] To make matters worse, the insurgents became more adept in their use of IEDs by removing metal contents, which made

1488 Thomas Johnson (2013). Taliban Adaptations and Innovations. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 24(1), p. 5-6.

1489 See ISAF data IEDs in Helmand in *Herrick Campaign Study*, p.3-6-E_1.

1490 Interviews British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 24.

1491 In 2010-2011, around 80 percent was victim-operated, see Campaign Study, p. 3-6_F-1.

1492 Interview British army warrant officer 1

1493 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 342.

1494 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_3

1495 British army warrant officer 1; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_4.

them even harder to discover by metal detectors. British troops struggled to adapt to this development.[1496]

The sheer volume of IEDs in Helmand is exemplified by the official numbers of related incidents involving UK personnel: 5,313 from 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014. When including the number of incidents that involved civilians, Afghan security forces and other coalition members, this number would be significantly higher.[1497] Furthermore, explosions (mostly IED-related) accounted for over half of battle injuries that were admitted to the field hospital at Camp Bastion throughout the Helmand Campaign.[1498] By January 2008, close to 80 percent of the deaths in action of British service members were caused by IEDs.[1499]

In Helmand, the Army had initially deployed WMIK's and Snatch jeeps under the assumption that it would be a stabilization mission and that the limited road network would not support heavier vehicles.[1500] Due to the heavy fighting and emergent IED threat, the MoD recognized that armored vehicles were needed for the Afghan theater and ordered additional Mastiffs and other variants in the summer of 2006.[1501] Although this deficiency was swiftly identified and acted upon, the concurrent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan complicated the delivery of the vehicles in quantity.[1502] Moreover, spare parts were scarce and by the end of 2007, less than half Mastiff's in Helmand were serviceable.[1503] In October 2008, the secretary for Defence announced a further investment of over 500 million pounds for new vehicles.[1504] Multiple variants of armored vehicles, with a V-shaped hull that protected against IED-blasts from below, were bought off the shelf. Ranging from the nimble "Jackal" for reconnaissance tasks to the highly protected "Wolfhound" for transport, the UK acquired a suite of vehicles colloquially known as the "Dogs of War" due to their names.[1505] Over time, thousands of these vehicles were deployed to Helmand. Given their high level of protection, the "Dogs of War" undoubtedly saved many lives. As such, the second order effects of lagging conceptual embedding, instruction before deployment and maintenance issues can be perceived as

1496 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_4; Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army warrant officer 1.

1497 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Background Quality Report: Improvised Explosive Device (IED) events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014*. London, p. 1.

1498 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Types of Injuries Sustained by UK Service Personnel on Op HERRICK in Afghanistan, April 2006 to 30 November 2014*. London, p. 6.

1499 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6-A_1.

1500 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 201-202.

1501 House of Commons. (2007, October 23). Defence - Minutes of Evidence. London, Q90.

1502 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-2_3.

1503 See LWC. *Post Operation Interview Herrick 7.*

1504 House of Commons. (2008, Octobner 29). Written Ministerial Statements: Defence National Recognition Study Report - Government Response. London.

1505 Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 360-365.

minor hindrances. Still, such ramifications increased additional pressure on the over-stretched Army.[1506]

Naturally, the proliferating threat, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, propelled the need to address IEDs into the spotlight. The mounting casualties garnered political attention as well and centered largely on the requirement of protective measures.[1507] Indeed, the parliamentary opposition used deficiencies in force protection to highlight government incompetence. As a result, force protection became a political topic in itself, and a focal point for the Helmand campaign in the domestic political debate.[1508] Given the urgency awarded to protecting the force, the bills of associated costs (mainly through Urgent Operational Requirements, UORs) were swiftly footed.[1509]

Within the Ministry of Defence itself, the mounting casualties led to an extensive review, mandated by PJHQ. The resulting Burley Review indicated that the IED threat had to be tackled in a comprehensive manner. American counter-IED task forces in Iraq ("Troy") and Afghanistan ("Paladin") were seen as examples.[1510] While the acquisition of new vehicles with enhanced protection and the development of new TTPs were helping to save lives, these measures were only reactive in character. Moreover, given the increased use of IEDs and the evolution of enemy tactics, the review team assessed that the protective assets and TTPs would be overwhelmed by 2009 and would cause unsustainable casualties. Instead, a shift was needed towards a more offensive posture to neutralize the insurgent networks that produced the IEDs. [1511]

The Burley Review thus advocated an overhaul and reinforcement of the Army's counter-IED capability. This became an integral part of Operation Entirety. At an institutional level, the Counter-IED effort was overseen by a major-general at the Army Headquarters, with a direct line to the Vice-Chief of Defence Staff. Throughout the Army the various capabilities were coordinated to support the deployed forces in Helmand.[1512] One of the most fundamental changes envisioned by the Burley Review was that Counter-IED was no longer a 'specialist' task but an 'all-arms' activity. As such, the international counter-IED doctrine was embraced. This consisted of three primary pillars: "prepare the force; attack the network; defeat the device".

1506 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-2_2

1507 See House of Commons Defence Committee. (2007, May 11). The Army's requirement for armoured vehicles: the FRES programme: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2006–07 HC 511. London; House of Commons Defence Committee. (2009, July 16). Helicopter Capability Eleventh Report of Session 2008–09 HC 434. London.

1508 Mark Clegg (2016). Protecting British Soldiers in Afghanistan. *RUSI Journal*, *157*(3), p. 25-28.

1509 See for example: House of Commons. (2009, February 23). Afghanistan (Troop Deployment) Volume 488: debated on Monday 23 February 2009. London; National Audit Office. (2009). *Support to High Intensity Operations*. London, p. 8-9.

1510 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 343.

1511 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6-A_1.

1512 Ibidem, p. 3-6_J-2

These pillars were to be supported by a foundation of "understanding and intelligence".[1513] Furthermore, two new regimental headquarters were established to generate EOD capability for deployment, and additional personnel were trained for intelligence exploitation. [1514]

To meet these requirements in-theater, a counter-IED Task Force was assembled throughout 2009 and formally established in November that year. This new element integrated various capabilities in the fight against IEDs. With this new task force, every battle group gained specialized EOD teams and advanced search teams.[1515] Other capabilities included the establishment of military working dogs' regiment under operation Entirety for search purposes and the introduction of new controlled vehicles. [1516] Furthermore, TFH had scientific advisers from DSTL who could experiment in the field with potential solutions. Although their remit was broader than just IEDs, this was largely their focus. In 2009, a testing facility for counter-IED solutions was opened at Camp Bastion.[1517]

Beyond these efforts, the Afghan security forces that were mentored by the British troops received additional training in Counter-IED drills. With the continuing ISAF retrenchment, the Afghan forces were increasingly at the forefront of operations and vulnerable against IEDs. Yet, the training of the Afghan forces on this subject lagged woefully behind, however, as the Afghans lacked technologically sophisticated assets. The focus therefore gradually shifted to training on low-tech solutions that could be sustained after ISAF had left. [1518] Finally, the latest experiences concerning IEDs were disseminated to the UK, to be incorporated into the predeployment training. Still, the adherence to the trained TTPs remained a weak point well into the campaign.[1519]

The most important shift in counter-IED efforts was the focus on intelligence exploitation. Forensic evidence gleaned from debris or discovered IEDs was used to identify individuals who had fabricated and placed them. This information was then fused with intelligence from other sources to understand and map the networks responsible for the IEDs. In turn, the intelligence was used to drive targeting operations to dismantle these networks.[1520] This modus operandi aligned with TFH-wide shift to "front-footed precision" and was supported by the increased intelligence efforts.[1521]

1513 Ibidem, p. 3-6_2.

1514 Ibidem, p. 3-6-B_1.

1515 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6-A_2.

1516 Ibidem, p. 3-6_15.

1517 Interview British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

1518 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_19.

1519 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_16.

1520 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_13/14; Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 343-344.

1521 Interviews British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23; British army staff officer 11.

Undoubtedly, the improvements regarding Counter-IED efforts were profound and saved many lives over the years (see table 5.11).[1522] Still, the IED remained the weapon of choice for the insurgent as it was successful in constraining the activities by coalition forces. The number of IED incidents peaked in July 2011 with more than 900 incidents in Helmand alone. Although the numbers decreased after this, the numbers remained consistently high (oscillating between 700 and 200) and never returned to the lower volumes of 2006-2008.[1523] While a significant decrease is visible in 2013 for incidents involving British personnel, this can be attributed to their drawdown and reducing of patrols.[1524] By and large, these numbers are thus indicative of both the efficacy of the IEDs itself as well as the continued potency of the insurgency in Helmand.

Counter-IED	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Developing and sharing new TTPs	Immediate adaptation by troops in the field and quick dissemination by training establishment	Informal and formal adaptation	Organizational culture, resource allocation, learning and dissemination mechanisms
Materiel acquisition	"Dogs of War"- vehicles	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, domestic politics,
Comprehensive countermeasures and knowledge sharing	Establishment of C-IED task force	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 5.11: Learning processes on counter-IED during the Helmand campaign

5.3.5: Sub conclusion

The British effort in Helmand was marred from the outset by a lack of understanding and an under-resourced yet over-ambitious campaign plan. Moreover, the initial campaign plan was immediately discarded by the first rotation in Helmand as a result of the pressures posed by the local dynamics. The jettisoning of the initial campaign plan was not redressed, as each incoming brigade brought a distinct plan for its own rotation which precluded any continuity beyond six months. In part this haphazard approach was driven by the regimental cultures, which entailed nuanced distinctions. PJHQ was initially unable to impose a new, feasible campaign on the early TFH rotations. In part, this can be explained by the violent character of the operation in which the British forces struggled to control their enlarged area of operations. A first adaptation thus was the gradual yet consistent increase in troop

1522 See Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 344.

1523 See ISAF data IEDs in Helmand in British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p.3-6-E_1.

1524 Ministry of Defence. *IED events*, p. 4.

numbers, from 3,000 in 2006 up to 10,000 in 2009. This was made possible by the concurrent withdrawal from Iraq. Yet, this growth in troop levels was unable to hold cleared areas, let alone develop them. Moreover, as the British were unable to withdraw from peripheral districts, TFH had to repeatedly conduct new clearance operations. Beyond the futility of this approach, such operations had an adverse effect on escalating the violence in Helmand and impaired the perception of the international effort by its population. More resources were needed, but due to the growing unpopularity of the Afghanistan campaign, the cabinet was unwilling send further reinforcements, despite public requests for further reinforcements by generals and the Americans.

A further fundamental flaw in the campaign was the lack of a working assessment process that informed commanders of the effect of their activities and could guide their plans. The Army did not adopt the informal initiative of the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework; moreover, the later Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme was predominantly used by the PRT and had little effect on the military operations. As such, this deficiency in understanding the effect of operations was not addressed.

As the campaign made little lasting progress from 2006 to 2009, various adaptations were initiated to address deficiencies. These areas included training, doctrine, intelligence, non-kinetic activities, and interagency cooperation. Although some of these adaptations were successful, they were often impeded by a lack of central guidance. The primary exception to this situation was measures pertaining to force protection such as counter-IED efforts and the acquisition of protective vehicles. Protecting troops from harm was not only a prime consideration within the MoD, but also garnered significant political attention. Through bottom-up development of new TTPs and the procurement of vehicles and other equipment via the Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) process, these problems were gradually addressed.

The most dramatic adaptation by the British Army leadership was of course Operation Entirety. This focused the army on Helmand, recognizing that the campaign was not properly resourced. As such, Operation Entirety took the calculated risk that by focusing singularly on Helmand, diminishing the Army's ability to prepare for other contingencies. "Entirety" affected the mission preparation of the units earmarked for deployment and instigated a learning process that more fully exploited the experiences from theater. Moreover, through the establishment of the Force Development and Training Command, the army now had a conduit to implement formal and informal adaptations. For instance, the writing of a new counterinsurgency doctrine was reinvigorated and an initiative to recruit and train cultural advisers was formally adopted. Other adaptations were the establishment of the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre Afghanistan and the Military Stabilisation Support Group.

The initiation of Operation Entirety was both necessary and impressive, as it overcame substantial organizational barriers. That it was implemented at all was a testament to the forceful advocacy of senior individuals. Still, even this program did not fully address deficiencies as the lack of campaign continuity. Despite the recognition that the campaign would benefit from longer command and staff rotations, the schedule of brigade deployments was retained.

Finally, Operation Entirety had profound effects on how the army prepared for the mission and learned from it. The formal adaptations further improved the performance of the British troops in Helmand. Yet, the extent that these adaptations had genuinely affected the mission itself is doubtful. The deployment of a large contingent of US Marines in 2009 had a more profound effect on Helmand and the campaign. This enabled the British forces to concentrate on central Helmand and engage in further capacity building and development. Furthermore, the implementation of a new Helmand Plan that was supported in Whitehall and aligned with a reinvigorated ISAF was now made feasible. Despite, or perhaps due to, the saturation of the province by security forces, Helmand remained one of the most violent areas of Afghanistan. As a direct result, the British forces continued to engage the insurgents until the end of the mission to allow for the transition to Afghan authorities and security forces. Although more emphasis was placed on non-kinetic activities in TFH, these capabilities were remained relatively underdeveloped compared to kinetic operations.

5.4: Institutionalization

5.4.1: Evaluation and Army 2020

5.4.1.1: The OP Herrick Campaign Study

As the British Army withdrew from Helmand after more than ten years of operations in Afghanistan, it took stock of its experiences. To this end, a campaign study was mandated by the commander of Force Development and Training in July 2013. The aim for the Herrick Campaign Study was to consolidate and prioritize the multitudes of tactical lessons from the Afghanistan mission. In addition to this aim, the study set out to capture lessons of enduring relevance for future conflict and force development.[1525] Underpinning these objectives were the ideas that the army will conduct counterinsurgency operations in the future and that experiences from Afghanistan had led to conceptual developments that would be useful for future conflict. At the same time, the campaign study's foreword acknowledged that all experiences from Operation Herrick would be relevant for retention.[1526]

1525 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. v.

1526 Ibidem, p. iii.

A writing team was assembled from the Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC). As the LXC had organized the Mission Exploitation Symposia, oversaw the DLIMS-database, and had conducted the Post-Operation Interviews with commanders, it was understood to be the repository of experiences from the campaign in the British Army. In addition to these sources, scores of further interviews were conducted.[1527] The writing team started its work in September 2013. Thus, the review of the tactical lessons commenced while the mission was still ongoing. The rationale behind this timing was that the experiences were collected while still fresh.[1528]

The vast amount of data was divided into functional areas and capabilities. The lessons identified and best practices were 'peer reviewed' by more than 30 "military judgment panels" to ensure coherence and forward them into the MoD's learning process for action. Besides input from within the British Army, the Royal Marines and the Royal Air Force contributed to the lessons. In all, over 700 lessons identified were captured and processed.[1529] A selection of these lessons were included in the campaign study. The upper echelons of the army and the MoD then vetted the drafts of this document, and additional comments were sought from the commanders of TFH.[1530]

The Operation Herrick Campaign Study was published in March 2015 by the Land Warfare Centre as an internal document.[1531] The resulting document is a vast tome of lessons identified, learned and best practices for a military audience. As a campaign post-mortem, the study was a continuation of the evaluations that had been written by the army after operations in Northern Ireland and Iraq. The contents of the campaign study reflect the division of lessons into the categories of functional capabilities, notably chapters on Command; Combat; Combat Support and Combat Service Support. In addition to these chapters, more specific themes in relation to the campaign are addressed: pre-deployment training; equipment; lessons learned processes; doctrine, counter-IED and stabilization operations. Further attention was awarded to Operation Entirety and its effects.[1532]

Throughout the study, best practices are highlighted that emerged from both informal and formal adaptations. Examples of these adaptations were the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre, the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit, and the Battle Group Intelligence Support Detachments.[1533] At the same time enduring organizational deficiencies were acknowledged.

1527 Interviews British army staff officer 6; British army staff officer 9.

1528 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. V.

1529 Ibidem, p. V; Interview British army staff officer 6.

1530 Interview British army staff officer 6.

1531 Since then, a redacted declassified version has been made available to the public through the Freedom of Information Act.

1532 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxv-xlv.

1533 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study* see, p. 3-1_6; 6-9_1.

For instance, counter-IED capabilities and Information Activities & Outreach and capacity building were identified as areas that had developed over the course of the mission. However, as the Helmand campaign had been concluded, the army now had to ensure that these capabilities were further professionalized and integrated in the organizational structure.[1534]

To be sure, the Campaign Study (and by extension the British Army) recognized that not all experiences or lessons from Operation Herrick were relevant for retention or useful in future operations. Indeed, the study explicitly states that the army needs to recalibrate after the prolonged Afghanistan campaign to be ready for other types of operations. The most prominent aspect of the mission that was perceived as specific to Afghanistan was the limited tactical capabilities of the insurgency. This is not to say that the British Army did not have a professional respect for the fighting abilities of the Taliban. However, the Afghan insurgents lacked air-support and had a "rudimentary indirect fire" capability. Such differences in capabilities meant that the British forces could maintain large headquarters and other static positions, whereas a potential future adversary might well enjoy a parity or even an advantage in technological assets.[1535] As British troops had operated in an environment where they had an overwhelming advantage in firepower and protective measures for over a decade, the army was aware that it had to reacquire the knowledge and skills to work under more austere conditions.[1536] Moreover, the campaign study asserted that the emphasis on force protection in Helmand, in particular due to IEDs, had driven a change in TTPs that minimized risks to the troops and fostered a defensive mindset. This risk aversion in both the public and military spheres threatened the readiness of the army for future conflicts. Therefore, the army should engage in a public debate to address this risk-threshold and thereby regain a more offensive outlook. [1537]

Of course, the campaign study has its inherent limitations as an evaluation. First of all, it was published as an internal document by the British Army and assesses the experiences of the organization in order to retain the relevant lessons for the army's future use. In combination with its comprehensive scope on how the Afghanistan mission had affected the army, it makes for an unwieldy and esoteric document.[1538] Secondly, and more fundamentally, it did not seek to draw up a verdict of the Helmand Campaign and was by design limited to tactical lessons.[1539] Still, on occasion, the study criticizes the prosecution of the mission by the army as an institution. Particular points of critique were the absence of clear campaign objectives,

1534 Ibidem, see sections: 3-6; 5-3; and 2-4.

1535 Ibidem, p. 2-1_1.

1536 Ibidem, p. xxix.

1537 Ibidem, p. 2-1_2.

1538 Interview British army staff officer 9; British commanding officer 7; including annexes, the document numbers over 600 pages.

1539 Interview British army staff officer 4; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. p. 1-1_2.

convoluted British (and Allied) command relationships and the inability to impose campaign continuity between the rotations.[1540]

Still, a higher-level evaluation on the prosecution of the campaign, its plans and the performance of the army (or the MoD) in resourcing the mission was warranted. According to some external and internal observers, the inability to publish a critical post-mortem of the campaign reflected the unwillingness of the armed forces to address structural issues in its organization.[1541] Of course, on the political level, the initiation of the Helmand mission had been questioned by the Chilcot inquiry, but this latter study was primarily in the context of the Iraq war. Unfortunately, an official historical reconstruction of the Helmand Campaign has been deferred to an undisclosed future date.[1542]

Ultimately, the Operation Herrick Campaign Study is a candid and comprehensive evaluation for the British Army's activities at the tactical level. It recognized the tension between the need of knowledge retention of lessons from counterinsurgency operations in Helmand while recalibrating the British Army for new challenges such as conventional combat.[1543] New plans and policy for the army after Helmand would indicate the extent to which this tension would be addressed.

5.4.1.2: Strategic Defence and Security Review and Army 2020

The foundations of the British Army after the Helmand mission were laid in 2010 with the publication of a National Security Strategy (NSS) and a new Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Where the NSS-document detailed the strategic environment end the UK's interests at the time, the SDSR should provide its strategic ways and means.[1544] The strategic analysis in 2010 was one of the first outputs of the National Security Council that had been installed by the new coalition government of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. This new forum for sought to enhance cross-government decision making for national security and thus address the strategic deficiencies that had manifested in the political preludes towards Iraq and Afghanistan under the previous Labour-governments.[1545] The NSS itself recognized four main threats to the UK's interests: international terrorism;

1540 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_1 - 1-1_5.

1541 See Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 158-159; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*. p. 159-160; interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1542 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2014, March 26). Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2013–14 HC 1175. London, p. 10-11; interview British civil servant 1.

1543 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 2-1_1.

1544 Paul Cornish (2010). *Evaluating the 2010 Strategy Review*. Chatham House: London, p. 3.

1545 See HM Government. (2010). *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy* . London p. 5; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 164.

cyber-attack; international crises and major accidents or natural hazards.[1546] According to the NSS, the ongoing operations in Afghanistan were still primarily conducted to counter the threat of international terrorism.[1547] However, the main challenge for the UK as outlined in the NSS was to bring the "nation's finances to a sustainable footing." Therefore, considerations of national security had to be aligned to the financial constraints.[1548] To make matters worse, acquisition projects and spending on operations had left the Ministry of Defence with a budget deficit of 38 billion pounds.[1549]
Where the NSS sketched the strategic context and the UK's interests, the SDSR should present how the UK opted to respond to this. According to the coalition government, a new SDSR had been long overdue as the last had been issued in 1998.[1550] Beyond the shift in strategic context in the intervening twelve years, the British government had to grapple with the fall-out of the financial crisis as emphasized in the NSS. Within these parameters, the SDSR delineated how the Ministry of Defence should be structured to meet contemporary challenges. Yet, the SDSR held disparate views on the roles of the three services in the strategic environment. The army would continue to focus on Operation Herrick, while the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were poised to procure and integrate new equipment from long term acquisition processes. Respectively, the costly acquisition of two new aircraft carriers and the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35) meant that these two services had to scrap other capabilities such as the Fleet Air Arm, amphibious ships, air mobility and ISR-assets. Consequently, the RN and RAF mortgaged their ability to support stabilization mission and more narrowly focused on force projection and potential interstate conflict.[1551]

Although the SDSR stated that the government would continue to resource operations in Afghanistan until the end of the mission in 2014, the Army had to look beyond Helmand for its future structure. It had to retain to function as a deterrent and if necessary, fight conventional wars. Still, foreign interventions and stabilization missions were the primary task for the army according to the SDSR. To sustain a continuous brigade-level commitment, the army would be structured around five multi-role brigades that could operate across the spectrum of conflict. Areas of investment included counter-IED capability and the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG). Capabilities that were to be reduced included main battle tanks and artillery.[1552] Given these propositions, the experiences from Afghanistan seemed to be incorporated into the strategic vision for the army by the British government and Ministry of Defence. A more incidental side effect of the operations in Afghanistan was that equipment that had been acquired for the mission, in particular the array of protective

1546 HM Government. *A Strong Britain*, p. 11.

1547 Ibidem, p, 13.

1548 Ibidem, p. 14.

1549 Malcolm Chalmers (2011). Keeping our powder dry? UK Defence policy beyond Afghanistan. *RUSI Journal*, 156(1), p. 21

1550 HM Government. (2010). *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review.* London, p. 9.

1551 Cornish. *Evaluating the Security Review*, p. 7-8; Chalmers. Keeping our powder dry? p. 20-21.

1552 HM Government. *SDSR 2010*, p. 24-25.

vehicles, had to be integrated into the army; moreover, the army now had to sustain this fleet from its own resources. Despite the vow that operations in Afghanistan would not be affected by the need to balance the budget, reports emerged in early 2011 that the army would lose some 20 per cent of its personnel strength. Its numbers would decrease from around 100,000 to 82,000.[1553]

The British Army itself conducted a review into its future structure with these considerations in mind under the name Army 2020 "to meet the security challenges of the 2020s and beyond". General Nick Carter led this effort. Initially published in July 2012, it confirmed that regular troop strength would be reduced to 82,000. While this meant that thousands of soldiers would be declared redundant, this would not lead to the disbanding of traditional regiments (or cap badges). Still, the army would be reduced by 23 regular units.[1554] As the army acknowledged that with this personnel numbers, it would not be able to perform all its tasks, the army opted to fully integrate its reserve component. To compensate for the decrease in regular forces, the reserves had to be increased from 14,000 to 30,000 by 2018. In this way the force levels Reservist could augment the army as individuals or in formed-up units.[1555] Beyond merely filling in gaps left by regular troops, the idea was that reserve could be recruited for such specialist roles as cyber operation, stabilization, and capacity building. In this way, the army could acquire necessary expertise without having to replicate the training processes.[1556] In Helmand, such specialists had already been deployed in a psyops, stabilization or other capacities.

The conceptual groundwork for the restructuring of Army 2020 was laid in the "Future Land Operating Concept", published in May 2012 by the DCDC. At the core of the document was the uncompromising requirement for land forces to excel at warfighting." Accordingly, the Army must be able to function as a deterrent and if that fails "be ready to apply lethal force to set the conditions for political progress". [1557] It recognized that potential adversaries would use hybrid threats to confront the UK. Therefore, understanding of conflicts and the operational environment was a primary underpinning idea of the concept. Furthermore, the Army must be able to generate influence and contribute to the UK's soft power in coordination with the other government departments.[1558] Perhaps the most striking aspect of this document was that it recognized that large scale interventions would not be palatable to the British public or politicians after the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan. Although the army must still

1553 Sean Rayment (2011, February 19). Army facing huge cuts after withdrawal from Afghanistan. *The Telegraph*

1554 British Army. (2012). *Transforming the British Army, July 2012: Modernising to face an unpredictable* . London, p. 7.

1555 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 2-8. Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Future Reserves 2020: The Independent Commission to Review the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces*. London, p. 12.

1556 Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Future Reserves 2020: The Independent Commission to Review the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces*. London, p. 25-26.

1557 Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Concept Note 2/12: Future Land Operating Concept*. London), p.vi.

1558 Ibidem, p. vii.

be able to conduct interventions of scale, the FLOC proposed to invest in capacity building for stabilization purposes. Through this long term "Defence Engagement", the British Army could develop enduring relations, acquire a better understanding of the environment, help prevent conflicts and promote the UK's values abroad.[1559] Overall, the British Army needed to integrate other capabilities like cyber and other non-kinetic effects, collaborate with other government agencies and provide security for stabilization and counterinsurgency operations.[1560]

In Army 2020, like the SDSR and the Future Land Operating Concept, stabilization missions were still presented as the most foreseeable task. If tensions in a region would conflagrate into a conflict, the British Army could then intervene through its high readiness reaction force. This would be a stabilization operation with a force configuration not too dissimilar from Helmand. Yet, through "persistent engagement" the British Army sought to contribute to international stability before an open conflict. Of course, this was preferable over a costly intervention, and this aligned with the emphasis on "Defence Engagement" in the FLOC. With "upstream capacity building," relatively small numbers of troops could assist in conflict prevention through, for instance, security sector reform. To be effective, the army proposed to invest in language and cultural training and align units (brigades) with specific regions in the world. In this way, units would acquire a better understanding of the environment.[1561]

To enable this operating concept of persistent engagement, changes to the force structure were made based on the lessons from Afghanistan. For instance, the army aimed to institutionalize "the integration of 'soft effect' into manoeuvre." Furthermore, it had to organize for inter-agency integration.[1562] To this end, a Security Assistance Group was established (see section 5.4.3.3) This brigade level formation would encompass inter-agency cooperation, capacity-building and non-kinetic effect delivery.[1563] Elements from this new formation could augment the staffs of regular units to integrate their capabilities with manoeuvre. Another area that warranted additional consideration was intelligence and understanding. Drawing on the experiences of Afghanistan, an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Brigade was established. This formation integrated military intelligence battalions, the LIFC and further ISR-capabilities. These and other specialist and combat support formations were to be organized into a Force Troops Command (equivalent to a division).[1564] To be sure, these changes were relatively modest within the restructuring of the British Army in response to the SDSR of 2010. Yet, they also form an indication that

1559 Ibidem, 4-16/4-17.

1560 Ibidem, 4-20/22

1561 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 2.

1562 Ibidem, p. 2.

1563 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 11.

1564 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades*. Andover, p. 4-7.

interagency cooperation, non-kinetic effects, and intelligence were areas that had been identified as being underdeveloped in Afghanistan and now required increased attention and small investment in a period of large reductions.

A final salient aspect of the Army 2020 reorganization was the importance awarded to the divisional level. Despite the envisaged reductions, the army wanted to retain the ability to deploy a division of three brigades and enablers for a short operation.[1565] With the establishment of additional specialist and combat support formations, divisional headquarters could serve as a core capability into which the more specialist elements could be integrated.[1566] Furthermore, the division headquarters was seen as the level of command that had the capacity and training to orchestrate the multitude of effects.[1567] To an extent this was a correction on the situation experienced with TFH where the brigade headquarters had to contend with an expansive span of control and multiple command relations.[1568] At the same time, it reversed the trend from Helmand in which responsibilities and capabilities were deferred to the brigade level and below. [1569]

In sum, the 2010 SDSR and the Army 2020 review yielded mixed results in institutionalizing the lessons from Afghanistan. Stabilization operations remained the primary task for the army. Indeed, this role was expanded with "Persistent Engagement" which saw the army deployed before and after a conflict for capacity building. Furthermore, specific capabilities were added to the army based on the experiences from Helmand such as the Security Assistance Group and the ISR-brigade. At the same time, the capacity of the army was dramatically reduced by 20.000 troops. This degraded the ability to engage in future protracted stabilization campaigns with the intensity of Helmand.

5.4.1.3: The 2015 SDSR and Army 2020 Refined

While the British Army was withdrawing from Afghanistan and in the process of restructuring along the lines of Army 2020, the strategic context shifted with the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the proxy war in Ukraine. Furthermore, the surprising battlefield successes of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria indicated that the turmoil in the Middle East was far from over. In this sense, it was fortuitous that the Conservative government was working on a new national security strategy and accompanying SDSR for 2015. Not surprisingly, the

1565 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 1.

1566 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2014, March 6). Future Army 2020 Ninth Report of Session 2013–14 HC 576. London, ev. 39.

1567 Royal United Services Institute. (2016, June 28). *Speech by General Nick Carter RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2016*. Retrieved from RUSI.org: https://rusi.org/events/conferences/rusi-land-warfare-conference-2016.

1568 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_8.

1569 Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 13.

events of 2014 affected the outlook of the new NSS. It identified four main challenges to the UK's security: "the increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability; the resurgence of state-based threats and intensifying wider state competition; the impact of technology, especially cyber threats; and wider technological developments and the erosion of the rules-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats."[1570] After the discrete interventions of the early 21st century the West - and thus the UK - had to newly contend with interstate rivalry. For the British armed forces, this meant a further emphasis on deterrence.[1571] Consequently, the budget would increase as the government vowed to meet the NATO agreement to spend 2 percent of the GDP on its armed forces.[1572]

With the strategic context sketched in the NSS, the 2015 SDSR went into more detail on how the UK would respond to this. For the armed forces, the government envisaged large investments in equipment with 178 billion pounds over the next decade. The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force would grow modestly with 700 personnel, while the army would not be reduced below the 82,000 cap from the previous SDSR.[1573] In order to confront a wider range of potential adversaries, thus including state actors, the SDSR stated the intention to develop a standing "Joint Force" for 2025. This Joint Force was to be comprised of 50,000 troops from across the three services. It consisted of a maritime task group centered around a new aircraft carrier, an air group of combat and support aircraft, a special forces task group and a division from the army.[1574]

For the British Army, the SDSR 2015 meant a further shift in focus. Where the previous SDSR and Army 2020 was geared towards reduction and to an extent institutionalizing the lessons from Helmand for future stabilization missions, the army now had to prepare to deploy a "war-fighting division". To field a division, it would acquire two new "strike brigades" based around new Ajax armored vehicles under development, along the existing two mechanized brigades.[1575] As the army would not grow, these "strike brigades" would be formed from existing units. The idea underpinning the new strike brigades was that the army needed a medium capability that was easier to deploy with lower logistical footprint and achieve decisive effects over long distances. It proposed to mix tracked Ajax-vehicles with wheeled Boxers and attached indirect fire support.[1576] However, what this entailed for

1570 HM Government. (2015). *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*. London, p. 17-22.

1571 HM Government *NSS and SDSR 2015*, p. 24.

1572 Ibidem, p. 27.

1573 Ibidem, p. 27.

1574 Ibidem, p. 29.

1575 Ibidem, p. 31.

1576 Nicholas Drummond 2020, April 8). *The Anatomy of Strike*. Retrieved March 3, 2022, from UK Land Power: https://uklandpower.com/2020/04/08/the-anatomy-of-strike/

the way the British Army would operate was not fully developed at the time. In essence it was an idea to fight a potential conventional foe without heavy vehicles as the inventory of Challenger-2 main battle tanks was further reduced.[1577] To develop this concept further, a Strike Experimentation Group was established at Warminster, consisting of an infantry battalion and a reconnaissance battalion.[1578]
The focus for the army now was explicitly on high intensity combat operations instead of stabilization missions. Yet, the SDSR 2015 fitted in with the earlier developments in which the Army needed to recalibrate from over a decade of large-scale counterinsurgency operations.[1579] What had changed with the NSS and SDSR was that the UK was conscious that interstate conflict was again a real possibility, for which the army had to prepare. The experience from Afghanistan were not always relevant in this new context.[1580] With the reduced capacity of the British Army and the dubious strategic effects of Iraq and Afghanistan, the UK in common with most of its allies opted for interventions with smaller footprints by deploying air power and special forces.[1581]

These new developments required some adjustments for the Army 2020 plans. Beyond the development of the strike brigades, the army felt that the most significant shift required relative to the SDSR 2015 was producing the ability to commit a division to a combat scenario. Of course, Army 2020 had already emphasized the divisional level of operations and smaller missions before and after conflict through "Persistent Engagement". General Nick Carter, by then Chief of the General Staff, stated that for the latter type of activities, the army needed bespoke units. [1582] For this, the army established the "Specialised Infantry Group". This new unit was built from four infantry battalions and were specifically geared towards capacity building training and advising partner forces. As these battalions consisted of mainly officers and NCOs, they were relatively small.[1583] Somewhat fortuitously, the establishment of the Security Assistance Group, now renamed 77 Brigade (see section 5.4.3.3), was further vindicated as the Ministry of Defence and parliament recognized the value of non-kinetic effect in inter-state competition.[1584] In the SDSR, 77 Brigade was even designated as the unit

1577 Peter Antill and Jeremy Smith (2017). The British Army in Transition:. *RUSI Journal*, *162*(3), p 53-54.

1578 House of Commons. (2016, December 15). Strategic Defence and Security Review - Army: Statement made on 15 December 2016 by Michael Fallon. London.

1579 Jeremy Mooney and John Crackett (2018). A Certain Reserve: Strategic Thinking and Britain's Army Reserve. *RUSI Journal*, *163*(4), p. 89.

1580 Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research. (2016). Being ready for warfighting at scale – lessons learned and today's challenges. *Ares & Athena*, *6*, p. 19.

1581 Malcolm Chalmers (2016). The 2015 SDSR in Context: From Boom to Bust – and Back Again? *RUSI Journal*, *161*(1), p. 8-9.

1582 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2016, June 14). Oral evidence: SDSR 2015 and the Army, HC 108. London, Q 3.

1583 House of Commons. (2016, December 15). Strategic Defence and Security Review - Army: Statement made on 15 December 2016 by Michael Fallon. London.

1584 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2016, June 14). Oral evidence: SDSR 2015 and the Army, HC 108. London, Q 91

for "counter hybrid warfare".[1585] Thus, as the strategic context shifted in 2014, the UK moved away from large scale interventions and counterinsurgency operations.

5.4.2: The legacy of Operation Entirety: Learning processes, doctrine, training

Operation Entirety had represented an overhaul of Army processes to support the Helmand Campaign. Although its effects were geared towards a specific mission and meant to be reversible, the British Army expected that through this experience, a dramatic intervention like Entirety would not be necessary in future campaigns.[1586] This section will explore the extent to which Operation Entirety and the Helmand campaign endure in processes of lessons exploitation, doctrine development and training.

5.4.2.1: Lessons exploitation and learning processes

Exploiting experiences from operations in Afghanistan was one of the primary drivers of Operation Entirety. The establishment of Force Development and Training Command (FDT) with its mandate and leadership by a lieutenant-general had been instrumental in overcoming internal stovepipes in the army to incorporate lessons across the organization. The tactical lessons from Helmand had then been consolidated in the Herrick Campaign Study and a selection of those were subject to further institutionalization through Army reorganizations. However, when the British Army returned from Afghanistan a key concern was to retain or even improve the learning processes introduced with Operation Entirety in peacetime.[1587] The LXC itself was broadening its scope before the end of operations in Helmand. For instance, it gathered information on French operations in Mali and assisted civil authorities with lessons processes on flood relief efforts and the London Olympics of 2012.[1588]

At the joint level, the gauntlet was taken up to enhance the Ministry of Defence learning capabilities. This was initiated with the establishment of the Joint Force Command (JFC) in 2011, itself a result of the 2010 SDSR. Beyond coordinating joint capabilities provided by the three services, it also sought to improve the joint lessons learned processes. To this end, personnel from PJHQ's J7 (lessons learned) were moved to the JFC's "Lessons and Learning Team".[1589] Tom Dyson notes that this joint lessons team had three tasks: to track

1585 HM Government. *NSS and SDSR 2015*, p. 28.

1586 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxix

1587 See Newton. Adapt or Fail, p. 310.

1588 Interview British army staff officer 9.

1589 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p 147.

the operational lessons from PJHQ; designing a lessons learned process for the JFC; and "developing a learning and lessons strategy" for the Ministry of Defence.[1590]

This latter task led to the "Defence Organisational Learning Strategy" (DOLS) in 2014. In answer to parliamentary questions, the MoD stated that it had "identified the need for a more effective overall approach to learning, so that at the operational and strategic levels we critically learn from history, training, education, operations and strategic events, and routinely apply what has been learnt to future activity." DOLS was to instill "a culture of learning across Defence."[1591] In 2017, the intention for an enhanced organizational learning capability for the ministry of Defence was reinforced by the publication of the Defence Knowledge Strategy. It sought to capture knowledge in order to promote challenges and encourage individual and organizational learning across the Ministry of Defence.[1592] This knowledge strategy was one of the products from the MoD's team that tried to implement recommendations from the Chilcot Report. In the same vein as the DOLS it aimed to foster an organizational culture that seeks and values knowledge and enables organizational learning. Furthermore, it encouraged experimentation and challenging of assumptions.[1593] With these two strategies, organizational learning for the Ministry of Defence featured on the political agenda.

In practice, the pan-Defence learning process was hampered through some institutional constraints. The JFC's "Learning and Lessons Team" was under-resourced from the outset as, apart from for the operations in Helmand, the Ministry of Defence faced severe budget cuts. After 2015, the team attempted to reinvigorate the DOLS by devising a formal joint learning process and aligning the processes from the services. Yet the services resisted efforts to harmonize their lessons processes as they felt that these were geared towards their specific requirements.[1594] Likewise, the team struggled to implement a joint learning process due to a lack of resources. As the team was developing the DOLS-policy, which had garnered political attention, it was unable to support the operational lessons process. Somewhat ironically, the JFC team was dependent on the services to provide them with lessons identified; however, the focuses of the services were inherently more parochial. Furthermore, JFC does not have the mandate to enforce measures based on identified lessons. As PJHQ remains the operational level and runs the deployments it is still the primary conduit for information from operational theaters. However, PJHQ is often unable to follow-up on identified lessons.

1590 Ibidem, p. 147-148.

1591 | House of Commons Defence Committee. (2014, January 14). Intervention: Why, When and How? Government Respons. London, point 22.

1592 Ministry of Defence. (2018). *Defence Knowledge Strategy*. London, p. 4.

1593 Ministry of Defence. (2018). *Defence Knowledge Strategy*. London, p. 3.

1594 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 148. Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 2.

Additionally, many of the identified issues are within the remit of the individual services[1595]. As a result, the lessons process at the operational and joint level remains sub-optimized.

As for the army's learning process, the Helmand campaign had shown that on the tactical level the service had become responsive to signals from the field after the establishment of the Lessons Exploitation Centre and the FDT. However, the FDT was abolished in late 2015. Although the functioning of the FDT had generally been lauded within the British Army, the end of the Afghanistan campaign had reduced the operational pressure for lessons exploitation and force generation.[1596] Furthermore, the disbandment of the FDT meant that the army could scrap a three-star general position, for which was considerable political pressure.[1597]

Yet, after a hiatus, part of the FDT's legacy was assumed by the Land Warfare Centre in 2018 when, following a reorganization, the LWC became responsible for the (Field) Army's "agile adaptation." Under the auspices of a major-general, the LWC coordinated the various trade schools, collective training, lessons exploitation and doctrine and concept development.[1598] This, and other organizational learning initiatives, have been mandated by the army leadership (general Carter) who subscribed to the idea of enhancing the army's learning capabilities.[1599] The "lessons team" is responsible for lessons exploitation and is the successor of the LXC. It has been reduced in terms of staff billets in comparison to the Afghanistan campaign, meaning that therefore the lessons team is unable to deploy staff members to operations, as the LXC had done in Helmand. Instead, the officers regularly visit the various theaters and have periodic video conferences with deployed units. Of course, the current deployments are of a smaller scale and of a lower intensity than Herrick. Consequently, both the volume of lessons identified and the operational pressure to resolve them have currently decreased. Similarly, the Mission Exploitation Symposia have been largely shelved after Helmand. While these are regarded as a useful tool to capture lessons and initiative enhancements across the MoD and beyond, the LWC has not felt that the missions after Afghanistan have warranted the organization demanded for these labor-intensive events. In the case of a future larger mission, the symposia will probably be reinstated.[1600]

Lessons or identified deficiencies are still captured from Post Operational Reports, which are subsequently subjected to the Military Judgment Panels headed by PJHQ. In essence, these panels are a truncated version of the exploitation symposia. The consolidated lessons are

1595 Interviews British army staff officer 1: British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 3: British army staff officer 5; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 149-150.

1596 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 4; British commanding officer 3

1597 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 153.

1598 Tim Hyams (2018). The New Land Warfare Centre. *British Army Review, 173*(Autumn), p. 5.

1599 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 151.

1600 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

processed into the DLIMS-database, and from here, actions to address lessons are taken by Operational Lessons Integration Groups (OLIGs). These OLIGs are thematically organized to address lessons concerning a specific topic and include members of the lessons team. With the reorganization of 2018, the LWC has the various training establishments of the arms and branches, for example infantry, artillery, and logistics under its wings. This makes coordination for the lessons team easier, although the team itself holds no authority over these training schools. Information on lessons identified and lessons learned is shared through the Army Knowledge Exchange. Although there are still issues with the search function, and variable quality of observations, the AKX is frequently used by army personnel. To make the content more accessible, the LWC is posting videos (vlogs) and podcasts.[1601]

While the Army's ability to capture tactical lessons from operations is somewhat truncated, the process is largely intact and potentially scalable. However, personnel shortages have led the lessons team to solely focus on operations. Lessons from training and exercises have been assigned to the LWC's training branch. As a result, there is no coordinating authority that has a comprehensive view of the identified lessons in training and on operations (see table 5.12). A further deficiency is the lack of a formalized learning policy for the operational level within the army. This is ascribed to reluctance on the part of senior army officers who "fear the establishment of [...] lessons processes which might shed light on problems in their areas of competence".[1602] At this level, crucial aspects of how a counterinsurgency or stabilization campaign is designed, led, and assessed could be addressed, for instance based on the army's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, the British ability to exploit lessons is uneven. Despite political attention and support by senior military leadership, the Ministry of Defence have not yet established a practical joint learning process. Furthermore, financial austerity, internal resistance and lack of operational pressure have diminished the Army's learning capability. Still, in large part, the learning processes from Operation Entirety continue to capture tactical lessons.

Learning processes	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Central position of learning process in British Army	No, discontinuation of FDT	Resource allocation, organizational culture
Learning and dissemination mechanisms	Yes, at Land Warfare Centre, albeit slimmed down in capacity	Resource allocation, anchor point in LWC

Table 5.12: Institutionalization of lessons learned processes

1601 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4.

1602 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 151-152.

5.4.2.2: Doctrinal developments

After the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Afghanistan COIN Centre was reorganized into the Stabilisation and COIN Team at the LWC.[1603] Without the operational demands for doctrine publications on counterinsurgency and the recalibration towards conventional conflicts, the team grew progressively smaller over the years, shrinking by 2019 to a team of just a handful of officers and NCOs.[1604] However, doctrine development on counterinsurgency and stabilization operations continued after 2014. This section describes how experiences from Helmand have been processed into doctrine.

At the joint-level, the JDP 3-40: *Security and Stabilisation* was succeeded by the JDP 05: *Shaping a Stable World: The Military Contribution*. Published in 2016 by DCDC, the JDP 05 was written to align with the interdepartmental The UKs Approach to Stabilisation of 2014.[1605] It retained the stabilization principles as listed in JDP 3-40.[1606] Interestingly, the nascent 77 Brigade is already singled out in the document as a key contributor to the UK's stability efforts.[1607] Further on, the role of the military in understanding and influencing the environment through non-kinetic activities is emphasized. Military activities such as capacity building and security sector reform are also elaborated upon, but unevenly. [1608]The use of force, for instance in a counterinsurgency context, is given relatively short shrift.[1609] As such, the JDP 05 defers the more practical elements of stabilization operations to subsidiary doctrine. As counterinsurgency features only in passing, the JDP 05 is a marked departure from its predecessor.

A further document pertaining to land forces by DCDC (2017) was the JDP 0-20: *Land Power*. This is a generic doctrine on the role of land forces in conflict. Although it does not refer to the operations in Afghanistan, aspects from the Helmand campaign are discernable. The main concept introduced in the JDP 0-20 is "Integrated Action", which is described as "a unifying doctrine that requires commanders first to identify the desired outcome, to consider all the audiences relevant to attaining the outcome, to analyse the effects required on the relevant audience and then to determine the best mix of capabilities, from soft through to hard power, to achieve the outcome."[1610] It applies to all activities of the British

1603 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 141.

1604 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 3.

1605 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Joint Doctrine Publication 05 Shaping a Stable World: the Military Contribution*. Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre), p. iii

1606 Ministry of Defence. *JDP 05*, p. 27-28.

1607 Ibidem, p. 74-75.

1608 Ibidem, p. 86-121.

1609 Ibidem, p 91.

1610 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Joint Doctrine Publication 0-20: UK Land Power*. Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, p. iii-iv.

land forces, ranging from war fighting and stabilization operations to disaster relief.[1611] While it recognizes fighting as the core function of land forces, it underpins the other functions of secure, support and engage.[1612] To be successful in land operations, the JDP posits that land forces must collaborate with government agencies and other partners. However, the command-levels who were tasked with the coordination between partners are the corps and division.[1613] Again, this is in contrast to the experiences in Helmand where such capabilities were delegated to brigade-level and below.

Thus, understanding of the environment, non-kinetic influence and interagency cooperation were integrated into joint doctrine. For the army itself, with its pivot to conventional combat and small-scale "upstream defence engagement", the retention of counterinsurgency in doctrine was still considered as a crucial task.[1614] In its capstone doctrine, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP): *Land Operations* (2017), the concept of Integrated Action is naturally further expanded upon.[1615] Furthermore, in its foreword, it posits that "[s]uccess is more likely to be achieved through non-military or non-lethal means [...]". However, the concepts of Mission Command and the Manoeuvrist Approach are still considered to be of enduring relevance. [1616] Crucially, it distinguishes between four operations themes (adhering to NATO-doctrine): war fighting; stability; peace support; engagement. While these themes are not stagnant within any given conflict, they are meant to provide an intellectual framework for the dynamics of that conflict. Counterinsurgency is consequently a type of operation within the Stability theme under the designation "Counter-irregular Activity.[1617] As for the experiences in Afghanistan, the ADP only refers to it in passing, besides a small vignette about Operation Hamkari (2010) on integrated civil-military actions and synchronizing non-kinetic effects

The theme "Stability" is elaborated in the Army Field Manual: Tactics for Stability Operations (2017). A salient aspect of this doctrine is that is closely aligned to the interdepartmental doctrine on stabilization and the integrated approach. Thereby, the various agencies at least have a common frame of reference. Perhaps the most interesting element in this volume is the recognition that well-intended military actions and interventions might well have negative effects on the operation. Therefore, it calls for "conflict sensitivity" in commanders so that they are aware of potential outcomes.[1618] This AFM forms an overarching doctrine for specific types of operations such as "Counter-irregular Activity" (2019) and "The Military

1611 Ministry of Defence. *JDP 0-20*, p. 23.

1612 Ibidem, p. 44-45.

1613 Ibidem, p. 39.

1614 Presentation Warfare Branch (2016).

1615 British Army. (2017). *Army doctrine Publication Land Operations*. Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, chapter 4.

1616 British Army. ADP Land Operations, p. i

1617 Ibidem, p. 7-8.

1618 British Army. (2017). *Army Field Manual: Tactics for Stability Operations*. Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre; Interviews British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

Contribution to Stabilisation" (not to be confused with JDP 3-40). Although "Counter-irregular Activity" has a broader outlook, its focus is on counter-insurgency. As such, it is designated as the successor of AFM 1:10, and it has retained the principles of AFM 1:10. The Army's experiences in Helmand are extensively used in small vignettes and a critical case study on Afghanistan is included at the end of the document.[1619]

Thus, the UK Armed Forces and the British Army have developed an array of doctrine publications on stability operations and counter-irregular activity after the end of operations in Helmand. Crucially, these documents show coherence with each other, but also with documents from other departments. However, whether the various tomes are read and comprehensively applied during operations remains to be seen.

5.4.2.3: Training and exercises

As the end of the Helmand Campaign approached, the Army started to recalibrate its training towards contingencies other than counterinsurgency missions. This has drawn critique by scholars who saw that, as early as 2011, training by the army was starting to revert to its emphasis on conventional war fighting.[1620] To an extent, this criticism is warranted as this recalibration risks the army to discard hard-won lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, experiences and capabilities from counterinsurgency operations were likely to be relevant for future missions. Yet, the return to for conventional combat skills has been welcomed within the British Army.[1621] At a fundamental level, such reactions to the recalibration towards training for conventional combat operations is indicative of the tension between mission-specific preparation for Helmand and 'foundational-skills' needed for other operations. Indeed, the institutional reluctance of the British Army to adequately resource its operations in Helmand had been the primary reason for launching Operation Entirety. At the same time, the army recognized that the effects of Operation Entirety should be reversible to prepare itself for new missions.[1622]

Of course, the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq had been formative experiences for the British Army. For over a decade, British service members had fought in two distinct counterinsurgency campaigns. With Operation Entirety, the institution had been adapted to meet the challenges of Helmand. Although Helmand was the most exacting mission for the British Army in decades, it was also fought under conditions that were specific to the Afghan

1619 British Army. (2019). *Army Field Manual Counter-irregular Activity.* Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre; Interviews British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1620 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 50-51; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 157-158.

1621 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 51; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 157-158.

1622 See British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p xxxix; Interviews British commanding officer 17; British commanding officer 3.

theater. First, in a tactical sense, the adversaries had not been able to defeat the British troops in combat. To an extent, this can be ascribed to British training and tactical prowess. Yet it could be more to do with the British troops having overwhelming advantages in firepower and air support. Moreover, during operations, force protection was a prime consideration .[1623] Secondly, TFH had rather largely uncontested logistical support and could operate from large, static forward operating bases. Furthermore, the quality of medical support was high and, in most cases, wounded service members received adequate treatment.[1624]

As the British Army looked to potential future conflicts, it acknowledged that conditions might well be more austere and adversaries more capable. However, the environment in Helmand had been the norm for years and permeated training exercises that were not geared to deployment in Afghanistan.[1625] Even at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, instructors emphasized their experiences in Helmand in the basic training for officer-cadets. Consequently, the Helmand experience skewed the training at a generic level and thus affected the preparation for other missions. Therefore, a reset in force preparation was warranted. An important aspect of this recalibration was that hybrid foundation training no longer included Afghanistan-specific elements and instead focused more on combat operations.[1626] Beyond the participation in combat exercises, army officers seek to address the underpinning assumptions in training. They feel that the British Army has become risk-averse due to the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan where force protection had been the norm. Instead, training, TTPs and equipment should be geared towards winning in close combat situations and survivability rather than protection.[1627] A further element in this reset from Helmand was that units had to reacquire the knowledge of how to design training. During Operation Entirety, units preparing for deployment were taken through the motions of training and just had to report at the time and location as ordered. With the end of the mission, the "conveyor belt" of training was discontinued. Now commanders must design and organize training and exercises for their units in order to attain the required level of readiness.[1628]

In accordance with the 2010 SDSR and Army 2020, the British Army established a rapid reaction force for expeditionary combat missions. For this role, the army had to provide a brigade with armored and mechanized units. This required extensive training on combined arms tactics at the brigade level. This included the strategic movement of heavy materiel to

1623 Interviews British commanding officer 14; British commanding officer 6; British army staff officer 3; British commanding officer 3.

1624 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 2-1_28.

1625 British staff officer 8; British army staff officer 3; British commanding officer 6

1626 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 49-51.

1627 Neil Unsworth (2020). Fight Light: The appetite for risk in dismounted close combat. *Carre*(3), p. 1-8Interviews British staff officer 3; British commanding officer 6.

1628 Interviews British staff officer 9; British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 13.

theater and fighting conventional adversaries with sophisticated capabilities. In a rotating schedule, Army brigades and battle groups were thus prepared for high intensity combat operations.[1629] Conventional combat is further trained in exercises as the American-led annual Joint Warfighting Assessment. Here a British army brigade, under the command of an American division, is evaluated in its ability to conduct combat operations.[1630] Furthermore, the British 3rd Division, earmarked for high-intensity operations, has participated in Warfighting exercises with American formations in recent years. Again, the training scenarios are geared towards conventional combat.[1631]

Likewise, the UK is the lead nation for a NATO battle group in Estonia for the alliance's Enhanced Forward Presence. Under Operation Carbrit, the army has provided 800 troops on a rotational basis for this battle group since 2017, augmented by contingents from Denmark and Iceland. Additionally, the UK has deployed a company-sized detachment to Poland under American command. During their rotations, the British troops train for combat operations up to battle group-level.[1632] Annually, the British battle group participates in the Estonian-led exercise "Spring Storm". This exercise brings over 10,000 allied troops to Estonia to train defensive operations against a fictionalized conventional adversary.[1633]

With regard to mission-specific preparation, the withdrawal from Afghanistan precipitated adjustments. With the various smaller deployments such as the mission in Iraq against the Islamic State (Operation Shader) and MINUSMA in Mali (Operation Newcombe), the mission-specific training phase naturally lost its singular focus of the later stages of the Helmand campaign. Thus, the army's training establishment had to service various requirements as counterterrorism operations (Shader) and stabilization missions (Newcombe). However, the mission preparation is in large part adapted from Operation Herrick. For instance, the preparation phase focuses on working in a multinational environment with interagency partners. When possible, service members are joined by personnel from NGOs and other departments during predeployment exercises. Additionally, cultural understanding is an integral part of mission preparation. These activities are supported by the DCSU and the LIFC. A main difference in the training is that the current emphasis is on enabling partner forces to conduct operations British forces taking on a mentoring role. This change poses some difficulties as it is harder to assess whether individuals or units are adequately trained

1629 Tim Ripley (2015, June 24). Ready to go: UK rapid reaction forces return to contingency. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, p 27-28.

1630 British Army. (2018, May 8). *Joint Warfighting*. Retrieved June 6, 2021, from British Army: https://www.army.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2018/05/joint-warfighting/

1631 John Mead (2019). Winning the Firefight on the 'Road to Warfighter'. *British Army Review*, 175, p. 64-73.

1632 Ministry of Defence. (2020, December 21). Operation CABRIT explained: Deterring Aggression in Estonia and Poland. London

1633 *Spring Storm: 1,000 British Personnel On Exercise In Estonia*. (2019, May 10). Retrieved july 12, 2021, from Forces.net: https://www.forces.net/news/exercises/exercise-spring-storm-battle-groups-operating-civilian-populated-towns-estoniexercise-in-estonia/

for such a role. Instead of normal combat skills, mentoring is more about cultural sensitivity and personal rapport.[1634]

To be sure, the trend of recalibration of training towards conventional combat does not mean that the British Army is reverting to a Cold War-footing. Since 2011, the army organizes the exercise "Agile Warrior". Initiated by the FDT, the objective of the exercise was to instill experimentation and concept development in the Army. Furthermore, it seeks to provide an "evidence-based analysis of future land-force requirements."[1635] Therefore, Agile Warrior strives to include international, academic, and interagency partners to provide additional insight that helps the army explore future capabilities and operating concepts. [1636] Areas of interest are the use of cyber capabilities and influence activities. Furthermore, the Army has increased training in urban environments with new capabilities in the related exercise "Urban Warrior."[1637]

Although "Agile Warrior" explicitly looked beyond operations in Afghanistan, the program identified enduring lessons from this mission that were relevant in future conflicts. For instance, the army must retain the ability to decentralize capabilities to brigades or even battalions and companies. Another aspect that warranted further development is intelligence and understanding of the environment through open sources and other agencies (such as NGOs). Related to this was the enduring necessity to work in an integrated manner with various partners rather than in isolation.[1638] A final aspect that was to be retained from Helmand and that Agile Warrior sought to promote was the ability to exploit lessons by the army.[1639] Although the FDT no longer exists, the Agile Warrior exercise has been retained and it has spawned new experiments and concepts such as the use of autonomous vehicles in operations. [1640] Moreover, outcomes from Agile Warrior have been used as foundation for the Future Land Operating Concept and other doctrinal publications.[1641] Thus, "Agile Warrior" sought to look beyond Iraq and Afghanistan by experimentation and cooperation. At the same time, enduring lessons from these missions were taken into account and the program attempted to retain the intellectual outlook of Operation Entirety.

1634 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 5; British army staff officer 8.

1635 Think Defence. (2012, March 10). *Agile Warrior and the Future of the British Army.* Retrieved May 10, 2021, from Think Defence: https://www.thinkdefence.co.uk/2012/03/agile-warrior-and-the-future-of-the-british-army, p 2-3.

1636 Mark Philips (2011). *Exercise Agile Warrior and the Future Development of UK Land Forces.* London: RUSI Occasional paper, p. 5-6.

1637 Think Defence. *Agile Warrior and the Future of the British Army*, p 4-5.

1638 Mark Philips (2011). *Exercise Agile Warrior and the Future Development of UK Land Forces.* London: RUSI Occasional paper, p. 7-10.

1639 Interviews British army staff officer 9; British commanding officer 3.

1640 Chris Tickell (2019). Keeping the Competitive Advantage. *British Army Review, 175*, p. 6-9.

1641 Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Concept Note 2/12: Future Land Operating Concept.* London, p. V; British Army. (2017). *Army doctrine Publication Land Operations.* Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, p. 1-6.

5.4.3: Vignettes

As seen during operation in Helmand, the British forces developed capabilities to better cope with the challenges posed by the operational environment. Aspects like intelligence, non-kinetic influencing, counter-IED measures, stabilization activities and interagency cooperation were changed due to experiences in Helmand. This following section studies how these capabilities were institutionalized and further developed after the ISAF mission. In this way, we can assess whether these crucial aspects in counterinsurgency endure beyond Helmand and are potentially developed further. Moreover, this will shed light on the distinct dynamics of institutionalization from wartime adaptation as proffered in chapter 2.

5.4.3.1: Interagency cooperation and the Stabilisation Unit

One of the core principles in counterinsurgency theory is the coordination between government agencies, subject to an overall plan. As described in section 5.3, the Helmand PRT was the main manifestation of the British interdepartmental efforts in theater. Although the government agencies, Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for International Development and the Stabilisation Unit ostensibly subscribed to the iterations of the campaign plans, cooperation at the coalface in Afghanistan proved problematic. This section examines the extent to which lessons from the Helmand PRT have been identified and addressed. It will focus on the subsequent developments concerning the Integrated Approach in the British Army and the Stabilisation Unit.

Like the British Army, the Stabilisation Unit evaluated the mission in Helmand to draw lessons from it. During a three-day conference in December 2014, it examined the experiences of the Helmand PRT. The conference focused on the PRTs effects on civil-military relationships; the lessons from the PRTs role in promoting reconstruction, development and governance; and whether the PRT could serve as a model for future integrated missions. [1642] Attendees of the conference, which included British civil servants, and American, Danish and Estonian participants, were generally in agreement that after an inauspicious start, the Helmand PRT had improved its performance.[1643]

Yet, the conference highlighted various fundamental flaws within the Helmand PRT. First of all, there was no clearly formulated strategic end-state for what the PRT was to achieve. Instead, there was a list of policy objectives based on departmental preferences that were often incompatible. For instance, the vacillating emphases between population-centric counterinsurgency and more kinetic counterterrorism activities were not successful in

1642 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 1-2

1643 Interviews British civil servant 5; Interviews British army staff officer 6.

garnering local support for ISAF or the Afghan authorities. Moreover, in Helmand this had been exacerbated by the counter-narcotics effort, which was found to be mutually exclusive to bringing stability to the province. However, the delicate coordination between the various departments and their interests had been deferred to the PRT. As a result, the PRT was more a reflection of interdepartmental rivalry than a solution for this problem.[1644] Secondly, the PRT had initially emphasized reconstruction and development projects while awarding insufficient attention to the political dynamics of Helmand. In large part, this was caused by the lack of understanding of the political economy of Helmand. Only as this understanding improved over time, the PRT became more adept in negotiating the local dynamics and supporting local governance. While this brought more cohesion to the PRTs efforts, there was considerable doubt about the sustainability of the modest progress that had made after the end of the mission in 2014.[1645]

Furthermore, while after 2008 the British mission in Helmand came under nominal civilian command, in reality the military commander of TFH ordered the deployment of his forces. Even after the introduction of the Helmand Roadmap, the collaboration between the PRT and TFH was marred by successive brigades trying to impose their plans on the mission.[1646] This was mirrored at the district-level where battle groups worked with the Stabilisation Advisers; the effectiveness of this ground-level cooperation hinged on the personal relationship between the adviser and the battle group staff.[1647] With regard to the American Surge, the evaluation was mixed in its opinion. The American troop contribution was seen as crucial in bringing security to population centers, allowing the PRT to assist local authorities and work on development. Concurrently however, it struggled to influence the American efforts as the PRT lacked credibility due to its performance in earlier years.[1648]

Ultimately, the Helmand PRT itself was not seen as a model for future missions. Fundamental issues like interdepartmental coordination, stating clear and obtainable objectives, acquiring sufficient understanding of the environment and the ability of collaborating with local authorities had to be addressed before embarking on a new ambitious intervention. Although the construct itself was not to be emulated, the positive note of the PRT-evaluation was that the Helmand mission had produced an experience cadre of personnel across the departments who had worked together under austere conditions.[1649]

1644 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 11

1645 Ibidem, p. 24-25; Interview British civil servant 5.

1646 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 15.

1647 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1648 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 6

1649 Interviews British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6; British civil servant 3; British staff officer 21.

While the Wilton Park evaluation essentially produced a consolidated list of observations by individuals who had worked in or with the PRT, various identified issues were included into "UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation". This document produced by the Stabilisation Unit and its parent departments in 2014, listed four key characteristics for British stabilization efforts: the primacy of an overtly political objective for addressing the instability; an integrated, civilian-led approach; activities that are flexible and targeted at the local level but within the larger political context; and, the awareness that British involvement is transitory, thereby planning for sustainable development and capacity-building.[1650] When contrasted to the mission in Helmand, these characteristics were aspects that had been sorely missing in the British efforts there. Moreover, the document underscores that political imperatives must make precedence over expediency from a security or military perspective. As such security must be seen as "an enabling factor" rather than an end in itself. Too much focus on the latter can impede political accommodation.[1651] Although the "Approach to Stabilisation" has a broader application than large-scale interventions like Afghanistan, the experiences in Helmand seem to provide its frame of reference, as it is ambitious in its outlook of fostering stability at local and national levels.

While the government agencies were evaluating their Helmand experiences, new, smaller missions were initiated that required interdepartmental collaboration. In September 2014, the UK deployed a task force to Sierra Leone to assist its struggle with an outbreak of Ebolavirus. The operation (Gritrock) was placed under civilian command and closely coordinated with NGOs. In this arrangement, the military contributed with naval transport, medical units, engineers for building treatment centers and infantry to provide security. This civilian-led mission was successful as Sierra Leone was declared "Ebola-free" in November 2015.[1652] Conversely, the UK contribution to the fight against the Islamic State, operation Shader, was military-led. However, beyond the delivery of humanitarian aid, mentoring Iraqi forces and air support, the FCO and DfID participated in the mission in an effort to address the root causes of the conflict. For instance, DfID provided stabilization assistance in liberated areas for the Iraqi government and economic reconstruction.[1653] Still, the military considerations were paramount in this operation.[1654] Of course, operations Gritrock and Shader were distinct for the Helmand mission in terms of objectives and scale. Yet the integrated command of the newer missions has been heralded by informed observers as representing marked progress from Afghanistan.[1655]

1650 Stabilisation Unit. (2014). *The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation (2014).* London, p 5-6.

1651 Stabilisation Unit, *The UK's Approach to Stabilisation*, p. 7.

1652 Interviews British civil servant 6; British staff officer 21

1653 Department for International Development. (2010). *Working Effectively in Conflict-affected and Fragile Situations: Links between Politics, Security and Development* . London, p. 5-6.

1654 Interview British commanding officer 10.

1655 Interviews British civil servant 6; British staff officer 21; British civil servant 3; British commanding officer 10.

From a military perspective, the need for interagency cooperation was well recognized. Indeed, the military had criticized the other departments for their lackluster contributions in Basra and the initial years in Helmand. Through subsequent doctrine publications, the army has reiterated the need for integrated operations, in particular for stabilization and peace support missions (see 5.4.2.2.).[1656] Furthermore, the army has established a specialist formation for interagency cooperation in the form of 77 Brigade. Still, the integration of civilian agencies into military planning processes and exercises have been regarded as underdeveloped.[1657] A further point of critique regarding contemporary military operations and the comprehensive approach is that there is no link between tactical activities and the objective to provide stability to an area. As the UK and its military are pivoting towards "upstream engagement", military personnel are providing security force assistance to indigenous security forces. Nevertheless, beyond enhancing the partner forces' tactical capabilities, it is often unclear in how this improves the local stability as these activities are apt to reinforce existing political tensions rather than resolve them.[1658]

The emphasis on promoting stability through engaging (local) political problems was reiterated in the 2019 version of the "UK's Approach to Stabilisation". A striking aspect of this version is that it denounces the military-led efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan as being unable to address the political situation.[1659] Instead of trying to defeat an adversary, such as an insurgency, the UK should help the parties of a conflict in reaching a political accommodation. Through facilitating such an agreement, violence could be reduced and thus provide a foundation for enduring stability.[1660] This idea was based on independent research on behalf of the Stabilisation Unit, "Elite Bargains and Political Deals", research finding that, since the end of the Cold War, conflicts had mostly been ended by a settlement rather than a decisive military victory.[1661] However, this diplomatic avenue had not been taken in Helmand where the Sangin-accord reached with local elders in 2011 received no political backing from the UK and the US. Consequently, violence resumed in the district.[1662] As such, this new 'approach' to stabilization operation spelled a departure, in theory at least, from the large-scale interventions in which military considerations of security were paramount. Instead, the military contribution was to be more subdued as it should focus on enabling local security forces and if necessary, reduce the threat against civilians.[1663] Finally, the Stabilisation Unit explicated the distinction between counterinsurgency and stabilization

1656 See for instance JDP 05, *Military Contribution*, p. 121.

1657 Interviews British staff officer 21; British army staff officer 12.

1658 See Abigail Watson and Megan Karlshøj-Pedersen(2019). *Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps: Lessons learned from remote warfare in Africa*. London: Oxford Research Group, p. 22-23; Interview British army staff officer 21.

1659 Stabilisation Unit. (2014). *The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation (2014)*. London, p. 7-8.

1660 Ibidem, p. 9-10.

1661 Stabilisation. (2018). *Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict*. London, p. 11.

1662 Ibidem, p 27; Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1663 Stabilisation Unit. *UKs Approach to Stabilisation*, p. 9.

operations. In the former, the intervening forces are assisting the local government, while the latter is more neutral.[1664] One problem with engaging in a counterinsurgency campaign is that the (nominal) authorities may well be a source of instability.[1665]

Regarding the Helmand PRT, the enduring lesson in the UK is seemingly that the experience from Afghanistan should not be emulated (see table 5.13). Far from a solution to interdepartmental wrangling, the PRT was seen as a manifestation of the unresolved tensions. Furthermore, future stabilization efforts should be genuinely civilian-led and more focused on political accommodation instead of defeating drivers of instability.

Comprehensive approach and PRT	**Institutionalization**	**Influencing factors**
Doctrine	Yes, incorporated in doctrine and policy papers	Political salience, dissemination mechanisms
Organizational structure	Yes, in Stabilisation Unit and successors; in British army through 77 Brigade. However, PRT is no blueprint for future interagency cooperation	learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation
Training	Limited, mostly in 77 Brigade.	Organizational culture: differences in training objectives

Table 5.13: Institutionalization of interagency lessons

5.4.3.2: *Intelligence*

Intelligence, and the more general term understanding of the operational environment, has been identified as an enduring area of attention within the British Army.[1666] As one of the principal units of the Army 2020 reorganizations, 1 ISR Brigade, was formally established in September 2014. It encompassed several units from the Royal Artillery with capabilities in surveillance and target acquisition. Beyond these units, the brigade consisted of the various regular and reservist Military Intelligence battalions and companies, the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre (LIFC) and the Defense Cultural and Specialist Unit (DCSU).[1667] These latter two units were thus being retained after being established to support operations in Helmand. However, the DCSU was to be transferred to 77 Brigade in December 2019 (see section 5.4.3.3.).

1664 Ibidem, p11

1665 This is a central point in Mike Martin's *An Intimate War.*

1666 See British Army. (2012). *Transforming the British Army, July 2012: Modernising to face an unpredictable* . London p. 2.; Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Concept Note 2/12: Future Land Operating Concept.* London p. 3-6.

1667 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades.* Andover, p. 11.

Hence, the LIFC was institutionalized as a reach-back facility for tactical intelligence. Towards the end of the Helmand campaign, the scope of the LIFC was widened to include more regions such as Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. In this way, the LIFC both supports deployed units and fuses the intelligence that is generated by these missions. Moreover, the LIFC aims to provide a baseline of situational awareness for potential areas of deployment in order to inform units that form an entry-force.[1668] Although this input will be no substitute for the more granular understanding of an environment, the idea is that in this way initial rotations can build their intelligence position from this foundation. In this role, the LIFC is an important partner of 77 Brigade.

Another adaptation from Helmand that has since been retained is the concept of Battle Group Intelligence Support Sections (BGISS). Since Army 2020, several Military Intelligence Battalions have dedicated companies to train for this role. If necessary, intelligence personnel can also form Company Intelligence Support Teams (COISTS). As in Helmand, the primary role of these Intelligence Corps detachments is to provide analytical support for the organic intelligence sections of manoeuvre units.[1669]

During operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the initial focus of the intelligence process had been on the adversary. One of the key observations by British service members was that a more comprehensive analysis of the environment and local dynamics was needed.[1670] To enhance the ability of the army to collect intelligence on the "human terrain", the concept of "human terrain reconnaissance" was developed. This entailed patrols conducted by intelligence personnel to acquire an understanding of the environment and its cultural, social, and political characteristics. Although such patrols have value throughout a mission, human terrain reconnaissance had the express purpose to obtain a better intelligence position at the preparatory and initial stages of a deployment.[1671] In other words, the purpose of these patrol was to prevent a reprisal of the Helmand campaign where understanding of the environment had been insufficient. However, for such patrols to be effective in an uncertain environment with limited military presence required specifically trained personnel. To this end, specific "Human Environment, Reconnaissance and Analysis" units have been established from reservist members of the Special Air Service. [1672]

The centrality of a comprehensive understanding of the environment and its actors is underlined in doctrinal publications (see table 5.14).[1673] As such the scope of the intelligence

1668 Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army staff officer 15.

1669 Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army staff officer 15.

1670 Interviews British army staff officer 14, British army staff officer 11; British commanding officer 2.

1671 Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army staff officer 15.

1672 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades*. Andover

1673 See Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations* . London, p. 4-11 - 4-14; *British Army. ADP Land Operations*, p 4-2 - 4-3.

process is broader than threats and physical terrain. However, in Helmand these requirements led to a significant expansion of intelligence staffs and, more generally headquarters, at the brigade and battle group levels. It is doubtful whether these static staff elements are sustainable in conflicts of a higher intensity. Yet a decreasing capacity in intelligence personnel will affect a unit's analytical capability to understand it's human environment.[1674] As the British Army has been recalibrating towards conventional conflict, it remains an open question how regular formations and units will cope with such constraints, whether in training or on deployments.

Intelligence	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Land Intelligence Fusion Centre	Yes, with expanded view	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation
Tactical intelligence support	Yes, BGISDs and COISTs are retained	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics
Cultural understanding	Yes, DCSU retained with expanded view	Resource allocation

Table 5.14: Institutionalization of intelligence lessons

5.4.3.3: Institutionalizing unorthodoxy: the establishment of 77 Brigade for non-kinetic effects

One of the most salient attempts to institutionalize lessons from the Helmand Campaign is the establishment of 77 Brigade. This new formation was part of the Army 2020 restructuring and initially called the Security Assistance Group (SAG). Its remit was to bring unity of command to - and enhance coherence between - specialist capabilities such as information operations and stabilization support. In essence it was to provide non-kinetic effects for the Army. Additionally, the SAG was to serve as the main military partner for the Stabilisation Unit at the tactical level.[1675]

Set up in September 2014, the SAG incorporated several disparate units. It comprised the Military Stabilisation Support Group, the Media Operations Group and 15 Psychological Operations Group. Furthermore, a Security Capacity Building Team was to be established. Finally, the new formation included a liaison team from the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre. It was initially subordinated to Force Troop Command, a divisional level formation that housed various brigades for combat support and combat service support. In 2019,

1674 Jack Watling (2021). Preparing Military Intelligence for Great Power Competition: Retooling the 2-Shop. *RUSI Journal*, p. 13.

1675 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_6; British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades*. Andover, p. 27.

this formation was reformed as 6th (UK) Division. Although the SAG was a brigade-level formation, its personnel strength was in the range of a small battalion with roughly 400 regulars and reservists.[1676]
From its inception, the SAG was an amalgamation of existing units and nascent capabilities. From the Army's perspective the unit had to balance the need for novel and unconventional competencies yet still be sufficiently familiar for other formations to be utilized. Therefore, regular positions were staffed with personnel from across the various arms and regiments. The more specific skills were drawn from reservists that were recruited.[1677]

Another initiative was the branding of the formation, both to attract personnel and enhance its status. Recognizing that the SAG image was somewhat bland, the first commander endeavored to rebrand it by adopting the traditions of the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade that was part of the "Chindits". Commanded by the eccentric Orde Wingate, the "Chindits" were known for their unconventional operations behind enemy lines in Southeast Asia during the Second World War. Its first commander felt that these disparate elements had to be mixed to break down the internal stove pipes.[1678] Revisiting its pedigree, 77 Brigade was reorganized into different "columns" including: planning support; reach-back capacity for deployed units; deployable specialists; media operations and civil affairs; capacity building. [1679] However, some observers felt that by breaking up the original units, valuable knowledge from operations in Helmand was discarded.[1680]

This structure was upended in 2018 when 77 Brigade was now organized in various groups. Information operations and influence activities are conducted by the Digital Operations Group, which includes a production team for various information products and a team for "web operations" that monitors sentiment and can engage with audiences to influence perceptions. This latter activity is conducted within the bounds of British policy.[1681] As such, the Digital Operations Group is the 'modernized' successor of 15 PsyOps Group. Media outreach is conducted by the Operational Media and Communications Group. Beyond its operational activities, 77 Brigade is also active in concept development for integrating non-kinetic effects within the British Army.[1682] Furthermore, 77 Brigade has seconded a liaison officer to the Stabilisation Unit to enable information sharing and keeping the Brigade abreast of cross-departmental developments.[1683]

1676 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades.* Andover, p. 27.

1677 Interview British commanding officer 15.

1678 Nick Reynolds (2015). The 'soft' touch: Delivering non-kinetic effects to influence the battlespace. *Jane's Defence Weekly*; British commanding officer 15

1679 British Army. (2016, May). 77 Brigade (unclassified presentation)

1680 Interview British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6.

1681 James Chandler (2020). An Introduction to 77 Brigade. *British Army Review*, 177, p. 17-18

1682 Chandler. 77 Brigade, p. 15-16.

1683 Interview British staff officer 21.

In December 2019, 77 Brigade was further augmented by the DCSU which was transferred from 1 ISR Brigade. In this way, the DCSU can provide Target Audience Analysis for the brigade's information activities and in general contribute to understanding the operational environment.[1684] In parallel to the LIFC, the scope of the DCSU was expanded to other regions of the world. Naturally, this has the side-effect that the depth of training is diminished, in contrast to the Afghanistan mission. Therefore, the role of the officers is shifting from cultural 'experts' towards more generic advisers for commanders on cultural understanding and influencing activities. This is reflected in the training of the officers which is currently more generic and based on outreach and information activities. After this foundation, the officers specialize in a region and receive linguistic training. On deployment, cultural advisers are generally attached to battle groups or higher echelons.[1685]

The DCSU continues to enroll active-duty personnel in the rank of captain, yet by and large, prospective candidates are provided by the Army's personnel services rather than actively recruited and selected. A fundamental issue for the DCSU is that there is no specific career-path for its personnel. Consequently, both the army and the service member have to invest much time and effort in the training for relatively modest gains in terms of operational output. Moreover, a tour at the DCSU has been described in interviews as detrimental to an officer's career.[1686] As a result, while the DCSU is institutionalized within the army, it is not fully embraced in the absence of a large mission like Helmand.

Furthermore, the legacy of the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG) and its constituent teams (MSSTs) is respectively continued by the Outreach Group and the Task Group. For its part, the Outreach Group has three main roles. The first is advising commanders on human security as espoused by the United Nations and to support policy development on this theme within the Ministry of Defence. Secondly, the group is tasked with fostering civil-military cooperation at an institutional level. In this role it helps planning for cooperation for missions and acts as an interface between the Ministry of Defence and civilian agencies. The third role is that of capacity building at the institutional level. This is not exclusive to armed forces, but also to other security agencies of partner nations. As such, its activities in capacity building are complementary to the more tactical focus of the Specialised Infantry Group. As the Outreach Group consists of approximately 40 personnel, both regular service members and reservists, it cannot execute its tasks to the full extent by itself. Instead, it functions as a hub in a network of experts that can be called upon when necessary. Its reservists largely maintain these relationships and are more generalists than specialists.[1687]

1684 Interview British army staff officer 19.

1685 Interviews British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 16.

1686 Interviews British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 14; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 120

1687 Interviews British army staff officer 16; British army staff officer 20.

Additionally, 77 Brigade's Task Group can be described as a conceptual descendant of the MSSTs. It is comprised of several Information Activities and Outreach (IA&O) teams that can be attached to formation headquarters and tactical units. As such, these comprise the deployable capacity of 77 Brigade. The IA&O teams are tasked with CIMIC, key-leader engagement, PsyOps and contribute to understanding the operational environment.[1688] Finally, a training element is under development that aims to train personnel from regular army units to conduct some of the information activities.[1689] In essence, although there is no direct organizational link, these teams can be seen as a continuation of the Non-Kinetic Effects Teams that were introduced in Helmand.

Still, challenges remain for the brigade and the integration of non-kinetic effects. First, it is hard to simulate the information domain and the potential effects it seeks to achieve in a training scenario, in particular within a training exercise by regular formations and units. For brigade and battalion commanders and their staffs, these challenges impede their familiarization with the non-kinetic effects and the ability to integrate them in operational plans.[1690] A second challenge is that for regular service members, for instance from the infantry, artillery or engineers, a position within the 77 Brigade is often less well understood by the personnel branches. This increases the threshold for talented officers and NCOs to join 77 Brigade lest they diminish their career prospects in their own regiments.[1691]

Within its short existence, 77 Brigade has deployed various detachments to missions. For example, elements of the brigade have contributed to Operation Shader (Iraq), Operation Cabrit (Estonia and Poland) and Operation Newcombe (Mali) [1692] Thus, 77 Brigade has evolved from an identified deficiency in the Army's ability to conduct "Information Activities and Outreach" in Iraq and Afghanistan into an institutional response to address the capability gap (see table 5.15). From here, it has taken a vital role in developing non-kinetic effects, both conceptually and on deployments. Senior Army officers have lauded the establishment of 77 Brigade as a crucial new capability to achieve influence effects.[1693] Of course, such statements are to be expected, yet the establishment of 77 Brigade in times of financial constraints is itself indicative that Army leadership has been willing to invest in such capabilities. However, while the capabilities of the brigade are evolving and deployed on missions, its potential is

1688 Interviews British army staff officer 16; British army staff officer 20.

1689 See 77 Brigade Groups https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/formations-divisions-brigades/6th-united-kingdom-division/77-brigade/groups/.

1690 Interviews British army staff officer 20; British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1691 Interview British army staff officer 20; British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 16; This had been identified earlier by Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 120.

1692 Chandler, 77 Brigade, BAR, p. 17.

1693 See comments by General Nick Carter and Lieutenant-General Paul Newton in House of Commons Defence Committee. (2017, April 29). SDSR 2015 and the Army: Eighth Report of Session 2016–17 HC 108. London, p. 20-21.

hampered by difficulties in providing integrated training with manoeuvre formations and the lack of viable career-paths for regular officers and NCOs.

Non-kinetic activities	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Integration of non-kinetic activities	Limited, increased attention for these activities. Yet, hard to integrate them in training exercises	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture
Professionalization of information operations personnel	Yes, establishment of 77 Brigade important boost. However, no career path for specialized personnel	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 5.15: Institutionalization of lessons on non-kinetic activities

5.4.3.4: Counter-IED

Where IEDs were the hallmark threat during the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, following these missions novel threat vectors such as armed UAVs and conventional capabilities as indirect fire have become more prominent. Despite this, within the British Armed Forces IEDs were acknowledged as an enduring threat in all potential theaters.[1694] Therefore, the British Armed Forces decided to institutionalize the counter-IED knowledge "to ensure hard won gains were not lost in the same way many had been on the conclusion of Operation BANNER". In particular, the understanding of C-IED capabilities and TTPs across the army should be retained.[1695]

To strengthen counter-IED training beyond the Afghanistan mission, the MoD established a new training site in December 2012. Additionally, a joint Defence EOD Munitions and Search (DEMS) Training Regiment was established. This brought together the various disciplines in of explosive ordnance handling. Specifically, one training wing trains for Search capabilities that supports service members from the various arms, services, and other security agencies. Another training branch is focused on the neutralization (dismantling) of IEDs.[1696] Furthermore, the army has retained two regular (and one reservist) regiments under the Royal Logistics Corps and Royal Engineers tasked with handling IEDs.[1697]

1694 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 6-1_2; Interviews British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22.

1695 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_17.

1696 Interviews British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

1697 Interviews British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

The skills in detecting and dismantling IEDs continues to be relevant on missions such as Mali.[1698] To keep abreast of developments, the DEMS Training Regiment closely follows information on IEDs in various conflicts. This is further enabled by its international students who enroll annually in the DEMS courses. In this way, the DEMS can use their experience to adjust its training and TTPs (see table 5.16).[1699] Beyond this more specialized training, C-IED are still used in the more generic training schedules for members of the army.[1700] Although the operational pressures from Operation Herrick have subsided, the British Armed Forces have retained an institutional foundation of Counter-IED knowledge.

Counter-IED	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Training and knowledge retention	Yes, establishment of DEMS training regiment	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation

Table 5.16: Institutionalization of lessons on counter-IED

5.4.4: Sub conclusion

Even before the conclusion of the Helmand campaign, the British Army started to recalibrate towards other potential missions. Training and exercises were used to prepare for other contingencies than Helmand. After Operation Entirety, this pivot was warranted as the army had been singularly focused on preparing for Afghanistan. Within the army, it was felt that this focus on a campaign with specific conditions had diminished its ability to fight in more austere conditions against more capable adversaries. Furthermore, this reset was precipitated by the reorganizations following the 2010 Security and Defence Review. Budgetary constraints necessitated a decrease in the Army's capacity by 20,000 regular troops as proposed in the Army 2020 review. In this review, the army sought to reinvigorate the divisional level and be ready for high-intensity combat operations if called upon.

Besides this reset from Afghanistan and the pivot to conventional combat the army retained stabilization operations as a core task. However, the UK now emphasized "upstream defence engagement". This meant that the British army conducted capacity building in order to prevent conflagrations of potential conflict areas. Although this did not necessarily preclude interventions in conflict, the capacity of the British Army to engage in large scale operations

1698 Michael Shurkin, (2020, March 12). *The UK in Mali*. Retrieved May 6, 2021, from The Wavell Room: https://wavellroom.com/2020/03/12/the-uk-in-mali

1699 Interview British army warrant officer 1

1700 Interviews British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

like Helmand was severely diminished by this reorganization. At the same time, Army 2020 envisaged to institutionalize lessons and address deficiencies from Afghanistan such as interagency cooperation, non-kinetic influencing and enhancing the intelligence process. To this end 77 Brigade and 1 ISR Brigade were established.
These deficiencies had of course been identified by the Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC). Before the end of the mission, the LXC was tasked to evaluate the Helmand Campaign. This resulted in the comprehensive Operation Herrick Campaign Study. Although the study offered a candid examination of observations, best practices and deficiencies, its scope was restricted to the tactical level. A higher-level post-mortem or an official historical reconstruction have not been commissioned. Therefore, as the campaign has not been publicly evaluated at the operational and strategic levels, it is unclear what the enduring lessons are from the perspective of the army and the MoD. Moreover, lacking such an internal appraisal, it is hard to discern whether issues at the higher echelons have been resolved for future missions.

In theory, the interdepartmental and military doctrine publications point to a measured approach for stabilization operations. Through integrated action, normally under civilian leadership, the UK seeks to assist in foreign conflict resolution. In this sense, the main observation from the Helmand experience seems to be to not engage in such a campaign again. The Helmand PRT equally was not considered to be template for future missions by its participants. However, the experience of the cooperation on the ground was valued by both civil-servants and service members.

Thus, aspects of the Helmand campaign have been consciously institutionalized as a result of a deliberate learning and evaluation process. Interagency cooperation, intelligence and non-kinetic activities have been implemented in doctrine, integrated into new units, and received more attention and resources within the army. Furthermore, to its credit, the British Army does not regard Helmand as its golden standard but recognizes that some lessons have enduring relevance in different contexts. As such, the establishment and further development of 77 Brigade and 1 ISR Brigade are an indication that the army has enhanced its capabilities that are crucial for counterinsurgency and stabilization operations. Yet, the specialization within such units runs the risk of being disconnected from regular manoeuvre units and formations as they are training for high-intensity combat operations. Integrating these specialized capabilities into generic training exercises remains complicated. Consequently, the lack of common training hampers the familiarization with these capabilities by commanders and their staffs in peace time. This is further compounded by limited career prospects for regular service members in a specialized formation such as 77 Brigade. Often, a billet here is seen as detrimental to a career. These relatively mundane considerations hamper the integration of these more 'exotic' capabilities.

5.5: Conclusion

Generally, observers from within the British Army posit that the institution has changed profoundly from its experience in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The Helmand campaign was of course the focal point of these wars due to its intensity and longevity from 2006 to 2014. As large parts of the army have been deployed to Helmand, this experience will have a lasting effect on the institution and its members. However, the ability to harness this experience for deliberate organizational change proved to be harder.

As has been extensively described above, the Helmand campaign was off to an inauspicious start. When the under-resourced TFH deployed, it was confronted with escalating violence and a besieged governor. This situation was the result of an inherently flawed campaign design. The initial campaign plan had been imposed by political and military leaders in order to initiate a politically preferable mission in Helmand. This would allow the UK to maintain its standing as key ally of the United States, while cementing its international stature by engaging in benevolent interventions. While the British forces in Helmand acquitted themselves admirably against fierce resistance, their tactical achievements of repelling these attacks did little to dampen the violence. Indeed, over the first rotations the level of violence increased even further. The lack of a workable campaign plan meant that the successive rotations often reversed course from their predecessor and repeatedly had to engage in new clearance operations. Meanwhile, the Helmand PRT was hamstrung in its ability to promote governance and economic development.

To be sure, various informal and formal initiatives were started to address deficiencies, which were often identified during the concurrent operations in Iraq. However, these adaptations were generally not adopted uniformly throughout the army because of bureaucratic hurdles and the absence of a lessons learned process. This changed with Operation Entirety in 2009. As the British Army was put on a campaign footing, more attention and resources were given to a new lessons' exploitation process and force preparation. Consequently, initiatives were now adopted and incorporated within TFH and the supporting elements in the UK. Meaningful adaptations included the enhanced pre-deployment training, a new counterinsurgency doctrine by the Afghan COIN Centre, the Lessons Exploitation Centre, the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre, the various counter-IED measures and the Military Stabilisation Support Group.

However, the effects of these formally supported adaptations on the mission itself can be questioned. The arrival of more American troops in Helmand and the improved capability of Afghan security forces allowed the British to concentrate on Helmand's central population centers within a relatively improved security situation. As such, Operation Entirety had a more lasting effect on the inner workings of the British Army than on the mission itself.

This is not to criticize the expended efforts by British service members to improve their performance. Operation Entirety was necessary for the army to cope with the operational demands of the mission. Furthermore, TFH enhanced several crucial capabilities. Yet, the local dynamics and conflicts of Helmand proved to remain largely beyond the competency of the British Army to resolve.

At the end of the mission, the British Army endeavored to institutionalize enduring lessons from Helmand. It did so within the context of a changing strategic outlook where great power competition and conventional warfare had become more prominent. Furthermore, the army was faced with considerable financial constraints, leading to a 20% decrease in service members. Despite these strategic and budgetary aspects, the army institutionalized elements based on the evaluation of the Helmand campaign. It established a specialized formation for interagency cooperation and non-kinetic influence in the guise of 77 Brigade. Furthermore, increased attention was given to understanding the environment through intelligence that looks beyond threats. All these elements are now incorporated into a coherent body of doctrine, even at the interdepartmental level. A further important aspect that has been retained, albeit in a slimmed-down version, is the lessons learned process. Potentially, this can be scaled in case of a larger operation with similar characteristics.

However, these institutionalization efforts are marred by two fundamental issues. First, the conduct of the campaign at the operational and strategic levels has not been analyzed publicly by the army. This means that profound issues with campaign continuity and providing operational guidance from PJHQ have not been addressed. As a result, despite positive developments new campaigns can suffer from similar profound defects. Secondly, although the British army is still engaged in small-scale stabilization missions, the bulk of the force is preparing for high-intensity conflict. While this is understandable in itself, given the specific condition of the Helmand campaign and post-2014 priorities, it is hard to integrate elements such as interagency cooperation and non-kinetic effect in the prevailing training scenarios. This limits the familiarity of commanders with these capabilities necessary for operations. Moreover, combined with limited career prospects, this can lead to a lack of stature of such specialized units, which diminishes their capability.

Finally, the British Army has shown that it had the willingness to address institutional deficiencies at the tactical level, as evidenced through starting Operation Entirety. The effects of this were both profound and necessary. Entirety enabled a responsive learning process that changed the way TFH prepared, operated, and exploited its lessons. Still, the deficiencies at the strategic and operational level have been alluded to, but there is no indication that they have been remedied after Helmand. Perhaps the most enduring lesson from the Helmand campaign at the strategic level is that the British Army and its interagency partners do not consider the conduct of this mission as a template for future deployments.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1: Introduction

This research has aimed to study the process and dynamics of learning during counterinsurgency operations and subsequent institutionalization efforts. In order to understand how armed forces learn, chapter 2 built a theoretical framework by synthesizing organizational learning theory and the literature on military adaptation. By integrating these fields this study strove to acquire conceptual insight into *how* armed forces learn. Chapter 3 then narrowed the focus by offering a frame of reference based on historical counterinsurgency prescriptions to assess important themes on *what* militaries can, or perhaps should, learn in counterinsurgency conflicts. With this theoretical lens, the next chapters explored the Dutch and British learning processes in Southern Afghanistan and the subsequent impact on the respective organizations based on a detailed literature review and an extended empirical research process based on 130 interviews and related document analysis of primary sources where available.

In this concluding chapter, the queries that drove this research will be answered. To start, the theoretical contributions will be reiterated. Subsequently, the key findings of this study will be discussed in more detail and analyzed with the help of the new theoretical framework. After this analysis, the chapter will examine the extent to which the Dutch and British militaries learned from their experiences in southern Afghanistan to answer the main research question. Finally, potential avenues for future research will be considered.

6.2: Theoretical contributions

As elaborated in the introduction the ability to adapt to wartime challenges has become a pronounced field of research in the last two decades. Beyond the study of how armed forces innovate in peacetime to face future conflicts, examining how militaries adapt to more immediate challenges in wartime became more prominent, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq providing an important impetus for this field. Western armed forces found that they were ill-prepared for the challenges posed by these counterinsurgency conflicts. This resulted in a vast body of literature that assessed the extent of adaptation by the militaries involved in these Western interventions. As such, the new empirical works contributed to the study of military change as they provided a trove of empirical data. Still, an underdeveloped theme in the literature on military change is how wartime experiences are institutionalized afterwards. Currently, this academic field emphasizes the difference between adaptation in conflict and innovation in peace time, as if two separate topics. This dissertation research

posits that the learning processes in war are better understood as having different dynamics than the institutionalization of the acquired knowledge afterwards. However, recent experiences naturally influence the outlook of the militaries after operations. Therefore, the working assumption of this book has been that learning processes in and beyond war are distinct but related, instead of dichotomous.

To understand these dynamics from a theoretical perspective, this study has aimed to synthesize organizational learning literature with that on military adaptation in chapter 2. By studying military change as an experiential learning process, while acknowledging idiosyncrasies of military organizations during and after conflict, an enhanced theoretical framework emerges. Classical organizational learning contributes the various levels of knowledge transfer and implementing change as being subject to power relations in organizations. More recent work on organizational learning adds concepts of learning from projects and temporary organizations to this synthesis. The most fundamental notion in this regard is the dialectic between exploration and exploitation. This tension is pertinent to armed forces that generally must balance between requirements for diverse types of missions. In other words, militaries are generally required to maintain an ambidextrous posture, balancing the tasks of conventional war fighting and deterrence with of those of counterinsurgency or stabilization operations. Thus, the concept of exploration and exploitation captures the tension that armed forces experience as they have to maintain readiness for different skill sets and consequently cannot focus solely on the conflict at hand, nor on narrow visions of potential wars in the future.

At the heart of this dissertation research then is the notion that military learning consists of distinct but related strands. Chapter 2 built a theoretical framework on how militaries learn in and from conflict. It offered a working definition of organizational learning based on the literature: "the process through which an organization constructs knowledge or reconstructs existing knowledge for maintaining or enhancing its performance in relation to its environment." By synthesizing organizational learning theories with the literature on military adaptation, a constructive theoretical lens emerges through which military learning processes can be examined. This joins recent research that has highlighted the process aspects of military learning, such as work by Dyson and Hoffman. The most pertinent contribution of this chapter is the distinguishing of three strands of learning in relation to conflict: informal adaptation, formal adaptation, and institutionalization. While these strands are related, they form distinct processes. The linkage of wartime adaptation and subsequent knowledge retention through institutionalization has been underdeveloped in the literature on military innovation and adaptation.

To recap the main distinctions, informal learning processes in conflict are those that are initiated by troops in the field that do not require attention, resources, or acceptance by the

wider institution. Prime examples are changing tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) or experimenting with organizational structures to overcome operational challenges. The inherent limitation of informal learning is that many identified deficiencies do require institutional support to overcome. Moreover, without institutional support knowledge transfer and retention are precarious.

Informal lessons can be disseminated and retained by the existence of 'anchor points'. These are specialized units that combine operational practice, doctrine development and education. As such, these units can form a closed learning cycle in which experiences feed into knowledge development and training. Consequently, such learning processes at the lower level acquire a semi-formal character as such units can allocate resources to them beyond the operational theater.

Formal learning indicates that the wider institution supports the outcomes of these processes. For instance, the acquisition of new equipment, implementation of new capabilities or initiating a new strategy for the current campaign require backing by the wider organization. Changes can be implemented through doctrine, training, new organizational structures or preferably a combination of these. However, formal adaptation in conflict does not itself equate to institutionalization of knowledge afterwards.

This discontinuity of learning processes during and after a conflict can be explained by considering three elements from organizational learning literature. First is the above-mentioned tension between exploitation and exploration. After the conclusion of a given conflict, the calculus for maintaining the balance between these elements changes. This is not to say that exploitation equals war-time adaptation or that exploration is more applicable to peace time innovation, but rather that the dynamics can shift. For instance, operational challenges in war may warrant experimentation that go against institutional norms. Conversely, after a mission concludes, a military organization can opt to refocus its attention back onto its normal operations as it deems the latest experiences to be context specific. This dynamic is compounded with the aforementioned necessity of Western armed forces to maintain an ambidextrous stance: readiness for conventional warfare and simultaneous deployments in other types of missions such as counterinsurgency, stabilization and peace-keeping that require the inclusion of different skills.

Consequently, this segues into the second organizational learning concept, learning from projects. While comparing expeditionary military missions with projects might be counterintuitive, there are some relevant similarities. Like projects, military missions to a given conflict work towards a specific objective, albeit often more broadly formulated, for a given time, with allocated resources. Of course, a war will not adhere to restraints in time or resources, but expeditionary missions generally do so. In projects and expeditionary military

operations, participants must adapt to emerging challenges. After the conclusion of such episodes, the wider organization can evaluate the experiences and decide which knowledge it retains as relevant for other contexts.

The third relevant element of organizational learning is formed by temporary organizations. When military units are deployed to conflict, they are generally organized in bespoke task forces. In these task forces, units with various tasks and specialties are combined, with differing levels of familiarity. Additionally, these task forces are subject to rotation schedules which means that there are consecutive temporary organizations. During deployment, these diverse arrays of units must then orchestrate their operations. By itself, this cooperation yields knowledge by coordinating various skill sets, especially at the staff and command levels. After the end of a mission, or indeed a rotation, the task force will dissolve, as such they resemble a project organization. This means that the knowledge on integration can dissipate. Furthermore, the constituent units will then refocus on their respective specialized tasks.

As such, these elements of temporary organizing, learning from projects and the tension between exploration and exploitation point to the dynamics of change both during and after conflict, but with differing weight awarded to them. Operational pressures and close cooperation will shape the extent of change during missions. Conversely, after the conclusion of a military mission, a certain recalibration is warranted to orient a military for future operations. This means that a military must evaluate the experiences and identified lessons from the recent operations and assess their merit for future use. Of course, this evaluation can be subject to fallacies. As William Fuller recognized, militaries can either discard lessons by designating recent experiences as exceptional, or embrace them wholeheartedly as a portent for new war. Thus, this evaluation phase after conflict is crucial for institutionalization of knowledge. Not only must the recent experiences be assessed, but these mission post-mortems must also be fused with analysis of developments in the strategic context. Lessons from the last war can be context-specific, while others may be applicable to potential conflicts. Furthermore, new strategic analysis can prompt the conscious 'unlearning' of lessons as these are irrelevant or even detrimental in new conflicts. Understanding this dynamic of recalibration can contribute to an explanation on how and why lessons are institutionalized.

The simultaneous distinction and connection between war-time adaptation and institutionalization then led to the construction of the analytical model that illustrates the process of learning in relation to conflict (see figure 6.1). This model comprises of six steps towards military learning: evaluation, identification, reaction, adaptation, contemplation, and institutionalization. Evaluation serves as a starting point for learning and assesses the performance of a unit in relation to its mission. This can range from verbal after action

reviews to more consolidated analysis at the task force-level. Through constant evaluation the second step is initiated, where identification can be made of performance gaps or opportunities. In the third step of reaction, search actions are undertaken to investigate remedial actions. The fourth step of adaptation then sees the implementation of measures to overcome operational challenges, whether sanctioned by the wider institution or executed informally by units in the field. As seen in the model, such adaptations can inform new learning cycles. Moreover, as chapters 4 and 5 show, multiple concurrent learning cycles can occur simultaneously. After the mission, the lessons from the specific conflict are assessed for their enduring relevance in the fifth step of contemplation. Combined with strategic analysis, the military institution can then choose to retain, reject, or revise the knowledge from past operations. In the sixth and ultimate step of institutionalization the lessons are implemented through structural reforms.

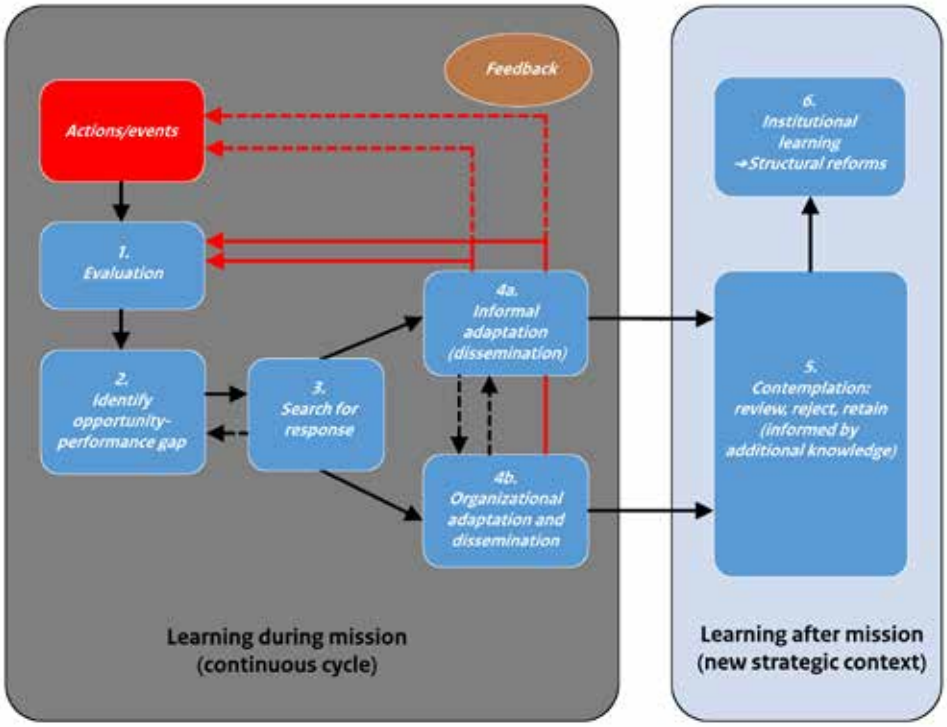

Figure 6.1: Analytical model for institutional learning in relation to conflict

Beyond being subject to the organizational learning dynamics as explicated above, more specific influencing factors on military change can be identified through the literature on military adaptation and innovation. In broad terms, these influencing factors can be divided into external and internal factors (see table 6.1). These influencing factors cannot be considered mono-causal explanations of military change; instead, collectively they can form a useful frame of reference for analyzing diverse manifestations of learning processes, adaptation, and institutionalization efforts. Interestingly, the identified set of external factors are specific to military organizations as they describe the (political) environment in which they exist. By contrast, at a more abstract level, the internal influencing factors are applicable to any organization. Whether a large bureaucracy or a nimble start-up company, all organizations are influenced by leadership, culture, organizational politics, resource allocation, learning and dissemination mechanisms. Still, at closer inspection, these attributes have a distinct quality pertinent to military organizations, such as the inter-service and intra-service rivalries, the specific circumstances of military command and the role of doctrine and training on learning processes. Of course, these elements can vary between armed forces and services.

External factors of influence	**Internal factors of influence**
Domestic politics	Leadership
Alliance politics	Organizational culture
Strategic culture	Learning mechanisms
Civil-military relations	Dissemination mechanisms
Threat perception	Organizational politics
Defense policy	Resource allocation

Table 6.1: Factor of influence on military change

This synthesis between the field on organizational learning and the literature on military change helps establish a comprehensive theoretical framework to study how military organizations in relation to conflict. With the empirical data on Dutch and British learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan, this framework can help explain how armed forces learn. The next section examines the impact of the empirical findings for the understanding of learning processes in relation to conflict.

6.3: Empirical findings and theoretical implications

With this theoretical framework on how military organizations learn in place, chapter 3 aimed to provide a frame of reference of what the manifestations of the learning processes can be in a counterinsurgency context (see table 6.2). By assessing historical and contemporary counterinsurgency prescriptions, a set of common themes emerge. The existence of a comprehensive campaign plan in which military force plays an important yet subsidiary role is identified as one of the most salient manifestations. This links to the importance of interagency cooperation in these conflicts. Further themes under study, although not exhaustive, are the centralities of intelligence, non-kinetic activities, efforts to counter adversarial actions and the ability to learn and adapt. As such, these themes are not intended as a metric to gauge the effectiveness of learning but rather form a prism by which to assess the processes of adaptation and institutionalization.

Recurring themes in counterinsurgency prescriptions
Integral campaign plan
Ability to learn and adapt
Interagency cooperation
Primacy of intelligence
Utility of non-kinetic activities
Countering adversarial activities

Table 6.2: Themes in counterinsurgency prescriptions

These themes were examined closely in chapters 4 and 5 through the study of Dutch and British learning processes in Southern Afghanistan and the subsequent impact on the respective organizations. Analysis of these themes in relation to the theoretical framework enables six notable outcomes to be presented. These outcomes pertain to: the inadequate formal institutional learning processes by the Dutch and British militaries; the limited learning at the campaign level; the role of "anchor points" in informal learning processes; the effects of the temporal aspects of the missions; the centrality of the tension between exploitation and exploration in military learning; and the assessment of influencing factors on learning. Each of these elements and their implications for the two empirical cases are discussed in the following subsections.

6.3.1: Learning processes

First of all, in both the Dutch and British militaries, the centralized lessons learned processes were initially understaffed and not adequately linked. Formal evaluation mechanisms existed in the form of post-rotation evaluations but mechanisms to disseminate lessons were lacking. To an extent, the training establishments sought to incorporate lessons from the field. Still, these lessons were mostly geared towards Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) in relation to adversarial activities rather than the full spectrum of counterinsurgency requirements.

Thus, the learning processes were driven by the deployed units that recognized deficiencies affecting security or performance, and sought ways to address them. The initial informal adaptations ranged from adjusted TTPs to innovative approaches such as the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework. Still, further adaptations and coordinated knowledge sharing required institutional attention. When informal learning processes from the field were accepted and supported by the institutions, at the service or department level, the adaptations were implemented more consistently throughout the rotations. As such, the processes of adaptation adhered to the processes of organizational learning. It was the deployed individuals and units that evaluated their performance, recognized deficiencies, and searched for responses to overcome operational challenges. With support of the wider institutions, these learning processes could be assisted by allocating resources and ensuring the transfer of knowledge throughout the organization. Both the informal and informal processes were geared towards enhancing the organizational performance.

In the Dutch armed forces, semi-formal arrangements were introduced such as army-level debriefings, deployment of personnel from the training command to acquire the latest insights from theater, and the publication of information bulletins. Indeed, the quick response to the threat of IEDs with the acquisition of electronic countermeasures and mine-resistant vehicles were examples of circumventing normal procedures. Additionally, experiences from the field were swiftly disseminated to the training establishment to help guide the predeployment training. However, this was mostly geared towards the battle group and TFU staffs. Furthermore, informal initiatives to draft a new counterinsurgency doctrine were not followed through. Curiously, while the deficiencies in the formal lessons learned process were well recognized before, during and after the deployment to Afghanistan, no significant remedial actions were taken to address this.

For the British Army, the initial operational challenges were even more intense than for their Dutch counterparts, as Helmand proved to be most volatile province in southern Afghanistan. Thus, the need to adapt to the encountered circumstances was particularly poignant. However, in addition to limited formal learning arrangements, the British forces

were hindered by the continuing operations in Iraq that required substantial institutional attention. Striking examples of this problem were the lack of a specific Afghanistan training by the Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) and the fact that new mine-resistant vehicles were first deployed to Iraq. More informal initiatives to adapt were launched, yet these often had a limited lifespan as they received insufficient institutional support such as the initial drive to write an updated counterinsurgency doctrine and the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF).

By 2009, the British Army decided to concentrate all its institutional capital towards Helmand and launched Operation Entirety. Foremost, Entirety was meant to harness the experiences from the field and foster organizational learning. It set the British Army on a campaign footing and established learning and dissemination mechanisms to capture knowledge and use it to enhance the performance of the deployed units and their supporting structures. An important aspect of Operation Entirety was the establishment of Force Development and Training Command (FDT) that, under the leadership of a lieutenant-general, oversaw the implementation of the measures. Under FDT's guidance new elements that were established were the Lessons Exchange Centre (LXC), the Afghanistan COIN Centre and the Mission Exploitation Symposia. Such elements did not only actively hunt for relevant lessons, but also followed upon them and streamlined the responses throughout the Ministry of Defence and beyond. Furthermore, the predeployment training became far more attuned to the experience of the operations in Helmand. Units that were deployed received a ready-made training package that was constantly updated. A final beneficial result of Operation Entirety was that initiatives to address deficiencies now had institutional backing and could be implemented throughout the Army. Examples of these include the new doctrine publications on counterinsurgency and the establishment of units such as the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre-Afghanistan (LIFC-A), the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit (DCSU) and the Miliary Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG).

With Operation Entirety, the British Army established a central direction for its learning processes and improved its leverage over the necessary channels within the Ministry of Defence. This central direction sets the British learning processes in Afghanistan apart from that of the Dutch. Given the smaller size of the Dutch Army and the challenges it had in deploying the later rotations, it is doubtful whether it had the capacity to organize a scaled equivalent. Of course, by the time Operation Entirety bore fruit in 2010, the Dutch were already packing up and leaving Uruzgan.

At the end of the operations in southern Afghanistan, both militaries conducted evaluations on their campaign to identify lessons and best practices. These should serve then as input for either fostering change or institutionalization of acquired experiences. In the Dutch case, a joint-level evaluation was drawn up based on the input from the successive TFU-rotations

and further research by specialists that tackled various themes like command and control, training, intelligence, and counterinsurgency. Although it focused on land operations and was thus dominated by lessons that pertained to the Dutch Army, it also investigated the performance by the Defence Staff in directing the campaign and other joint processes. Additionally, other, semi-formal evaluations attempted to capture the experiences of the TFU-commanders and the lessons for the permanent education of officers. These evaluations resulted in troves of lessons that could be implemented and help enhance the Dutch military's performance beyond Afghanistan and specific counterinsurgency missions.

The British had a different approach. The Army mandated the most important evaluation when TFH was still conducting operations. This resulted in a veritable tome that was designated the Operation Herrick Campaign Study. As it was commissioned by the Army, its scope was naturally limited and was mostly focused on the tactical level and what this meant for the British Army. Although some critique at the strategic direction of the Helmand campaign can be found, it does not address these shortcomings in a coherent manner. Of course, dealing with such deficiencies requires efforts beyond a single military service.

Between the Dutch and British learning processes, the enduring effects of the campaigns differed (see table 6.3). In the Netherlands, despite acknowledging that the formal lessons learned processes had been inadequate, no significant remedial action was undertaken to address this. In the British Army, Operation Entirety was naturally concluded at the end of the Helmand campaign. Elements of the learning processes were retained in a downscaled version as the army tried to capture lessons from new missions. However, the FDT was swiftly abolished after the withdrawal from Helmand. This indicates that the formal learning processes lost important backing at the institutional level.

Learning processes	Formal learning processes	Evaluation efforts	Institutionalization
The Netherlands	Limited to evaluation mechanisms during and after operations; semi-formal efforts in Dutch Army and Training Command	Internal evaluation at department level	Recognized deficiency, no remedial action
The United Kingdom	Revamped with Operation Entirety (2009), linking informal initiatives with formal support	Internal evaluation at service level (army)	Limited: abolishment of FDT, some elements persist in British Army

Table 6.3: Learning process in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

6.3.2: Limited learning at the campaign level

The second finding from the case studies indicates that both the Netherlands' and the United Kingdom's efforts to address deficiencies at the campaign level were inadequate. Issues regarding the campaign plans, rotation schedules and task force configuration remained unresolved or had limited impact on mission itself. In turn, while these deficiencies were recognized at the end of the campaigns, attempts to remedy them for future operations were limited.

Over the course of the campaign, the Dutch and British campaign plans saw several iterations and improvement. As time progressed and the violent nature of operations in southern Afghanistan was apparent, (population-centric) counterinsurgency principles became a more overt source of inspiration for these plans. Still, aspects of counterinsurgency theory such as the primacy of political considerations featured in the early plans. In the Dutch Uruzgan Focal Paper and the British Helmand Road Map (both in 2008), counterinsurgency elements were more pronounced. Moreover, both countries concurrently increased the civilian contributions to the campaigns. This was reinforced by the 2009 iterations of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan and the Helmand Implementation Plan. As these plans were geared towards a population-centric counterinsurgency approach, they aligned with the new ISAF-campaign Plan by general McChrystal.

A crucial difference between the Dutch and British campaigns was where the drafting of the campaign plans was initiated. For Uruzgan, the three campaign plans were drafted by the TFU with no substantial input from military or political leadership. Conversely, the British produced plans through interdepartmental processes, although these were dominated by the military.

However, despite this difference both campaigns suffered from a similar defect: the disconnect between strategic guidance from the capitals and the conduct of operations in Afghanistan. In the Netherlands, this was manifested by the aloofness at the ministerial levels and above for the campaign plans drafted by the TFU. Tellingly, the attempt to get political backing for the Focal Paper in 2008 was rebuffed, yet it was still implemented in Uruzgan. For the subsequent Uruzgan Campaign Plan, this support was not even sought. In the United Kingdom, this disconnect meant that the plans were inadequately coordinated and enforced with Task Force Helmand. Consequently, the initial Joint UK Plan for Helmand was immediately jettisoned by TFH when the situation in Helmand proved more volatile than envisioned. Subsequent rotations saw a highly varying approach of the campaign with little consistency. Even after the latest plan was implemented in 2009, British rotations shifted their focus away from the hallmark notion of "courageous restraint" on their own initiative. Towards the end of the campaign, successive TFH commanders had coordinated among

themselves to ensure campaign continuity. Thus, despite the existence of a sanctioned campaign plan, there still was no effective central direction of the effort in Helmand.

Another fundamental deficiency was the inability to assess the effects of the campaigns in a meaningful way. This hindered the ability to adjust operations and campaign plans. The role of campaign assessment differed starkly between the British and Dutch missions. In Uruzgan, a relatively small cadre of Dutch operational analysts rotated as augmentees within the TFU-staff's plans section (G5). Thus positioned, they had considerable influence on the drafting of plans for the longer term. Moreover, they either initiated or contributed to the three successive campaign plans and functioned as advisors for the TFU-commanders.

In contrast, the role of operational analysts was more limited in Helmand. Although the British analysts had nominally a similar position as their Dutch colleagues in TFH's headquarters, their influence on the campaign was more constrained. In part, this can be ascribed to the fact that there was no extant campaign plan between 2006 and 2008. Additionally, as some interviewed officers and the official evaluation by the British Army indicated, the analysts were not among the principal advisors in the TFH staff. This is evidenced by the short-lived experiment of the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF). That this informal initiative was deemed necessary is indicative that the measurement of effectiveness was deficient hitherto. Furthermore, after the discarding of TCAF, no real alternative was introduced, let alone institutionalized. It was only in 2010 that the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP) was introduced by the Helmand PRT.

Overall, efforts by the analysts were hampered by the difficulties of acquiring valid data on the progress of the campaign. By and large they relied on sources within the task forces for data, as they were mostly unable to venture into the province by themselves. Naturally, interlocutors from the battle group, PRT or intelligence were not singularly focused on acquiring data for the activities of the operational analysts. Efforts to outsource data-collection through sub-contractors undermined the veracity of the information.

Furthermore, the task forces were too small to secure all population centers and thus conduct operations that adhered to counterinsurgency principles. This is not to say that with additional troops these campaigns would have been more successful. However, the Dutch and British forces, at first tacitly, professed that these were guiding principles but with these force configurations they did not meet the requirements for such an approach. Indeed, reinforcements in Helmand by British and even more American forces had only a transient effect. Paucity in personnel that could patrol the Afghan towns and rural areas was compensated with firepower, which further undercut a genuine population-centric approach.

The rotation schedules then limited the accumulation of knowledge on the environment. Although this was recognized, considerations such as unit cohesion and administrative difficulties precluded extending tours. In the Netherlands, mandating extended tours could be challenged by the military labor unions. Moreover, deploying soldiers for longer tours would be politically unpalatable in both countries. Another consideration was that the wider institutions did not want to deny commanders the opportunity to command their formation or unit. Such experiences generally had positive effects on individual careers.[1701] Furthermore, the reasoning was that operations in Afghanistan were a valuable experience for the units themselves which benefitted the entire army, especially when as many units as possible would be able to serve a tour there.

Finally, deploying large task forces on open-ended counterinsurgency campaigns became politically infeasible given the unpopularity of the Afghanistan conflict and militarily impractical due to budget cuts after the troops were withdrawn. Consequently, despite the inclusion of the comprehensive approach in policy papers, there is little evidence that the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have enhanced their ability to conduct a counterinsurgency or stabilization campaign.

To a certain extent, the quality of the Dutch and British performance at the campaign level in southern Afghanistan is moot. Uruzgan and Helmand had specific local dynamics but were of course part of a larger theater. Thus, even if the Dutch and British had produced feasible campaign plans that were attuned to the resources available and the operational environment, this set of facts in itself would not affect the strategic direction in the Afghan conflict. This strategic guidance and overall plan should of course have originated from the Afghan authorities, strongly supported by the international community. In practice, the fact that allies like the Netherlands struggled to draft and implement discrete campaign plans is indicative of the lack of strategic direction in the Afghanistan war.

The implications of these difficulties of learning at the campaign level (see table 6.4) were mirrored after the Dutch and British missions in southern Afghanistan ended. After the respective withdrawal of Dutch and British forces, embarking on open-ended expeditionary counterinsurgency campaigns was no longer politically feasible. Furthermore, the allied militaries recalibrated towards conventional warfare. Consequently, deploying large task forces for counterinsurgency or stabilization missions became beyond the scope of the armed forces. Instead, the Dutch and British opted for smaller contributions with specific capabilities in such as in Iraq, Mali, and Afghanistan. Furthermore, due to large budget cuts, both armies' capacity to field large forces for prolonged campaigns was severely diminished.

1701 Indeed, many of the Dutch and British commanding officers that were interviewed for this research had been promoted in the subsequent years.

As such, the political will and capacity to wage large scale counterinsurgency operations had declined in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Still, the operations in Afghanistan had brought serious deficiencies at the campaign level to light. Unfortunately, these identified lessons went unheeded or were unevenly implemented. For instance, the Dutch idea to establish a Permanent Joint Headquarters to better guide expeditionary operations was silently jettisoned in the years after Uruzgan. Additionally, instead of drawing up comprehensive campaign plans for new missions, the Netherlands and the UK mostly contributed specific capabilities to international missions instead of a self-supporting task force. Furthermore, in Dutch and British doctrine and policy papers, counterinsurgency is now a reticent theme. Instead, the most touted topic in these documents with regard of Afghanistan is the comprehensive (or integrated) approach. However, there is no evidence that for future campaigns the interagency cooperation or indeed campaign planning will work better based on the experiences in Afghanistan. One potential positive aspect that a number of interview respondents from both countries mentioned was that the interagency cooperation in Afghanistan has led to a better understanding between service members and civil servants. Still, this experience is highly personal and ephemeral. Finally, the mention of lessons at the campaign level or existence of updated counterinsurgency doctrine is hardly a guarantee for implementation of these concepts in future operations. Both countries under study had recent relevant experiences and current doctrine publications when they deployed to southern Afghanistan in 2006 yet both failed to tap into their institutional knowledge.

Aspects of the campaign	Manifestations	Influencing factors	Institutionalization
Plans (NLD)	Informal adaptation of plans, disconnect between theater and strategic level	Organizational culture, leadership	Acknowledged deficiency, no evidence of implementation beyond doctrine
Plans (UK)	Formal adaptation of plans, disconnect between theater and strategic level	Organizational culture, leadership	Acknowledged deficiency, no evidence of implementation beyond doctrine
Analysis (NLD)	Informal drafting of plans and metrics	Organizational culture	No, recognized deficiency
Analysis (UK)	Informal and formal establishment of programs	Organizational culture	No, recognized deficiency
Configuration (NLD)	Limited reinforcements	Domestic politics, civil-military relations	-
Configuration (UK)	Extensive reinforcements	Alliance politics, domestic politics, civil-military relations	-
Rotations (NLD)	Limited, extension of PRT. Recognized deficiency	Organizational culture: administrative considerations	No, recognized deficiency
Rotations (UK)	Recognized deficiency	Organizational culture: administrative considerations	No, recognized deficiency

Table 6.4: Learning at the campaign level

6.3.3: The role of anchor points in learning

A third germane finding is the role of ''anchor points" below the institutional level for developing knowledge and implementing lessons. When examining the various themes in which the Dutch and British forces learned in relation to their operations in Afghanistan, the existence of these anchor points is indicative of whether specific knowledge was retained. As described in chapter 2, anchor points are organizational elements that are responsible for a specific area of knowledge. As such, they can harness informal adaptations and even 'institutionalize' them without support from the wider institution. Consequently, informal learning processes from the field acquire a more semi-formal character.

Within Western militaries, most arms and branches have their own knowledge or expertise centers. However, to function as an anchor point, such elements must have proximity to the operational practice and combine the factors of doctrine development, education, and training. As such, these anchor points can help institutionalize specific knowledge as they incorporate experiences from operations, implement these into doctrinal publications and disseminate the knowledge through education and training.

This dynamic is visible in both the Dutch and British armed forces in relation to learning in the realms of intelligence and counter-IED efforts. For instance, the Dutch Army's ISTAR-battalion and associated school adapted its intelligence process to meet the requirements of counterinsurgency operations. As mentioned in chapter 4, intelligence in the Dutch Army suffered from the institutional unwillingness to establish a separate branch and specialized career paths. Still, intelligence personnel fed their experiences and adaptations into training at the intelligence training establishment that was collocated with the battalion. Moreover, service members with prior experience went on to instruct new personnel. After Afghanistan, this specific "knowledge hub" continued to develop this capability, even though there was no specific branch or a dedicated career path for intelligence personnel in the army. Of course, the British Army had an intelligence corps and thus a more formal anchor point. Consequently, its adaptations were more far-reaching and saw a better implementation and institutionalization.

Regarding the threat of IEDs, this knowledge fell inside the remit of both armies' Combat Engineers and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) units. This was reinforced by the creation of Counter-IED Task Forces that sought to develop comprehensive lessons for reducing this threat. The establishment of these task forces were indicative of the institutional and political pressure to decrease casualties from IEDs. Along with the existing units, the C-IED task forces developed improvements in training, equipment, TTPs and targeting IED-networks. Throughout the campaigns, IEDs remained the weapon of choice for the insurgents. After the end of operations in Afghanistan, both armies have institutionalized the knowledge in specific organizations. The Dutch Army has created a permanent expertise center and the British Army has incorporated the knowledge in a reinvigorated training regiment and has established regular specialist regiments. While the urgency of the threat has naturally diminished, the knowledge has been retained and continues to be developed. For now, deployments in areas like Mali ensure that this knowledge continues to be disseminated.

Conversely, interagency cooperation and non-kinetic activities initially had no anchor points in the Dutch and British militaries. Consequently, adaptations in these fields remained largely informal and haphazard. For example, the Dutch PRT-rotations were built around staffs drawn from, among others, cavalry, engineer, and field artillery battalions. Of course, fostering governance and development was beyond their organic tasks. As a result,

the operational experience of operating as a PRT was extraordinary for these units. After their redeployment, they would begin to refocus on their normal tasks. Moreover, there was no specific knowledge hub in either the Dutch army or the Ministry of Defence into which the experiences could be fed or from which disseminated. Consequently, the PRTs continued on the basis of personal relations to share knowledge. However, this knowledge quickly dissipated after a rotation. In the British case, their Stabilisation Unit served as an interagency "anchor point," but the disconnect between the PRT and TFH precluded coordinated knowledge development on this topic. After the establishment of the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG), the British Army formed its own knowledge hub. In relation to non-kinetic activities, both armed forces lacked a dedicated unit that could serve as a conduit for knowledge. As a case in point, the Dutch Army had delegated the task of psychological operations to its Air Defence Artillery-units. Although the British Army had assigned associated tasks to various units, there was no unit responsible for non-kinetic activities.

In the evaluations after the campaigns, the interagency cooperation and non-kinetic activities were identified as institutional deficiencies. The British Army opted to institutionalize these lessons in its Army 2020 reorganization by establishing 77 Brigade. This new formation was tasked with, among others, non-kinetic activities, and civil-military cooperation by absorbing the MSSG. By contrast, the Dutch Army pondered allocating such tasks to its CIMIC-battalion but did not follow through on this. Establishing a new unit for these tasks was deemed impractical as it would be vulnerable for new budget cuts. Only much later did the Dutch Army establish a Communication and Engagement branch for non-kinetic activities.

Thus, the existence of "anchor points" can indicate whether informal lessons can be shared and retained (table 6.5). The examples of intelligence and counter-IED show that specialized units can help institutionalize lessons. In the case of Dutch Army intelligence, the lack of institutional support for retaining the knowledge from Afghanistan proved no insurmountable obstacle. However, as the C-IED efforts and British intelligence indicate, the combination with institutional support can help attain more extensive adaptations. Conversely, when no anchor points exist, informal learning processes have limited value beyond a single rotation as the knowledge quickly evaporates.

Anchor points	The Netherlands	The United Kingdom
Interagency cooperation (PRT)	No dedicated unit, novel, and singular task for deployed units	Not within armed forces, remedied by establishment of MSSG and later 77 Brigade
Intelligence	Yes, ISTAR-battalion and Intelligence school	Yes, Intelligence Corps and associated units
Non-kinetic activities	No dedicated unit, secondary tasks	No, later remedied by establishment of 77 Brigade
Counter-IED	Yes, engineers and EOD, reinforced by specific task force	Yes, engineers and EOD, reinforced by specific task force

Table 6.5: The role of anchor points in learning

6.3.4: Temporality in organization and missions

The fourth finding pertains to the temporal aspect of the missions in Southern Afghanistan. This notion affected the associated learning processes. By definition Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) and Task Force Helmand (TFH) were temporary organizations that existed for the duration of the campaign. Built around a brigade staff, the task forces consisted of a nucleus of infantry and other combat arms that provided the battle groups. These troops were to be assisted by a vast array of supporting units such as artillery, engineers, logistics and medical support. Of course, integrating these different capabilities required coordination but was familiar for officers and NCOs. What was particular to Afghanistan was that this integration occurred at the platoon-level or even below.

Thus, introducing such capabilities into temporary organizations such as the task forces and their constituent parts were straightforward. These were either informal initiatives or sanctioned by the wider institution. As the militaries recognized the value of these nonorganic capabilities to overcome operational challenges, these adaptations often received some institutional support. For the deployed task forces the main challenge proved to be integrating such new capabilities into the normal framework of security operations. At an institutional level, the main concern was to find personnel that could fulfill the roles. As seen in the PRTs and non-kinetic activities, these subunits were often comprised of personnel that was available instead of specifically trained for such roles.

More intricate was the integration of more exotic capabilities such as the PRTs, specialized intelligence detachments and non-kinetic activities. These were either relatively new or normally attached to higher echelons. As such, the traditional and the novel capabilities had to integrate to attain the operational and tactical objectives during deployment. This

in itself required a learning process, as this was largely unfamiliar territory for the involved personnel. This collaboration thus led to new experiences that were specific to the mission. Whether this knowledge could be captured and institutionalized after the mission is a central consideration in the theory on temporary and project organizations.

Furthermore, the deployed forces were not only configured as temporary organizations, but the personnel also rotated after a few months. Again, this was for good reason, but inherently affected the campaign continuity and accumulation of knowledge. After the end of the mission, these temporary organizations were naturally subject to a centrifugal dynamic in which the constituent unit would again refocus on its original tasks. As a result, experiences with integrating and orchestrating the various capabilities dissipated over time.

The temporary character of the Dutch and British missions ties into the challenge of institutionalizing knowledge after the campaigns. As the case studies demonstrate, formal learning during missions does not automatically lead to institutionalization of lessons. Instead, the lessons were weighed for relevancy in future missions during post-mission evaluations. Transferring knowledge from a specific episode to the institutional level adheres to the same principles. Moreover, the post-mission evaluations are conducted with this objective. The Dutch and British armed forces produced candid internal evaluations on their performances in southern Afghanistan.

As such, institutionalization of lessons from a specific conflict resembles organizational learning in project environments. Here, organizations seek to capture knowledge from particular contexts that can be useful for the wider organization and future projects. Comparing, or even equating, military missions as TFU and TFH with projects is somewhat counterintuitive. As mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, wars are not bound in time. Furthermore, the desired end-states are often unclear, and progress is hard to assess. However, the Dutch and British missions in Afghanistan have been tacitly approached as discrete projects. While the international endeavor in Afghanistan lasted from 2001 to 2021, countries like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom had deployed troops for bracketed terms, in various areas and different mandates. In this way, Western states picked a type of intervention that matched their appetite for risks and expenditure of resources at the time. While understandable from a political perspective, such project-based deployment precluded strategic consistency.

In both cases the formal evaluations provided these institutions with identified lessons and best practices that could be used for organizational change without the pressure of supporting an intense and large-scale campaign. However, institutionalization of wartime adaptation and remedying extant deficiencies beyond the operations in Afghanistan was hindered by several factors. A first mundane but crucial element was that after the

withdrawal from southern Afghanistan, the sense of urgency to address deficiencies had naturally diminished. Additional funding that was made available to support the operations in Afghanistan had stopped, thereby limiting the willingness to introduce new capabilities. Furthermore, the Dutch military did not address its lack of an adequate formal learning process while the British Army downscaled its learning capacity from operation Entirety. Secondly, both militaries faced substantial budget cuts because of the global financial crisis. A third factor that hindered institutionalization was that the armed forces started to recalibrate from a specific counterinsurgency footing towards an outlook for conventional warfare.

These impeding factors notwithstanding, the British Army made a concerted effort to implement the relevant lessons from Afghanistan in its Army 2020 reorganization. Despite the budget cuts, new formations such as 77 Brigade and 1 ISR-Brigade were established. These new organizational structures institutionalized manifestations of learning as increased attention to non-kinetic activities, civil-military cooperation, and developments in intelligence. As such, the British Army combined the evaluations of the Helmand campaign with a new strategic analysis while incorporating new financial realities. In the Netherlands, the implementation of lessons fell flat due to the budgetary constraints and the lack of a comprehensive implementation plan.

6.3.5: Ambidexterity and the tension between exploitation and exploration

The fifth finding concerns the influence of the inherent tension between *exploitation* and *exploration* on the examined learning processes in the Dutch and British militaries. As often described, Western armed forces are organized for conventional interstate warfare. This leads to a cultural penchant to further develop capabilities associated with this type of conflict. Adaptations and adjustments associated with these capabilities can be designated as *exploitation*. By contrast, the more specific capabilities relevant to counterinsurgency or stabilization operations are indicative of *exploration* as they fall outside the established organizational norms.

As described above, the Dutch and British armed forces had to adapt significantly to the operational challenges posed in southern Afghanistan. Addressing identified deficiencies could not solely rely on *exploitation*. Adjusting capabilities associated with conventional warfare was strategically irrelevant against an irregular adversary. To be sure, adaptations regarding counter-IED efforts and improved targeting cycles had tactical benefits and proved a genuine ability to learn. However, many of the other recognized problems required looking beyond the existing norms and organizational capabilities. Integrating concepts such as the PRT and non-kinetic influencing were of course not completely novel to the Dutch and

British militaries, but as inorganic capabilities with highly contextual specificity these could be designated as *exploration* activities.

More difficult was the institutionalization of these capabilities associated with *exploration*. This required for instance: arranging specialized training, permanent organizational structures, and dedicated career paths. Implementing such administrative arrangements are crucial for institutionalization; but with finite resources available to armed forces, adopting such capabilities that are associated with specific conflict types cut into resources available for existing capabilities. Moreover, questions can be raised whether militaries must implement units like a PRT when this role is more attuned to interagency partners.

Understandably, being proficient in both conventional and irregular warfare or peacekeeping is a challenging proposition at best, as these types of conflicts have diverging requirements. The notion of organizational ambidexterity is therefore central to most Western armed forces who are tasked with territorial defense and expeditionary stabilization and peace keeping operations. During the initial years of either campaign, the wider institutions of the Dutch and British struggled in this balancing act. Operational concerns were pressing but had limited effect on the institutions themselves. However, the British Army recognized the partiality towards *exploitation*. Operation Entirety was initiated to counter this and put the army on a campaign footing, thereby consciously mortgaging its readiness for other types of missions. As such, the balance swung towards addressing shortcomings in the Helmand campaign.

However, even when deemed applicable for new operations, the organization had to allocate resources to retain manifestations of learning such as equipment, training programs or organizational structures. After a mission that required the attention of large parts of the institution, such as in southern Afghanistan, armed forces seek a form of recalibration. Missions of a longevity and intensity characteristics of Uruzgan and Helmand were formative experiences for individual service members and units. Moreover, the counterinsurgency context placed specific requirements on the organization and its members. Yet, western militaries remain tasked to maintain readiness for a wide array of missions, ranging from conventional warfare to peace operations and assistance to civilian authorities. Consequently, the skillset had to be rebalanced after the latest era of large-scale counterinsurgency operations. This need for ambidexterity and recouping skills that had been previously under-resourced affected institutionalization of mission specific capabilities.

This recalibration affected large parts of the Dutch and British armies, in particular the manoeuvre-battalions and brigades. These had made up the bulk of the battle groups and task forces. In Afghanistan they had formed the central organizing element to which non-organic capabilities, such as PRTs, non-kinetic influence teams and reinforced intelligence

detachments, had been attached. Throughout the campaigns, the staffs of the battalions and brigades had tried to integrate such capabilities in counterinsurgency operations. As described above, these efforts met with varying degrees of success. After the conclusion of the operations in Afghanistan, the temporary organizational structures dissolved, and the various units started to refocus on their organic tasks. For the specialist units, to the extent that they existed, this change was limited. Conversely, the combat units had to readjust to their organic tasks. For instance, the deployments in Afghanistan had led to atrophying of the ability to conduct combined arms operations at the battalion and brigade levels against a capable adversary. Thus, such skills had to be relearned by these units in exercises that were not suited for the more specific capabilities of other units. In turn this led to the decline of knowledge and familiarity of integrated capabilities relevant for counterinsurgency or stabilization operations.

Although far from absolute, the trend of recalibration toward conventional warfare was reinforced by new strategic analyses that indicated that states like Russia and China could be potential threats. Furthermore, these analyses led to defense policy papers that emphasized the need for proficiency in combat operations against such threats and the effects of integrating new technologies. As such, institutionalizing counterinsurgency experiences was less of a priority given the financial constraints both militaries faced. This is not to say that the leadership did not recognize their value, but more that they had limited resources to allocate to specific capabilities.

Recalibrations like these have been ascribed to a cultural predilection of Western armed forces towards conventional warfare by, for instance, scholars as Sergio Catignani and Tom Dyson. Although this is a contributing factor, the refocusing on a broader spectrum of conflict is warranted. At the tactical level, the adversaries in Afghanistan had limited capabilities that could defeat the Western militaries in sustained combat. Of course, this says nothing of their strategic capabilities and political acumen. However, adversaries in future conflicts may well employ different and new capabilities whether they are conventional or irregular actors. Any professional military must thus prepare for such eventualities and not dwell on previous experiences.

After the operations in southern Afghanistan, the Dutch and British armed forces thus had new capabilities that were associated with the Afghanistan campaign. Their worth was recognized for future potential conflicts. However, the institutions had to balance between recalibration towards their norms of conventional warfare and implementing lessons from a counterinsurgency campaign. A complicating factor was that the resources available to the militaries decreased after the missions. Furthermore, the lack of success in Afghanistan provided additional ammunition for skeptics of counterinsurgency. As such, the institutionalization of counter-IED measures could be aligned with combat operations

as a specific topic. Still, in the British Army modest resources were allocated for retaining capabilities or implementing broader lessons from Afghanistan such as 77 Brigade and 1ISR Brigade. For the Netherlands, knowledge was retained at a lower level and only institutionalized when additional resources became available.

6.3.6: Influencing factors on learning processes

The final general finding of this research is the role of the identified influencing factors on the learning processes in the studied militaries. The literature on military innovation in its broadest sense lists several factors that can influence how armed forces innovate or adapt. Originally, most literature categorized exogenous factors to military organizations, with prime examples being the role of national strategic culture, domestic politics, alliance politics and civil-military relations. Conversely, more recent works have introduced endogenous characteristics that shape military change, like organizational culture, leadership, learning mechanisms and dissemination mechanisms.

In general, the influence of external factors was mostly manifested at the campaign level. Perhaps the most politically salient aspect of the missions was troop levels. In both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, military planners proposed task force configurations based on what would be politically feasible instead of based on strategic analysis. In the Dutch military, the requests by commanders in Uruzgan for additional troops were often rebuffed. This points to an unwillingness to broach this subject to the political masters. As the run-up to the mission had been highly contentious in parliament, the expectation of political pushback for new troops was warranted. Conversely, the United Kingdom increased its troop levels in Helmand as the campaign stalled. Beyond operational necessity, an important consideration for the British government to do this was to demonstrate to the United States its commitment to the war in Afghanistan. Still, the effect of alliance politics was eventually trumped by domestic politics. American requests for further British reinforcements were not answered as the British effort in Helmand became increasingly unpopular domestically. A further salient domestic political aspect of the missions was casualties among the deployed troops. Countermeasures to IEDs and other threats to service members garnered political attention and often incentivized adaptations in terms of allocating additional resources.

However, the studied learning processes were largely internal affairs. As described, the initial absence of aligned and resourced learning and dissemination mechanisms impeded both formal and informal learning processes. While learning mechanisms were in place through various forms of evaluation, they were inadequately linked with dissemination mechanisms such as doctrine development and predeployment training. As discussed above, the existence of "anchor points" could help retain knowledge from informal learning processes.

The conscious attempt by the British Army to ameliorate the paucity of formal learning processes through Operation Entirety led to improvements during the Helmand Campaign. In this instance, forceful leadership was crucial against the internal opposition against mortgaging the British Army's readiness for future missions. By contrast, the Dutch Army's leadership refrained from addressing identified deficiencies in its intelligence process. In the evaluations from its mission in Iraq (2003-2005), the scarcity of trained intelligence personnel was recognized. A proposed solution was the founding of an intelligence branch or at least a dedicated career path for intelligence personnel to ensure knowledge retention in this field. After the operations in Afghanistan further reinforced the dearth of qualified intelligence personnel, this proposed solution was still not implemented. A main consideration was that a new intelligence branch would have to come out of existing personnel slots and thus (further) decrease the numbers available for the established arms and branches. It was not until 2020 that a dedicated intelligence corps was founded in the Dutch Army when additional funding came available. A somewhat similar dynamic can be seen in the British 77 Brigade where regular personnel come from the established arms and branches. As such, knowledge retention is tenuous as these personnel often do only short tours in this formation. The positive impact of leadership on learning processes arises thus when individuals help to overcome structural hindrances to implementing knowledge.

Often the organizational culture of Western militaries is designated as being an impediment to learning. In particular, the culture of armed forces is slanted against lessons that do not adhere to the institutional norm of conventional warfare. While this notion has its merits, it warrants some qualification. As discussed above most western armed forces have to balance between territorial defense against conventional threats and expeditionary stabilization missions. These tasks impose distinct requirements and force militaries into an ambidextrous stance, in which the conventional 'leg' is generally dominant. In this the Dutch and British militaries form no exception. However, at the same time most adaptations in Uruzgan and Helmand were initiated by service members instead of through external interventions. Thus, organizational culture cannot be considered as a catch-all concept to explain military change.

Furthermore, with some adaptations, the deployed militaries tried to compensate for capabilities that ideally should be deployed by other government agencies or even other organizations, such as reconstruction and building viable governance structures. This is hardly a military task but has been executed by soldiers throughout history in volatile environments whenever appropriate civilians were not available. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan have been lauded as an innovation that integrated interagency efforts within a military mission. The PRT were tasked with fostering development and assisting the fledgling Afghan authorities while most deployed troops would either provide security or sustain the international effort. Closer examination shows that designating the Dutch and British PRTs

as hallmarks of interagency cooperation is overly generous. The paltry civilian contribution and inadequate coordination with security operations hampered the effectiveness of the PRTs. Although the civilian contribution and coordination were improved over time, the campaigns were at their core military missions with limited buy-in from other departments. Thus, while civil-military interaction is a familiar if secondary aspect in western militaries, the Dutch and British PRTs were initially more indicative of the failures of interagency cooperation. Consequently, efforts to remedy deficiencies in this field went against the dominant organizational culture. Still yet both informal and formal adaptations were made. That the PRT concept was not retained at the end of the Afghanistan mission cannot be solely ascribed to the choices or resources of the Dutch and British armed forces.

Ultimately, the vignettes show that while deficiencies in capabilities were generally recognized within both armies, the most prominent factor for formal adaptation was the willingness to spend resources such as personnel, budget or equipment to address them. Of course, allocating resources to specific capabilities useful for counterinsurgency or stabilization mission is subject to organizational politics and culture. Here the British Army proved more able to allocate resources to such capabilities during the Helmand campaign. This was facilitated by Operation Entirety. Afterwards, new capabilities were retained within the Army 2020 program and beyond, despite a more general recalibration towards conventional warfare and declining budgets. Conversely, the Dutch armed forces awarded limited resources to these capabilities. The exception to this were the counter-IED efforts. After the withdrawal, most of the lessons concerning these capabilities were not implemented, in spite of the acknowledgement by the Army's leadership of their value. With shrinking budgets, the Dutch Army opted to retain existing units and capabilities instead of building new ones geared towards stabilization operations.

In sum, the identified external and influencing factors offer a useful frame of reference. This research indicates that the Dutch and British processes of learning were impacted mostly by internal influencing factors. External factors were generally limited to changes at the campaign level. However, the studied learning processes show that monocausal explanations offer limited value. With multiple learning processes in a complex mission, several influencing factors will be at play and a framework must encompass them.

6.4: Conclusion

To answer the main research question *"to what extent have the Dutch and British militaries learned from their counterinsurgency operations in southern Afghanistan between 2006 and 2020?"* this study has examined and compared two episodes across the case studies. First, the learning processes during the respective campaigns in Uruzgan (2006-2010) and Helmand (2006-2014) have been scrutinized. The second aspect of study was to analyze the effort of both armed forces to institutionalize the lessons from these formative experiences up to 2020.

As the empirical chapters describe, the allied forces in Uruzgan and Helmand ran into various challenges when they deployed in 2006. Recognizing deficiencies, in particular in specific capabilities relevant for a counterinsurgency campaign, the deployed task forces initiated informal adaptations. Some of these were quickly disseminated over rotations and found their way into the predeployment training such as TTPs to mitigate the threat of IEDs. As such, these informal learning processes were accepted by the institutions and thus became part of formal responses. Other initiatives did not receive formal backing and consequently dissipated after one rotation. Interestingly, informal learning processes could maintain their momentum when these were supported by specialized units (or branches) that were responsible for drafting doctrine and providing training for their personnel. In this way for instance, the intelligence units in both armies served as anchor points for developing the knowledge derived from operational experience.

While the deployed task forces were the principal agents for identifying deficiencies and at times formulating responses, they often required institutional support for implementing solutions. In essence, many identified capability gaps needed additional resources to ameliorate them - resources that could only be conferred by the home institution, whether that was the Army as a service or the Ministry of Defence. However, the formal learning mechanisms had been inadequately resourced by both the Dutch and British armed forces to enable them to act on signals from the field. While evaluations existed to capture identified lessons from theater, there was insufficient linkage to dissemination mechanisms to incorporate changes such as doctrine and predeployment training. When the Dutch military deployed equipment to mitigate the threat of IEDs, it was able to do so by circumventing established processes. A further dynamic that impeded formal learning processes was that, while the operations in Afghanistan were the primary focus of the Dutch and British forces, both armies had to balance between the mission at hand that required specific capabilities and maintaining readiness for other contingencies that were more aligned with the institutional norms. In other words, the tension between *exploitation* and *exploration* was keenly felt by both institutions.

The most salient difference between the Dutch and British learning processes was central direction. Admittedly, the British Army as an institution only became serious about learning from experience with the advent of Operation Entirety in 2009. The suite of measures resulted in an organization more attuned to processing signals from the field and using these to enact changes to enhance performance. Crucially, while Operation Entirety was instigated by Army leadership, it sought to expedite the wider Defence processes that were necessary for implementing changes. Moreover, not only were improvements implemented in TFH, but new organizational structures were established in the British Army that could support the operations. Elements like the Force Development and Training (FDT) Command, the Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC), the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre – Afghanistan (LIFC-A) and others, not only captured experiences from Helmand but also developed knowledge processes that fed lessons back into the deployed units. In this way, the British Army bestowed resources - funding, attention, and personnel - to improve its central learning processes. In this way, the British Army's focus was consciously swung towards *exploitation*. By contrast, the formal learning processes within the Dutch military lacked such a central guidance and mostly relied on initiatives by the Training Command and specialized units that functioned as anchor points.

Despite this difference in the resources awarded to formalized learning processes, the Dutch and British shared similarities in terms of where their learning abilities were inadequate. According to the introduce model of learning, both armies correctly identified performance gaps (step 2) and looked for responses (step 3), but in a several instance refrained from implementing formal adaptations (step 4). Two aspects stand out in this regard First, both militaries struggled with addressing shortcomings at the campaign level. Although campaign plans were revised periodically, their implementation was hindered by a disconnect between the deployed task forces and the national strategic headquarters. Furthermore, counterinsurgency theory increasingly a reference point for the conduct of operations. Yet, beyond the development and implementation of capabilities like interagency cooperation, intelligence, counter-IED and, to a lesser extent, non-kinetic activities, there was no orchestrated execution of the campaign. Elements such as campaign assessment, task force configuration and rotation schedules were not sufficiently addressed during the missions. Consequently, although these inadequacies at the operational and strategic level were discussed in post-mission evaluations, the lack of adaptations in this regard hamstrung the extent of institutionalization after the withdrawal from southern Afghanistan.

A second noteworthy aspect that hampered formal adaptation, and subsequently institutionalization, was the general inability or unwillingness to make significant adjustments to administrative norms. While changes pertaining to operations themselves were fairly straightforward, if not easy, to implement, seemingly mundane peace-time considerations proved refractory. Prime examples of this were the unwillingness to change

rotation schedules, command arrangements and establishing career paths for specialist service members such as intelligence personnel in the Dutch Army. Again, the latter was primarily a consequence of resource allocation because this would eat into personnel billets of the established arms and branches.

Although the effects of the learning processes on the operational environment itself are beyond the scope of this research, the empirical findings suggest that these have been limited. To be sure, the allied forces made relevant adaptations, but the local and strategic environments were subject to influencing factors other than the military task forces. Of course, any progress that was made by the international efforts in southern Afghanistan proved to be transient. This is not to say that adaptation in counterinsurgency conflict is irrelevant, as the inability to learn from experience will have negative effects on the changes of military success. However, as the war in Afghanistan demonstrates, counterinsurgency conflicts are ultimately political struggles in which the legitimacy and effectiveness of the incumbent government are challenged. If the host-nation government cannot improve its functioning and increase its base of support, the level international support will eventually be moot at best. Furthermore, this research shows the limitations of conducting operations in a coalition. Even if the Dutch and British task forces would have been completely attuned to their environment, they were still composite parts in a coalition effort that lacked strategic guidance and feasible objectives. As such, one of the more germane lessons of Afghanistan concerns the limitations of expeditionary military missions in a coalition to address political problems.

As the Dutch and British withdrew from southern Afghanistan, they took stock of their experiences. Although there was a sense of pride concerning the conduct of the armed forces in these volatile environs, sincere internal evaluations were drafted listing deficiencies and best practices based on these experiences. The evaluations pointed towards further solutions that could be implemented to remedy capability gaps. However, many of such institutionalization efforts required additional resources at a time when both militaries were faced by severe budget cuts.

Moreover, as the intense campaigns in Uruzgan and Helmand had ceased, the balancing act between *exploitation* and *exploration* became more pronounced. The operations in Afghanistan had added more weight to *exploration* in the pursuit of specific capabilities associated with counterinsurgency. Now the scales tipped towards *exploitation* as the militaries had to prepare for other potential mission types, most prominently conventional warfare. This was not solely a return to cultural fondness for combined arms operations; the specific circumstances of southern Afghanistan, the resulting adaptations and the longevity of the campaigns had led to units and service members that were geared towards a specific type of operations. For instance, patrols were normally conducted by augmented platoons with

overwhelming firepower. Furthermore, task forces in Helmand operated from sprawling bases with ubiquitous logistical support while the allies enjoyed complete air superiority. In future conflicts, conditions were likely to differ.

As the combat arms of the armies had been the most affected by these experiences, both militaries sought to recalibrate them towards combined arms operations against potential similarly operating adversaries. Thus, manoeuvre brigades and infantry battalions, who had made up the bulk of the deployed task forces and battle groups, started to refocus their training on conventional warfare and the associated tasks. In effect, with this recalibration the combat arms were trained to unlearn certain aspects of their experiences in Afghanistan. Of course, new strategic analyses indicated that the resurgence of interstate competition with countries like China and the Russian Federation became a more distinct possibility based on their increased assertiveness in recent years. As such, the recalibration after the specific conditions in southern Afghanistan were underwritten by the changes in the strategic contexts.

At the same time, the Dutch and British armies sought to retain the more specific adaptations from Afghanistan. The ability to institutionalize these capabilities was contingent on the existence of a unit that could serve as an anchor point for the specific knowledge. In the Dutch Army, the Counter-IED task force and the ISTAR-battalion with the collocated Joint Intelligence School (DIVI) served as such knowledge hubs. Conversely, interagency-cooperation and non-kinetic activities were only tangentially designated towards the army's CIMIC-battalion.

In the British Army, 77 Brigade was established and made responsible for civil-military cooperation and non-kinetic activities. Adaptations in intelligence were incorporated into a reorganized ISR-Brigade. These new formations were part of the Army 2020 reorganization and thus were part of a concerted attempt to institutionalize these capabilities. As the British Army had to contract due to budget cuts, this allocation of resources is an indication of a genuine effort to retain the competencies based on the Afghanistan experiences.

Whether 'anchored' informally in specialist units or in newly-established formations, these specific competencies were continuously developed in the years after Afghanistan, either through new insights from training or from other missions. As such, a new cadre of specialized personnel was trained in these capabilities. Eventually, this was reinforced in the Dutch Army by the creation of new branches in intelligence and non-kinetic engagement, with concomitant career paths. However, as the combat arms refocused on conventional warfare, the traditional elements of the armies and these more specialized elements were placed onto diverging paths. Training exercises for both elements are often incompatible to simulate genuine integration, risking the integration of these elements in new missions,

whether in a conventional conflict or a new counterinsurgency operation. Consequently, the potential negative effect of this change is that these elements must familiarize and integrate again in new missions.

Ultimately then, the answer to the main research question is that the learning processes in the Dutch and British armed forces were uneven and to a large extent ephemeral. During the operations, the deficiencies pertaining to the campaign and specific counterinsurgency capabilities were recognized. To an extent, adaptations were made to address capability gaps at the unit level. However, at the campaign level, changes proved to be more limited. Moreover, the formalized learning process proved to be inadequate for quick implementations of lessons learned. While this was ameliorated by the British Army with Operation Entirety, this applied mainly to measures to address the capability gaps and supporting structures and not to the strategic conduct of the campaign. Furthermore, the institutions struggled with balancing the requirements of the current counterinsurgency operations and the need to maintain readiness for other contingencies. After the withdrawal of Dutch and British forces, both militaries wanted to institutionalize lessons from Afghanistan. This was offset however by financial constraints and the recalibration from the specific prerequisites of Afghanistan towards conventional warfare. As a result, while specific capabilities were developed in both institutions based on the Afghanistan experiences, crucial lessons from the campaigns were not implemented or dissipated.

6.5: Avenues for further research

While recognizing the limitations of this study, it can open potential avenues for further research. A first worthwhile subject of examination is the notion of institutionalization of knowledge after conflict of recent wars. In particular, the identified dynamic of recalibration can be assessed against other case studies. Relevant lines of query can be developed whether recalibration occurs after all types of conflict and what further influencing factors can be identified beyond available resources and the need to maintain an ambidextrous stance. In a similar vein, the dialectic between exploration and exploitation in large organizations after crisis situation or projects in volatile environments may hold relevant insights for institutionalization in military organizations.

Of course, other case studies that couple adaptation and institutionalization in (southern) Afghanistan are topics of interest. The Dutch and British contributions were just two of various task forces that were deployed during these years. Among others, Australia, Canada, Denmark, and Romania fielded substantial task forces. Furthermore, contrasting the learning processes of these smaller states with those of the United States can garner additional insight. A comprehensive study of collective learning among a multinational

coalition such as ISAF, Inherent Resolve in Iraq, and Syria or MINUSMA in Mali will be a further important contribution to the field. Perhaps even more interesting is the inclusion of non-Western perspectives such as the lessons derived from the Nagorno-Karabach conflict by its belligerents or the adjustment by the military forces of the Taliban as they transformed from an insurgency to the incumbent armed forces.

Finally, as this research shows, learning processes by military organizations on their own cannot produce successful strategic outcomes in counterinsurgency contexts. Instead, a comprehensive study of the learning and institutionalization efforts of involved government agencies is warranted. Whether lessons derived from conflicts like Afghanistan are compatible across departments is an open question. Nevertheless, an enduring lesson from Afghanistan should be that deploying military forces to tackle a political problem will end in failure, despite genuine efforts to address deficiencies through organizational learning.

6.6: Practical considerations for military learning

This dissertation sought to understand how military learning processes worked in relation to the Dutch and British campaigns in southern Afghanistan. As will be apparent from the preceding chapters, there is much room for improvement as to how armed forces learn. Although this study is not meant to be prescriptive on improving learning processes, a few identified British best practices and deficiencies warrant reiteration at this point in order to serve as foundation for remedial action.

First and foremost, learning from experience must be more pronounced, both during operations and in peace time. Although the operations in southern Afghanistan were thoroughly evaluated, the Dutch and British militaries struggled to implement this knowledge, in particular beyond the theater of operations. The lessons learned process itself was an afterthought within both institutions. Where the British Army sought to remedy this through operation Entirety, the Dutch were unable to address this problem. After the operations in Afghanistan, both armies struggled with preparation for new missions. Units and individuals had to unlearn some recent experiences while training for new skills. Yet, the processes to disseminate knowledge from exercises or smaller missions remained under-resourced. Fortunately, both the Dutch and British armies currently boast dedicated units for experimentation and are actively pursuing concept development. Still, how the results of these efforts are disseminated and used for organizational change remains an open question.

Another aspect that should be addressed is the demonstrated inability to learn at the campaign level. One of the most fundamental deficiencies in this regard was the disconnect

between the strategic level and the conduct of operations in theater. With each new rotation, the approach to the campaign could change. Transfer of knowledge was thus contingent upon the relationship of rotation commanders and the compatibility of their plans. From a learning perspective, this arrangement was not conducive for the accumulation of knowledge on the campaign and the operational environment.

To remedy this, strategic direction at the interdepartmental level is necessary as opposed to controlling discrete operations in the field. Of course, this requires a strategic outlook on an expeditionary mission from the outset. Clear and attainable objectives must be formulated for each campaign and progress, or the lack thereof, must be assessed to guide the conduct of operations and the drafting of plans. As such, operational analysts should not only be deployed within task forces, but also be attached to the strategic headquarters in the capitals. To be sure, the identification of relevant metrics and assessment of progress continue to be intractable challenges in stabilization and counterinsurgency campaigns.

A more straightforward remedial action is to form an equivalent of the British example of Force Development and Training (FDT) command. By uniting concept development, lessons learned processes and collective training, the capability to collect and transfer knowledge can be established at a central level. This is not to say that all learning efforts should be centrally directed. Instead, it can act as a conduit for bottom-up initiatives and adaptations. Moreover, it can ensure the transfer of this knowledge across the organization.

Although this FDT-organization should be nimble, a potential constituent part should be a reach-back facility that can function as a knowledge repository on missions in the vein of the British LIFC. To be successful, such a knowledge hub should not be overly restricted in terms of classification. Moreover, beyond the support of troops in the field, it should play a central role in mission preparation and evaluation to collect and share knowledge. When there is no (large) mission to support, the center can partly adopt a more explorative stance by scanning for new developments relevant to warfare and potential threats. Furthermore, closer cooperation between personnel involved in intelligence, operational analysis and lessons learned in a fusion center is warranted. More often than not, these individuals are trying to make sense of the campaign and the environment. By at least coordinating these intellectual endeavors, duplication of effort is prevented, and a more thorough understanding can be attained.

The final British example that deserves emulation is the mission exploitation symposium. Its strength was that it had a broad attendance that consisted of various elements of the armed forces, allies, interagency partners and the military industry. Consequently, the symposia were not just evaluation tools but could also serve as conduits for remedial action. To retain the experience of the overall campaign, an “end-of-mission evaluation” symposium can

form part of a solution. This would entail an evaluation process instead of a single event. The lessons of a larger campaign require more contemplation in order to assess which lessons are relevant to retain, revise or reject. At the end of the evaluation process, a more explorative view can be adopted to ponder the impact of campaign for the future of warfare and the institution itself. Finally, the evaluation process must end with an action plan to implement changes.

Of course, most identified deficiencies are of a fundamental nature and relate to organizational culture and politics. These defy simple solutions. Learning starts with an inquisitive attitude to one's performance and to the environment. Organizations of all stripes would be well served by promoting such curiosity among its members to ensure that prior experience will enhance its performance in the future.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of interviews

List of semistructured interviews		
Interview date	Anonymized label (role)	Nationality
Uruzgan		
11-4-2018	Dutch army staff officer 1	NLD
24-4-2018	Dutch Marine staff officer 1	NLD
24-4-2018	Dutch commanding officer 1	NLD
24-4-2018	Dutch army staff officer 3	GER
3-2-2020	Dutch civil servant 1	NLD
3-2-2020	Dutch army staff officer 4	NLD
7-2-2020	Dutch army reservist 1	NLD
10-2-2020	Dutch Army reservist 2	NLD
26-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 5	NLD
24-1-2020	Dutch civil servant 2	NLD
20-2-2020	Dutch army staff officer 6	NLD
6-2-2020	Dutch army staff officer 7	NLD
6-3-2020	Dutch Navy staff officer 1	NLD
20-2-2020	Dutch Air Force officer 1	NLD
5-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 2	NLD
4-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 3	NLD
5-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 4	NLD
6-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 5	NLD
10-3-2020	Dutch Marine staff officer 2	NLD
9-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 8	NLD
12-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 6	NLD
12-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 7	NLD

4-6-2020	Dutch army reservist 3	NLD
16-3-2020	Dutch army staff officer 9	NLD
17-6-2020	Dutch commanding officer 8	NLD
24-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 10	NLD
24-3-2020	Dutch commanding officer 9	NLD
25-3-2020	Dutch army staff officer 11	NLD
3-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 12	NLD
3-4-2020	Dutch army staff officer 13	NLD
8-4-2020	Dutch army staff officer 14	NLD
4-6-2020	Dutch army reservist 4	NLD
3-6-2020	Dutch commanding officer 10	NLD
8-6-2020	Dutch army reservist 5	NLD
2-6-2020	Dutch commanding officer 11	NLD
10-7-2020	Dutch commanding officer 12	NLD
22-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 15	NLD
11-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 16	NLD
20-5-2020	Dutch army staff officer 17	NLD
12-5-2020	Dutch army staff officer 18	NLD
15-4-2020	Dutch civil servant 3	NLD
25-3-2021	Dutch commanding officer 13	NLD
24-5-2020	Dutch army staff officer 19	NLD
2-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 20	NLD
5-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 21	NLD
17-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 22	NLD
25-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 23	NLD
25-6-2020	Dutch army staff officer 24	NLD
15-2-2021	Dutch scholar 1	NLD

3-7-2020	Dutch civil servant 4	NLD
7-10-2020	Dutch commanding officer 14	NLD
5-3-2021	Dutch army staff officer 25	NLD
31-7-2020	Dutch army staff officer 26	NLD
6-8-2020	Dutch civil servant 5	NLD
14-10-2020	Dutch commanding officer 15	NLD
23-10-2020	Dutch commanding officer 16	NLD
29-1-2020	Dutch Army staff officer 27	NLD
16-2-2021	Dutch commanding officer 17	NLD
9-3-2021	Dutch commanding officer 18	NLD
3-3-2021	Dutch army staff officer 28	NLD
3-3-2021	Dutch army staff officer 29	NLD
22-2-2021	Dutch Air Force officer 2	NLD
25-3-2021	Dutch commanding officer 19	NLD
2-6-2021	Dutch commanding officer 20	NLD
1-8-2020	Dutch army staff officer 30	NLD
2-6-2021	Dutch commanding officer 21	NLD
12-5-2021	Dutch army staff officer 31	NLD
19-5-2021	Dutch army staff officer 32	NLD
2-7-2020	Dutch commanding officer 22	NLD
28-1-2020	Dutch commanding officer 23	NLD
12-10-2020	Dutch Staff officer 33	NLD
29-4-2020	Dutch civil servant 6	NLD
9-4-2020	Dutch army staff officer 34	NLD
Helmand		
24-2-2020	British scholar 1	UK
27-2-2020	British army staff officer 1	UK

27-2-2020	British army staff officer 2	UK
27-2-2020	British army staff officer 3	UK
27-2-2020	British army staff officer 4	UK
27-2-2020	British army staff officer 5	UK
5-3-2020	British army staff officer 6	UK
16-12-2020	British civil servant 1	UK
11-9-2020	British commanding officer 1	UK
28-10-2020	British commanding officer 2	UK
28-10-2020	British commanding officer 3	UK
17-9-2020	British commanding officer 4	UK
9-11-2020	American scholar 1	US
14-12-2020	British army staff officer 7	UK
15-12-2020	British commanding officer 5	UK
17-2-2021	British staff officer 8	UK
26-2-2021	British commanding officer 6	UK
17-1-2021	British commanding officer 7	UK
8-3-2021	British army staff officer 9	UK
12-2-2021	British commanding officer 10	UK
4-2-2021	British civil servant 2	UK
17-12-2020	British civil servant 3	UK
18-2-2021	British commanding officer 11	UK
16-2-2021	British commanding officer 12	UK
9-2-2021	British commanding officer 13	UK
24-2-2021	British commanding officer 14	UK
1-3-2021	British army staff officer 10	UK
22-2-2021	British army staff officer 11	UK
23-2-2021	British commanding officer 15	UK

23-2-2021	British army staff officer 12	UK
24-2-2021	British civil servant 4	UK
2-3-2021	British army staff officer 13	UK
11-3-2021	British army warrant officer 1	UK
10-3-2021	American scholar 2	UK
9-3-2021	British army staff officer 14	UK
9-4-2021	British army staff officer 15	UK
17-3-2021	British army staff officer 16	UK
13-4-2021	British commanding officer 16	UK
6-4-2021	British commanding officer 17	UK
14-4-2021	British army staff officer 17	UK
16-4-2021	British army staff officer 18	UK
11-5-2021	British army staff officer 19	UK
12-5-2021	British army staff officer 20	UK
23-4-2021	British civil servant 5	UK
28-4-2021	British civil servant 6	UK
12-4-2021	British staff officer 21	UK
3-3-2021	British army staff officer 22	UK
3-3-2021	British army staff officer 23	UK
7-9-2021	British civil servant 7	SWE
11-5-2021	British staff officer 24	UK
12-8-2021	British civil servant 8	UK
British Commanding officers 8 and 9 withdrew their contribution		

Summary

Summary

Over the last two decades, the study on how armed forces learn during wartime has proliferated significantly. In part, this academic interest can be ascribed to the Western large-scale counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. During these conflicts, the Western militaries involved were caught unprepared to conduct counterinsurgency operations. While the involved armed forces adapted, for better or worse, during these conflicts, some signs indicate that Western militaries are already in the process of discarding the knowledge they have acquired in order to recalibrate towards conventional warfare.

From a theoretical perspective then, the study on how armed forces learn during conflict is germane, but incomplete. The resulting vital complementing question is to what extent these lessons are retained in the context of another conflict. Are the lessons regarded as applicable solely to the previous conflict? Does the altered context lead to further contemplation and a reappraisal of the knowledge acquired in wartime? What is the influence of the new context on the lessons learned?

This study examines the Dutch and British campaigns in southern Afghan provinces of Uruzgan and Helmand and the impact of these experiences on the respective military organizations. For both militaries, the campaigns in Afghanistan are regarded as formative experiences. As earlier research attests, both militaries expended significant efforts to adapt to the challenges in Afghanistan. Yet, the extent of institutionalization of this knowledge remains uncertain. Therefore, the main research question underpinning this study is: *to what extent have the Dutch and British militaries learned from their counterinsurgency operations in southern Afghanistan between 2006 and 2020?*

As such, this research has both empirical as well as theoretical objectives. By reconstructing the learning processes of the Dutch and British militaries in relation to their experiences in Uruzgan and Helmand we can examine the lasting impact of these hard-won lessons on the organizations. Furthermore, this provides insight into the aforementioned concern that Western militaries are already forgetting the knowledge from the latest counterinsurgency operations. For the case studies in chapters 4 and 5, archival records, doctrine publications, formal evaluations and policy documents have been analyzed. Furthermore, over 100 service members, civil servants and scholars were interviewed who were involved in the Dutch and British campaigns in southern Afghanistan.

The theoretical contribution was made by synthesizing organizational learning theory with literature on military innovation in chapter 2. Combined with a frame of reference

based on enduring counterinsurgency prescriptions in chapter 3, I established a theoretical framework through which to engage with the case-studies.

One of the most pertinent elements of chapter 2 is the distinguishing of three strands of learning in relation to conflict: informal adaptation, formal adaptation, and institutionalization after conflict. While these strands are related, they form distinct processes. The linkage of wartime adaptation and subsequent knowledge retention through institutionalization has been underdeveloped in the literature on military innovation and adaptation.

This discontinuity of learning processes during and after a conflict can be explained by considering three elements from organizational learning literature. First is the tension between *exploitation* and *exploration*. After the conclusion of a given conflict, the calculus for maintaining the balance between these elements changes. A second aspect is learning from projects. In projects and expeditionary military operations, participants must adapt to emerging challenges. After the conclusion of such missions, the wider organization can evaluate the experiences and decide which knowledge it retains as relevant for other contexts. The third element is the role of temporary organizations. When military units are deployed to conflict, they are generally organized in bespoke task forces. After the end of a mission, or indeed a rotation, the task force will dissolve, as such they resemble a project organization. This means that the knowledge on integration can dissipate. Furthermore, the constituent units will then refocus on their respective specialized tasks.

Ultimately then, the answer to the main research question is that the learning processes in the Dutch and British armed forces were uneven and to a large extent ephemeral. During the operations, the deficiencies pertaining to the campaign and specific counterinsurgency capabilities were recognized. To an extent, adaptations were made to address capability gaps at the unit level. This worked well when a certain unit could serve as an anchor point for knowledge. However, at the campaign level, changes proved to be more limited. Moreover, the formalized learning process proved to be inadequate for quick implementations of lessons learned. While this was ameliorated by the British Army with Operation Entirety, this applied mainly to measures to address the capability gaps and supporting structures and not to the strategic conduct of the campaign. Furthermore, the institutions struggled with balancing the requirements of the current counterinsurgency operations and the need to maintain readiness for other contingencies. While the former bore many hallmarks of exploration, the latter resembled the notion of exploitation. Of course, this distinction is not absolute. Yet, due to the dramatic swings in organizational focus, the learning processes during and after Afghanistan caused much disruption in the Dutch and British militaries. After the withdrawal of Dutch and British forces, both militaries wanted to institutionalize lessons from Afghanistan. This was offset however by financial constraints

and the recalibration from the specific prerequisites of Afghanistan towards conventional warfare. As a result, while specific capabilities were developed in both institutions based on the Afghanistan experiences, crucial lessons from the campaigns were not implemented or dissipated.

Samenvatting

Samenvatting

In de afgelopen twee decennia heeft het onderzoek naar hoe krijgsmachten zich aanpassen aan oorlogsomstandigheden een grote vlucht genomen. Deze academische belangstelling kan gedeeltelijk worden toegeschreven aan de grootschalige Westerse inspanningen in de counterinsurgency campagnes in Irak en Afghanistan. Tijdens deze conflicten werden de Westerse krijgsmachten aldaar geconfronteerd met hun gebrek aan relevante kennis en vaardigheden op het gebied van counterinsurgency. Hoewel deze krijgsmachten zich probeerden aan te passen tijdens de inzet in deze missies zijn er al signalen dat deze verworven kennis reeds wordt verdrongen om de capaciteiten op te bouwen voor conventionele oorlogvoering.

Vanuit een theoretisch perspectief is onderzoek naar hoe krijgsmachten leren tijdens inzet dan ook relevant maar incompleet. De cruciale aanvullende vraag is dan ook hoe lessen uit operaties worden geborgd in de context van een nieuw conflict of een veranderde strategische context. Worden opgedane lessen beschouwd als alleen toepasbaar in het afgelopen conflict? Leidt een veranderde strategische context tot verdere overpeinzingen of herwaardering van de verkregen kennis? Wat is de invloed van de nieuwe context op de implementatie van geleerde lessen?

Dit onderzoek bestudeert de Nederlandse en Britse campagnes in de Zuid-Afghaanse provincies Uruzgan en Helmand en de impact van deze ervaringen op de respectievelijke militaire organisaties. Binnen beide krijgsmachten worden deze missies in Afghanistan gezien als vormende ervaringen. Zoals eerder onderzoek laat zien hebben de Nederlandse en Britse defensieorganisaties grote inspanningen verricht om zich aan te passen aan de operationele uitdagingen in Afghanistan. Echter, in hoeverre deze lessen sindsdien zijn geborgd in de organisatie is op dit moment nog onzeker. Om hier inzicht in te krijgen is de centrale onderzoeksvraag van deze studie: *In hoeverre hebben de Nederlandse en Britse krijgsmachten geleerd van hun counterinsurgency operaties in Zuid-Afghanistan tussen 2006 en 2020?*

Dit onderzoek heeft zowel empirische als theoretische doelstellingen. Door de leerprocessen van de Nederlandse en Britse krijgsmachten te reconstrueren in relatie tot hun ervaringen in Uruzgan en Helmand kunnen we de blijvende effecten van deze lessen op de organisaties beoordelen. Daarnaast biedt dit onderzoek inzicht in hoeverre de zorgen terecht zijn dat Westerse krijgsmachten dergelijke kennis alweer aan het vergeten is. Voor de casestudies in hoofdstukken 4 en 5 is gebruik gemaakt van archieven, doctrine publicaties, formele evaluaties en beleidsdocumenten. Tevens zijn meer dan 100 militairen, ambtenaren en wetenschappers geïnterviewd die betrokken waren bij de Nederlandse en Britse campagnes in Zuid-Afghanistan.

De voornaamste theoretische bijdrage wordt geleverd door een synthese te maken tussen *organizational learning* theorie en de literatuur over militaire innovatie in hoofdstuk 2. In combinatie met het referentiekader gebaseerd op counterinsurgency voorschriften in hoofdstuk 3 ontstaat een theoretisch raamwerk waarmee de casestudies geanalyseerd kunnen worden.

Een van de voornaamste elementen van hoofdstuk 2 is het onderscheid tussen drie vormen van leren in relatie tot conflict: informele aanpassingen, formele aanpassingen en institutionaliseren na conflict. Hoewel deze vormen aan elkaar zijn gerelateerd kunnen zij aparte processen vertegenwoordigen. Daarbij is de relatie tussen leren tijdens operaties en het borgen van kennis door institutionaliseren nog relatief weinig onderzocht in de literatuur over militaire innovatie en adaptatie.

De discontinuïteit van leerprocessen tijdens en na conflict kan worden verklaard aan de hand van drie elementen uit de *organizational learning* literatuur. Een eerste element is de spanning tussen *exploitatie*, het verbeteren van kerncompetenties, en *exploratie*, het verwerven van geheel nieuwe competenties. Na het beëindigen van een missie of conflict kan de balans tussen deze zaken wijzigen. Een tweede element is het leren van projecten. In projecten en expeditionaire militaire operaties moeten mensen zich aanpassen aan nieuwe operationele uitdagingen. Na beëindiging van projecten of missies kan de overkoepelende organisatie deze ervaringen evalueren en bezien of deze bruikbaar zijn voor toekomstige uitdagingen. Het derde element betreft de rol van tijdelijke organisatieverbanden. Wanneer militaire eenheden worden ontplooid naar een missiegebied gebeurt dit vaak in tijdelijke, op maat gemaakte verbanden. Aan het eind van een missie, en vaak zelfs een rotatie, wordt dit tijdelijke verband ontbonden. Hiermee kan de opgedane kennis over samenwerking vervluchtigen. Bovendien zullen de onderdelen van dit verband zich in de regel weer gaan richten op de eigen specifieke taken.

Uiteindelijk is het antwoord op de centrale onderzoeksvraag dat leerprocessen in de Nederlandse en Britse krijgsmachten onevenwichtig en grotendeels tijdelijk van aard waren. Tijdens de missie werden tekortkomingen met betrekking tot counterinsurgency onderkend. Tot op zekere hoogte werd geprobeerd deze tekortkomingen te adresseren op eenheidsniveau. Wanneer een eenheid verantwoordelijk was voor een specifiek kennisdomein werkte dit in de regel goed. Op het niveau waarop de campagne werd vormgegeven waren leerprocessen problematischer. Bovendien bleken formele processen ongeschikt om tot snelle aanpassingen te komen. In de Britse landmacht werden formele leerprocessen uiteindelijk sterk verbeterd gedurende *Operation Entirety*. Echter had dit vooral effect op het oplossen van bepaalde tekortkomingen op tactisch niveau en niet op de strategische sturing van de campagne.

Daarnaast worstelden beide krijgsmachten met het vinden van de balans tussen aandacht voor de huidige missie en mogelijke toekomstige, meer conventionele opdrachten. Terwijl de lopende counterinsurgency operaties meer nadruk legden op *exploratie*, moest tegelijk de *exploitatie* van de kerncompetenties niet worden veronachtzaamd. Uiteraard is dit onderscheid tussen de capaciteiten niet absoluut. Toch leidden de drastische schommelingen in focus tot sterke verstoringen binnen de Nederlandse en Britse krijgsmachten. Na de beëindiging van de operaties in Zuid-Afghanistan bestond binnen beide organisaties de wens om de geleerde kennis te borgen. Dit werd echter gefrustreerd door financiële beperkingen en een herijking naar conventionele oorlogvoering. Hoewel er specifieke nieuwe capaciteiten werden ontwikkeld op basis van de ervaringen uit Afghanistan, gingen cruciale lessen van deze campagnes verloren.

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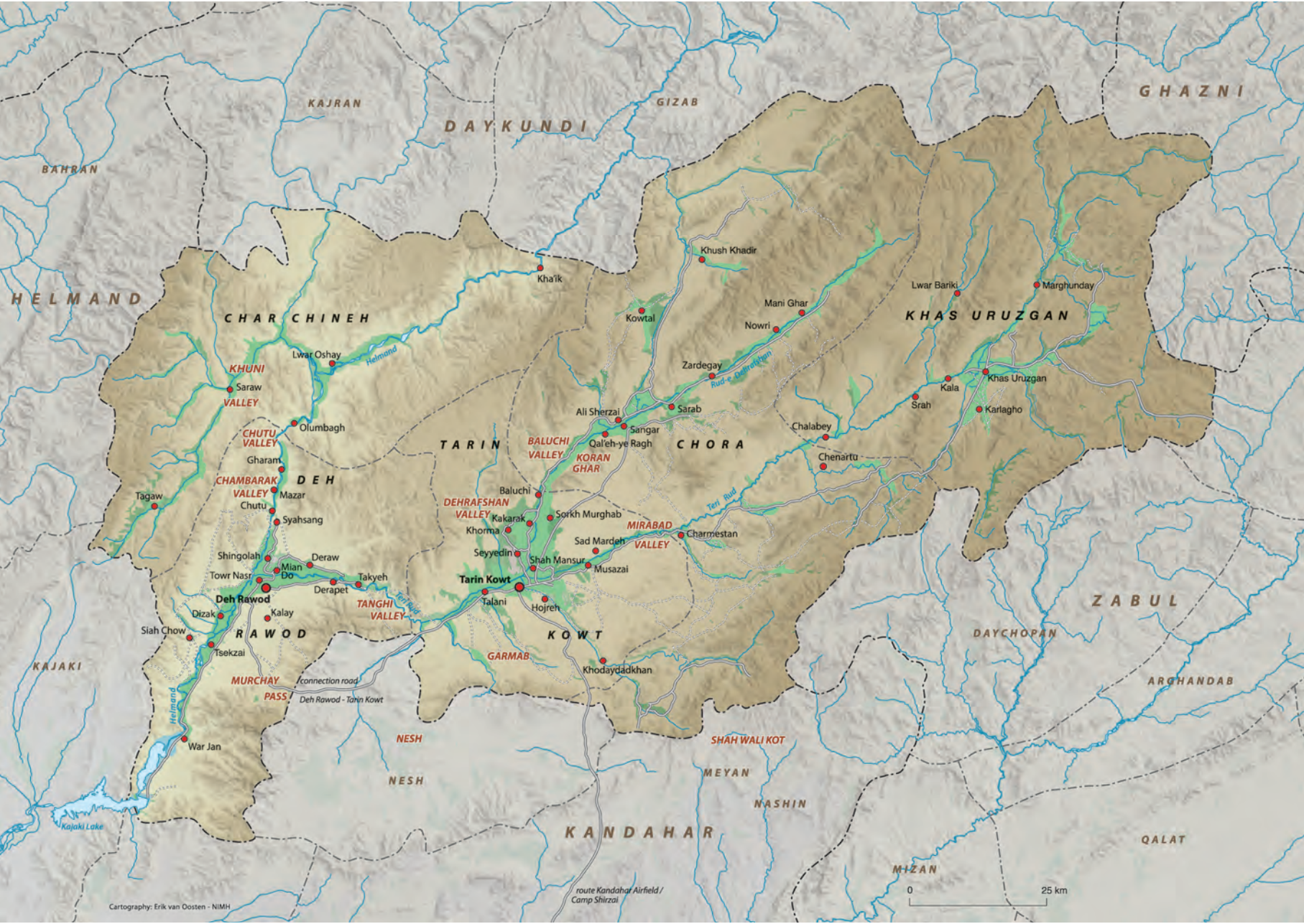
Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

Martijn van der Vorm (Delft, 20 April 1982) acquired his secondary education at Christelijk Lyceum Zandvliet in The Hague (1994-1999). He was awarded his propaedeutic diploma in Information Management at the Haagse Hogeschool (2000-2001). He studied history at Leiden University between 2001-2005, obtaining a Master of Arts degree. In 2005 he joined the Royal Military Academy as a cadet in the post-academic track, graduating in 2007. Since then he serves as an officer in the Royal Netherlands Army in various positions. Martijn has been deployed four times on operational tours to Afghanistan and the Middle East. Between 2016 and 2019, he attended the Military Strategic Studies program at the Netherlands Defence Academy, obtaining a Master of Arts degree. He has published scholarly works on Special Operations Forces, irregular warfare and organizational learning in armed forces.



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Cartography: Erik van Oosten - NIMH

How armed forces adapt to operational challenges has been a salient subject in War Studies in recent years. However, the process of institutionalization of such lessons post-conflict has received less attention. This study seeks to examine military learning processes during missions and beyond. By synthesizing organizational learning theories with the literature on military innovation, it argues that there are distinct but related forms of learning during and after operations that are subject to peculiar dynamics. Specifically, this research analyzes Dutch and British learning processes during operations in southern Afghanistan and their enduring impact on the respective military organizations. The Dutch and British experiences and institutionalization efforts are reconstructed based on archival records, policy documents, official evaluations and over one-hundred interviews with service members, civil servants and scholars with direct involvement in the Uruzgan and Helmand campaigns during the most volatile years in the Afghanistan war and their aftermath.

Martijn van der Vorm is an officer in the Royal Netherlands Army and a historian

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