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The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/32625 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

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Title: Deadly embrace : the decision paths to Uruzgan and Helmand
Issue Date: 2015-04-02

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Puzzle

'What happened?', *'Why did we end up here'*, *'For what purpose?*' - just a collection of questions raised by practitioners[1] and scholars[2] when addressing the two major Western military interventions of the last two decades: Iraq and Afghanistan. The recurring theme primarily exposes an everlasting search for a sound strategy, linking the use of these military endeavours to a predefined political outcome. Western governments are encountering great difficulties with formulating political goals explicating the purpose of the intervention: without a sense of purpose or political meaning it is rather difficult to engage in the making of policy, or strategy for that matter.[3] Consequently, military interventions are increasingly justified in moral or value based terms, and by doing so, providing legitimacy to the actions.[4]

Hence, the 'grammar of war seems to be dictating the logic'[5] of the campaign in countries like Afghanistan. Some practitioners even argue operations in Afghanistan to be the reverse of the classic Clausewitz adage and claim that 'politics has become an extension of war'[6] potentially heralding a completely novel reading of events. Often, the underlying rationale of the engagement in general, and the reasoning underpinning the actions of those designing the engagement, remains unclear. Consequently, general and vague terminology is employed to articulate the purpose leaving many to guess and consequently even to question the road taken by their respective governments.

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1   Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: the Art of War in the Modern World* (London 2005); Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-first Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford 2012); Wilfried Rietdijk, 'De 'comprehensive approach' in Uruzgan, schaken op vier borden tegelijk', *Militaire Spectator* 177 (2008) 472-486; Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron and Hew Strachan, *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (London 2013).

2   Hew Strachan, 'Making Strategy: Civil–Military Relations after Iraq', *Survival* 48(3) (2006) 59-82; Jan Ångström and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (eds), *Modern War and the Utility of Force: Challenges, Methods and Strategy* (London 2010); David Chandler, 'War Without End(s): Grounding the Discourse of Global War', *Security Dialogue* 40(3) (2009) 243-262; King, A., 'Military command in the last decade', International Affairs 87(2) (2011) 377-396.

3   This argument is put forward by David Chandler who largely builds his argument on perspectives provided by Alain Badiou and Zaki Laïdi. They argue that Western political elites refrain from embracing a strong political vision and are believed to hold a transformed perception of, and relationship to, political power. As such, governments and policy-makers are supposedly experiencing their policy-making power more as a 'risk' or a cause of potential embarrassment, than as an opportunity. In other words, they seem to reject rather than welcome the responsibilities of power, seeking to devolve policy-making responsibilities either to regional and local authorities or to higher bodies such as the European Union or other international institutions. See: David Chandler, 'Hollow Hegemony: Theorising the Shift from Interest-based to Value-based International Policy-making', *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 35(3) (2007) 703-723; Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (Londen 2002); Zaki Laïdi, *A World without Meaning: The Crisis of Meaning in International Relations*, trans. June Burnham and Jenny Coulon (Londen 1998).

4   Chandler, 'Hollow hegemony', 719.

5   Hew Strachan, 'Strategy and the Limitation of War', *Survival* 50(1) (2008) 31-54.

6   Stabilisation Conference, London, December 2010.

The dearth of strategy and the involvement of the military in the act of strategy making for recent operations have brought to light the fact that in practice the actions of those involved challenge the traditional predicates that have dominated Western thought on how to best design and plan a military operation; civil military relations and strategy.

These prescriptions are informed by the belief that the military needs to be restricted in order to prevent them from taking power over the state. The difficulties of crafting strategy for contemporary operations cannot be separated from traditional models and consequent prescriptions on civil military relations. By itself, the distinction made between the political [strategic level] and the operational level [situated between the tactical level and the strategic level] has been closely guarded, as the drafting of strategy is believed to be a 'civilian responsibility'.[7] However, some concerns are voiced addressing the potential danger for Western democracies in neglecting the development of coherent strategy due to the fact that current prescriptions of civil military relations limit the role of the military in policy making.[8]

However, as witnessed in Afghanistan when then ISAF commander Stanley McChrystal[9], presented the 'Afghanistan Strategy' in October 2009[10], the operational level fills the void when the strategic level neglects to draft a comprehensive strategy. Shortly thereafter, NATO and EU officials indicated their support for the strategy.[11] The guiding authority of this document for the stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan, painfully illustrated the remissness of the international community and its civilian agencies in providing political direction for what had become a predominantly military campaign.

But what underlies the act to assign military means in the first place? The principal held belief holds that states articulate their ambition and assign means accordingly. But is this really what occurs? What are in fact the circumstances that shape the decision to deploy military forces? How does that decision translate into an actual deployment? What about the actors that have engaged in the decision-making process to commit military forces and the setting in which they operate? What conditioned and informed their actions?

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7   Hew Strachan, 'Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the operational level of war', *Survival* 52(5) (2010) 157-182, 159. Strachan points to the Cold War era as foundational for this clear separation.

8   Strachan, 'Making strategy'.

9   The proneness of General Mc Chrystal to draft an overarching strategy for Afghanistan however should not too easily be mistaken with the often expressed assumption that the military would like to 'run the show'. One only has to hark back to the conflict between him and President Obama when General McChrystal, openly expressed his frustrations with his political masters for neglecting to provide political guidance. See: Micheal Hastings 'The runaway general' (22 Juni 2010), http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622 (10.07.2013). By doing so, he briefly injected new momentum in the debate about the need for political strategy and a review of traditional civil military relations, only before the discussion went silent again.

10 *Commander's Initial Assessment, 30 August 2009. Headquarters International Security Assistance Force* (2010 Kabul) 2-10.

11 Valentina Pop, 'Nato in face-saving mode after top general sacked' (24 July 2010) http://euobserver.com/9/30357 (30.09.2011).

A problem calling for foreign policy action generally tends to get structured into a series of decisions that involve different segments of government. Occasions for decisions are moments when those involved feel they need to act even if the action itself is not to act at all or to inquire more information. Consequentially, there might be various occasions for the decision that may be addressed across time by the same decision unit or by different decision units. The specific occasions studied are strategic actions that lead to authoritative actions on the part of governments.[12]

In this dissertation, the way decisions to commit military forces came about and how respectively a strategy for this deployment was designed, is at the centre of attention. The study seeks to go beyond generally held assumptions about how decisions are made with regard to the use of military means (civil military relations) and the use of strategy at the strategic level (strategic studies). The act of deciding if and how military forces will be deployed lies at the heart of what is known as the strategic *civil military interface*. In this interface[13], the design and direction of the military operations is constructed by a group of senior civil and military decision-makers. This *decision unit*[14] is situated within the wider context of their respective political system.

Consequently, this study takes the agency of individuals seriously and scrutinises the ways in which they came to make up their minds and acted accordingly. In the process of figuring out what to do, actors routinely twist and intertwine what conventional scholarly accounts of human action struggle to keep neat and separate. This twisting and intertwining, in turn, has crucial repercussions for their political efficacy. Hence, whether they fail or succeed to influence political decisions and transform social relations, and for what cause, defines the result of their actions.[15]

It is the actions of the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, whilst deciding to deploy their troops to South Afghanistan, that will serve as cases in point, in order to be able to answer the following central research question: *'Why*

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12   Margaret G. Hermann, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: a Theoretical Framework', *International Studies Review* 3(2) (2001) 47-81, 54.

13   The term *civil military interface* is used to describe the strategic level. It does not only include a level in the chain of command, but it also provides the funds, as well as the physical and conceptual directions that are necessary to implement the decisions of the political leadership. In this arena decisions are taken regarding the size, organization, materiel and deployments of the military are made. It is at this level where the campaign plans are created and implemented. See: Robert Egnell, 'Explaining US and British Performance in Complex Expeditionary Operations: *The Civil-Military Dimension', The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29(6) (2006) 1041-1075, 1042,1045-1046.

14   This terminology is taken from Margaret G. Hermann and her work on foreign policy decisions. See: Hermann, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy'; Ryan K. Beasley et al, 'People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking: Insights from Comparative Case Studies', *International Studies Review* 3(2) (2001) 217-250; Margaret G Hermann, Charles F. Hermann and Joe D. Hagan, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy Behavior' in: Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and James N. Rosenau (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Londen 1987) 309 - 336.

15   Markus Kornprobst 'The Agent's Logics of Action: Defining and Mapping Political Judgement', *International Theory* 3 (2011) 70-104, 70-72.

did the senior civil and military decision-makers of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decide to provide military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan and how was the political ambition to stabilise South Afghanistan converted into a military operation [2004-2006]? [16]

1.2 Objectives and Relevance

The research objective of this study is to reconstruct why and how it was decided to use military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. By doing so, the black box of senior civil military decision-making on the use of military meansis unfolded. Hence, it entails a particular focus on systematically comparing the actions of these decision-makers and thus asks questions about how this decision unit[17] came about assigning government means (the military).

This study in consequence asks why and how the senior civil military decision-makers engaged in the use of military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan; did the primacy of politics, as the text books would prescribe, guide the actions of senior civil and military decision-makers; how did this decision group interpret and make sense of the task at hand; was there a strategy and a subsequent narrative articulating the purpose of the use of the military means? Systematically reconstructing and comparing the activities of the senior civil and military decision-makers will allow us to reach a sound judgment about why and how the decision to commit military troops was made.

Instead of solely focussing on the conditions that resulted in this decision, a particular focus will be directed towards the members of this decision unit. It does so by closing in on the configuration and the dynamics of the decision unit within the process of committing military resources for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan. During this process, the decision unit perceives and interprets pressures and constraints posed upon them by domestic and international actors.[18]

The research objectives are both theoretical and empirical. The study offers a detailed account of how the senior civil and military decision-makers came to the decision to employ their military means and subsequently aimed to draft their respective strategies. By doing

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16 This period is limited in time in the sense that after once the military plan was drafted and political approval was granted, the investigation ceases. This will be further explicated in chapter 3.

17 The use of the model of decision units is grounded in the work of Margaret Hermann. Her studies examine occasions for decisions that lead to authoritative actions on the part of the government in dealing with a perceived foreign policy problem. By doing so, it focuses on understanding the processes that affects the commitment of government's resources and its choice of policy. See Hermann, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy', 55.

18 Beasley et al, 'People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking', 219.

so, it explores the conversion process of political goals into military operations against the background of stabilisation missions and addresses the underlying process mechanisms within their own political and organisational context (NL/UK), whilst testing underlying theoretical prescriptions, on civil military relations and stategy.

Investigating why and how it was decided to use military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan seems pointless if the context of why such operations are used is not delineatet. Military means are often treated as if they are neutral, an 'all-in-one toolkit' to be employed when other methods of achieving a particular political goal fail. Yet, the methods adopted may affect the ability to achieve the specified goal. The '*how*' is as important as the '*why*'.[19] By learning about how these foreign policy decisions are made, we gain information about the intentions and strategies of governments and how their definitions of the situation are translated into action.[20]

Scholars, with a few exceptions, tend not to engage that much in operational analysis of contemporary military missions. This might be related to the fact that, as already outlined by Richard Betts, political science no longer encourages scholars to conduct operational analysis as a prime undertaking. As a result, few political scientists learn sufficiently about the processes of decision-making and military operations to grasp the difficulties of implementing strategic plans. 'Few focus on the conversion processes that open gaps between what government leaders decide to do and what government leaders actually do'.[21] It is this conversion process [within the current context of stabilisation operations] and the inherent tensions and difficulties as illustrated above, that constitute the core of this dissertation.

1.3 Research Strategy

This study is interdisciplinary since the phenomenon of deciding why and how military means are used cannot be limited to one field of science. The analysis will include perspectives from the field of international relations, social and organisational theory, and foreign policy analysis. It follows from generic insights of social and organisational theory that the context in which human beings operate is constructed around rules, identities, and roles.[22] A context

19   Isaiah Wilson, *Thinking Beyond War: Civil-military Relations and why America Fails to Win the Peace* (Basinstoke and New York 2007) XXIII ; Mary Kaldor and Andrew Salmon, 'Military Force and European Strategy', Survival 48(1) (2006) 19-34, 20; Smith, *The Utility of Force*.

20   Hermann, 'How Decision Units shape Foreign Policy', 48.

21   Richard K. Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?', *International Security* 25(2) (2000) 5-50, 7.

22   Anthony Giddens, *Central problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradictions in Social Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979); Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford 1998); Bob Jessop, ´Interpretive Sociology and the Dialectic of Structure and Agency´ *Theory, Culture & Society* 13(1) (1996) 119-128; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International*

that by definition conditions all actions of the actors: being either the calculation of costs and benefits (consequences), abiding of identity-constituting rules (appropriateness), generating a convincing argument (argumentation), or following tacit common sense (practice).[23] The conceptualisation of the senior civil and military decision-makers originates from the framework of decision units.[24]

The interdisciplinary approach is supposed to advance to a more thorough understanding of the decision-making process on the use of military means for contemporary operations. As indicated by Lawrence Freedman, many important academic cleavages though cut across these boundaries. Consequently, practical problems such as the use of military means can rarely be encapsulated in terms of a single discipline. Every so often an interdisciplinary approach facilitates innovation and influences new thinking.[25]

Comparative case study

The empirical part of this research is based on a comparative case-study research design. The actions of the senior civil and military decision-makers of both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as to how their political ambition to stabilise South Afghanistan was translated into a military campaign are scrutinised. The case selection is based on the criteria of most-dissimilar cases combined with a sense of pragmatism due to funding and possibilities to access data. As the exact description of the case selection will be provided in chapter three, only the most central features of the two cases will be highlighted here. The major dissimilarities between the cases lie in the differences between their political systems, the differences in the decision-making process with regard to the use of military means and the assumed differences between the group of senior civil and military decision-makers and their perspectives on the role of their nation within the larger international security context.

By comparing why and how it was decided to use the armed forces of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom for the stabilisation of South Afganistan, prevalent patterns of why and how Western states use their military means for stabilisation purposes will be highlighted. The data for this study has been collected through qualitative methods and techniques. The research employs a structured and focused comparison.

The process of why and how the decisions were made by the senior civil and military decision-makers is reconstructed by studying a large amount of primary and secondary

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Politics (Cambridge 1999); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 'The Logic of Appropriateness' in: Martin Rein, Michael Moran, Robert Goodin (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy* (Oxford 2005) 689-708.

23 Kornprobst, 'The Agent's Logics of Action', 71.

24 Hermann, 'How Decision Units shape Foreign Policy'.

25 Lawrence Freedman, 'Does Strategic Studies have a future?', in: John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray, eds. *Strategy in the contemporary world* (third edition, 2010), 391- 406, 400.

documents and conducting over one hundred semi-structured interviews with key actors in both the political and military arena in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Document analysis, interviewing and observation were structured by means of a set of broad topics and general questions reflecting the theoretical focus of this study. Propositions were developed to shape the data plan and provided priorities to the relevant analytic methods.[26]

1.4 Book Outline

The dissertation is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the conceptual, theoretical, and, methodological issues of the research. Chapter One presents the theme of the study by introducing the topic and the research design. It sets out the rationale behind the research project and presents structure of the dissertation. Chapter Two introduces the main concepts and their status quaestionis. First of all, the context of contemporary military interventions will be delineated, with a particular focus on the concept of stabilisation operations. This concept was, and arguably still is, the dominant concept wherein the decisions that are at the centre of attention for this study were made. Subsequently, the senior civil and military decision-makers and the nature of their relations will be attended to. These actors are the main unit of analysis in this research project and as such need to be conceptualised. Successively, a theoretical description of their core process, the act of strategy making, will be presented. From than onwards, the analytical framework that will provide the prism of the research project will be introduced. It commences with the sketching the institutional context and its conditioning mechanisms, thereby providing the setting in which the senior civil and military decision-makers are to come to a decision. Successively, the analytical framework that sets out how to reconstruct the decision paths of the group of senior civil and military decision-makers. The chapter is concluded with listing the dispositions that will guide the data collection and analysis of this research project.

Chapter three explicates the methods and techniques applied for the data collection and analysis. It commences with embarking upon the unit of analysis, after which the multiple case study as a research strategy is explained, followed by a description of the applied method 'structured focussed comparison'. Subsequently, an overview of the techniques for the collection and analysis of the data is presented. The last section discusses the reliability, validity, and to what extent the study can be generalised. The chapter is concluded with an overview of the limitations of the study.

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26   Robert K. Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods* (Thousand Oaks 2008) 130-131.

Part Two of the book presents the context, the cases and the analysis of the collected data. It starts off by providing a short overview of the genesis of the Western intervention in Afghanistan until the time that the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decided to employ their military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan (Chapter Four). This chapter serves merely to set out the developments in Afghanistan since the intervention of the 'coalition of the willing': a formation of Western military powers led by the United States that invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 until NATO's expansion to the South of Afghanistan in the summer of 2006. The chapter is designed to provide an understanding of the environment in which the Netherlands and the United Kingdom felt they needed to engage by contributing to NATO's expansion in this country.

Successively, chapter five discusses the foreign and security policy of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and provides a description of their senior civil and military decision-makers and the procedures of deciding to use military means all within their specific political context. The two cases are presented in the successive chapters, the Dutch case (Chapter Six) and British case (Chapter Seven). In these chapters the actions and decisions of the senior civil military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are carefully reconstructed. The structure of the reconstruction is founded on the analytical framework as presented in chapter two. Subsequently, a cross case comparison is conducted in Chapter Eight. The workings of the actions undertaken and the decisions made by the senior civil and military decision-makers in both nations will be compared in this chapter. The findings will be structured along the lines of the propositions that have guided the research project.

Part Three of the book presents the concluding chapter in which the questions that instigated and guided this research will be answered. First of all, the question of why the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decided to provide military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan will be answered. Secondly, the question as to how this political ambition was converted into a military operation will be answered, followed by theoretical deductions, inductions, and recommendations. Subsequently, avenues for future research are proposed for advancing the findings of this study.