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## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction: From Distinctions to Generalisations

The research objective of this dissertation entails focussing on a systematic comparison of the actions of the senior civil and military decision-makers whilst deciding to deploy their military forces. This study thus asks why and how these agents engaged in the use of military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan; if it was an anticipated response; what political objective(s) needed to be attained and how these objectives were converted into a military operation. Systematically reconstructing and comparing the activities of the senior civil and military decision-makers will allow us to reach a sound judgment with respect to whether the stated propositions presented in the previous chapter account for a convincing logic.

A contextualised approach is employed appreciating the idea that scientific knowledge about social phenomenon cannot be gained separately from the context in which the phenomenon occurs. Therefore, to unravel the mechanisms at play, the method of structured focused comparison is used, allowing an in depth analysis of the cases at hand. This chapter outlines the methodological aspects of the study. First of all, the unit of analysis is embarked upon, 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.

### 3.2 The Unit of Analysis

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<sup>1</sup>, the design and direction of the military operations is constructed by a group of senior civil and military decision-makers. The group of senior civil and military decision-makers under study in this research have been conceptualised as a *decision unit*. As described in the previous chapter, the primary feature

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1 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: Egnell, 'Explaining US and British Performance in Complex Expeditionary Operations, 1042, 1045, 1046.

of a decision unit is its ability to commit government resources. The conceptualisation allows a focus on how this group of actors acquired agency despite the different political arrangements in the nations under study.

The group of senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands is best captured as an intergovernmental single group decision unit.<sup>2</sup> To be precise, the actors involved are: the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister for International Cooperation, the Minister of Defence and the members of the Steering Group Military Operations: the political counsellor of the MP<sup>3</sup> the director general Political Affairs (MFA), the director general International Cooperation (MFA), the director general Security Policy (MFA), the director general Stability and Human Rights (MFA), the director General Policy (MOD), the Chief of Defence (MOD) and the Director Operations (MOD). Depending on the topic additional backbenchers from the respective ministries will sit in.<sup>4</sup>

The group of senior civil and military decision-makers in the United Kingdom is best described as a single group decision unit with a dominant leader. The Prime Minister holds a very dominant position and personally appoints his trustees and ad hoc groups. In the case under study, the Reid Group mandated by the Prime Minister, can be best described as a single group with a dominant leader.<sup>5</sup> The group is referred to as an interdepartmental group entrusted to oversee the employment of British forces to South Afghanistan. The Secretary of State for Defence is in charge of the group who comprises of the Secretary of State for International Development, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Depending on the topic additional backbenchers from the respective ministries will sit in.

It is worth noting that in both groups often – depending on the situation or topic on the agenda – special advisors, civil servants or military personnel would sit in and provide their advice or input to the decision-making process. Furthermore, throughout the decision-making the configuration of the units shifted as a consequence of the sequential decisions that were made to deploy the respective military forces, which required at times the inclusion or exclusion of other actors to safeguard a decision.

Nevertheless, the group of senior civil and military decision-makers that advanced the initial decisions by doing so initiating the deployment of military means remain to be the *prima* unit of analysis. The added value of closing in on this particular group of actors, highlights an informal decision-making process that conditions, shapes, and maybe even

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2 Hermann, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy'.

3 This person is delegated from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of General Affairs to assist the Prime Minister as his personal counsellor.

4 Information provided by the former secretary of the SMO, Pieter - Henk Schroor. Email correspondence 11-12 June 2013.

5 Hermann, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy', 57.

lures the ultimate decision. The application of the framework to the different occasions for decisions linked to the ultimate action, namely the deployment of forces, allows a perspective on the twists and turns the senior civil and military decision-makers engaged in whilst they were trying to cope with the problem<sup>6</sup> facing them. The multiple occasions for decision demonstrate the viability of the dynamics by focusing on the series of choices that are contained in many foreign policy problems. Understanding how results from one occasion for decision influence and/or intertwine with information from the (inter) national environment and as such shapes the nature of the next occasion for decision, offers insights about the decision-making process across time. Studying the decision paths of the senior civil and military decision-makers, enables an understanding about a government's strategy and ways of coping with the deployment of military forces at large.<sup>7</sup>

This approach is believed to reconstruct and provide insights into the decision paths of the civil and military decision-makers in a more detailed manner than by testing the relevance of theoretically informed hypotheses. Paraphrasing Norman Denzin, slightly extends the argument made here that traditional, post positivism, in terms of applying a soft quantitative grid (confirmability, hypotheses, credibility) to qualitative research does not in itself result in better scientific results.<sup>8</sup> The premise here is that the explorative nature of this study intends to facilitate a better insight into the decision-making of senior civil and military decision-makers by carefully reconstructing their decision paths that led to the use of their military means. Consequently the applied model in itself will not be tested but will be employed as a useful vehicle for the reconstruction of events, decisions and for the conceptualisation of the senior civilian military decision-makers.

### 3.3 A Multiple Case Study

This study is a comparative case study, a research strategy which is often used in the field of political science and international relations.<sup>9</sup> The research strategy contains similarities

6 A foreign policy problem is best defined as a specific occasion for decision that requires action. Beasley et al., 'People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking', 226.

7 Beasley et al., 'People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking', 227.

8 Denzin N. K., 'The elephant in the living room: or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence', *Qualitative Research*, 9 (2) (2009) 139-160: 149. See also: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln Y. S., 'The discipline and practice of qualitative research', *Handbook of qualitative research* 2 (2000) 1-28.

9 Dvora Yanow, Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Maria José Freitas, 'Case Study Research in Political Science' in: A.J. Mills, G. Durepos & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi and Singapore 2008) 108-114; Alexander L. George, and Timothy J. McKeown, 'Case studies and theories of organizational decision-making', *Advances in Information Processing in Organization* 2(1) (1985): 21-58; Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton 1994).

with both historical and experimental forms of research since it provides answers to ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. These all deal with operational links which need to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence.<sup>10</sup> However, it differs from these methods as well, since the case-study method studies a contemporary set of events (contrary to historical research) over which the researcher has little or no control (contrary to experiments).<sup>11</sup>

An important benefit of this research strategy is its ability to study the events in-depth. Conducting a case study and searching for and identifying sources of variation in outcomes can potentially lead to richer models than a quantitative research strategy that ‘can easily use controls and randomization to build a wall separating a larger causal mechanism from a small number of variables of immediate interest’.<sup>12</sup>

The primary criterion for the case selection is its relevance to the research objective of the study.<sup>13</sup> For this study the least-likely case selection was applied. This decision was founded with preliminary knowledge of the cases at hand, thereby allowing a stronger research design.<sup>14</sup> In addition, least-likely cases are most appropriate for the verification of propositions.<sup>15</sup>

The two selected countries, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, represent two important Western European states and NATO members when it comes to providing troops for stabilisation missions but differ to one another to a great extent, especially with regard to their political system and with regard to their security posture within the international arena. While the British are often criticised or applauded for their ‘warrior proneness’, the Dutch are often criticised or applauded for their ‘soft’ and ‘a-military’ appearance. Generally put, one can distinguish a difference between Atlantic and European views about the purpose of the military, especially with regard to their role in foreign policy. The principal realist assumption that states use armed force to advance their security interests<sup>16</sup> has been more appealing to major and medium military powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Small states like for example Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden have doubted whether armed force is a useful means for achieving security.<sup>17</sup>

10 Yin, *Case Study Research*, 9.

11 Yin, *Case Study Research*, 13

12 Timothy J McKeown, ‘Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview: Review of King, Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*’, *International Organization* 53(1) (1999) 161-190, 174.

13 Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge 2005).

14 *Ibid.*, 24

15 Bent Flyvbjerg, ‘Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12 (2) 2006, 219-245. 234

16 John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford 2010) 3.

17 This discourse on the utility of military means does have pacifist elements, but, as Mikkel Rasmussen has put it, it is basically a discussion about utility rather than morality. He claims the difference should be sought in how military force is understood, rather than the opportunities to use it. See: Rasmussen, ‘What’s the Use of It?’, 67. See also: Jan Angstrom and Jan Willem Honig infer the strategic choice of small powers to be more diversified than usually assumed. In particular,

The major difference with regard to the political systems of these states effecting the use of military means. The Netherlands is a so-called multi-party system more often than not ruled by a coalition government. Coalition governments by definition need very much to work on consensus building within their cabinet and in parliament and the senate in order to be effective. The Prime Minister is *primus interparis* (first among equals) and the role of government and the use of military means is laid down in the constitution.<sup>18</sup> The United Kingdom is a so-called majority system, also known as the Westminster model named after the palace of Westminster in London, the location of the British parliament. The main characteristic of the model is that the Queen, the head of state is the nominal or *de jure* source of executive power while the *de facto* head of the executive is the Prime Minister. He exercises executive authority on behalf of the head of state. This system of government originated with parliamentary convention, practices and precedents and has never been formally laid out in a written constitution'.<sup>19</sup>

An aspect closely related to the different political systems of these states is the set of procedures underpinning the deployment of their troops. These differences are founded in the differences in their political systems. As where in the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister is endorsed with great powers to employ his military means, in the Netherlands, Parliament had acquired itself quite a prominent role in the endorsement of deploying military means.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, in the Netherlands, the use of the military is a sensitive and often debated issue in the Dutch parliament especially after the events that had evolved in Srebrenica.<sup>21</sup> As a result, an assessment framework and consequently a parliamentary procedure was developed and implemented. The framework, as will be explicated in chapter five, consists of a series of political and military criteria that are used to consider the desirability and feasibility of contributing military resources to an international military operation.<sup>22</sup> When applied, the Dutch government prepares an *Article 100 Letter*. On the basis of this letter, parliament can debate the issues involving the deployment. In order for the government to deploy its military forces, the majority of parliament members must endorse the proposal. Without a majority in parliament, the government could decide to deploy its forces anyhow but

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Dutch and Danish internationalism is seems to reconcile the use of force in the national and international domains in contrast to Sweden and Norway where a sharp distinction between national interest and humanitarianism perseveres. Jan Angstrom and Jan Willem Honig, 'Regaining Strategy: Small Powers, Strategic Culture, and Escalation in Afghanistan', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35(5) (2012) 663-687, 684.

18 See Arend Lijphart, 'Democratic Political Systems Types, Cases, Causes, and Consequences', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1 (1) (1989) 33- 48.

19 'Ministerial Responsibility Under The Westminster System', the Nassau Institute. See: <http://www.nassauinstitute.org/articles/article652.php?view=print> (last accessed 25 September).

20 These differences will be described in much greater detail in chapter five.

21 The fall of the enclave of Srebrenica will be outlined in great detail in chapter five.

22 The assessment procedure will be outlined in great detail in chapter five.

this is not viewed to be desirable.<sup>23</sup> The United Kingdom does not possess such a thorough and formal set of procedures when it comes to deploying their troops, which adds to the comparative advantage of the two cases.

An additional difference between the two states is the fact that the United Kingdom institutionalised a comprehensive approach to operations in its Post Conflict and Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) (now referred to as Stabilisation Unit). The interdepartmental unit jointly serves the Department for International Development (DFID), Foreign Common Wealth Office (FCO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). PCRU is to plan missions to fragile states, according to a single British aim and strategic framework. Consequently, they deploy civilian experts as well as military forces. The Netherlands has not institutionalised its interdepartmental cooperation, but coordinates the planning and execution of its military missions through the Steering Group Military Operations (SMO).

### **3.3.1 Process Tracing and Structured Focused Comparison: Linking Outcomes and Conditions**

The data collected from the two cases will be analysed using the qualitative methods of 'structured focused comparison' and process tracing. The propositions as described in the previous chapter are theoretically informed and guide the data collection and analysis and provide the focus of the study. The structure is provided through 'semi structured' interviews in which the theoretical focus resonates but it also allows room for the interviewees to provide information on matters unique to their experience and matters they view to be important.

In case study research, a 'structured and focused comparison' stressing the systematic collection of data is a very useful method. The method is 'structured' by posing general theoretically founded questions that reflect the research objective. These questions are to guide each case under study and standardise the data collection, facilitating systematic comparison and accumulation of the findings. The method is 'focused' because it deals with, and scrutinises, particular aspects of the cases (the informal and formal decision-making of the senior civil and military decision-makers and their respective activities). A merely formalistic adherence to the format of structured focused comparison will negatively influence the results since the important device of formulating a set of standardised, general questions is grounded in both the theoretical and research objective of the study.<sup>24</sup>

The case studies are structured in the following way: first of all, the context, largely describing why the senior civil and military decision-makers have chosen to engage their armed forces for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan. Secondly, the actions and events

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<sup>23</sup> This process will be described in great detail in chapter five.

<sup>24</sup> See: Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge 2005) 67-71.

featuring the complex political military interplay of launching a military operation and the articulation of its purpose, will be outlined. The cases are concluded when political approval for the operations was granted and the plans for the operations were delivered. As such, the timeframe of the case studies is limited to the duration of the military and political decision-making process which started in 2004 and was concluded in the first quarter of 2006.

### 3.3.2 Process Tracing

The data collected from the two cases will be analysed using the qualitative method of 'process tracing'. Within qualitative research, the process tracing method is quite regularly employed. Its goal is to obtain information about well-defined and specific events and processes.<sup>25</sup> The most profound proponents of the method of process tracing are Alexander George and Andrew Benet.<sup>26</sup> They continually fine-tuned this method, since the conduct of qualitative research was often criticised for its presumed lack of reliability.<sup>27</sup> Process tracing as a tool in particular, has been criticised for its use within a recursive setting.<sup>28</sup> If one is to use process tracing within an interpretative approach, it should be separated from discursive and narrative techniques.<sup>29</sup>

The most distinctive feature of process-tracing styles of research is what John Gerring refers to as 'non comparability of adjacent pieces of evidence': all pieces are relevant to the central argument but they do not comprise observations in a larger sample. They are more correctly understood as a series of  $N=1$  observations. It is the quality of the observations and how they are analysed, not the quantity that matters.<sup>30</sup>

The framework of the decision unit is particularly suited for process tracing purposes since it facilitates isolating and examining the sequence of decisions that are made by breaking the sequence into parts. In the reconstruction of the flow of decisions and who was involved in which decision with what consequences to the decision process, actual choice comes to light.<sup>31</sup>

25 Tansy, Oisín, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: a Case for Non-Probability Sampling', *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40(4) (2007) 765-772, 766-768.

26 The method of process tracing was first introduced in 1979 by Alexander George and Andrew Benet. See: Alexander L. George, 'The Causal Nexus Between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision-Making Behavior: The "Operational Code" Belief System', in: Lawrence S. Falkowski, (ed.), *Psychological Models in International Politics* (Boulder, CO 1979) 95-124; Alexander L. George and Timothy J. McKeown, 'Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision-making', in: Robert F. Coulam and Richard A. Smith (eds.), *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations II* (Greenwich, CT 1985) 21-58. For the most recent insights see: George and Benet, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*.

27 See: Benoît Rihoux, 'Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Systematic Comparative Methods Recent Advances and Remaining Challenges for Social Science Research', *International Sociology* 21 (5) (2006) 679-706.

28 See: Jeffrey Checkel, 'Tracing Causal Mechanisms', *International Studies Review* 8(2) (2006) 362-370.

29 Checkel, 'Tracing Causal Mechanisms', 363.

30 John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge 2007) 178-180.

31 Hermann, 'How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy', 54.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

As this study seeks to shed light on the decisions made the senior civil and military decision-makers that led to the use of military means, data on these actions has been collected through the earlier explained qualitative method. The data gathered for this study is composed of a large amount of primary and secondary documents and over a hundred semi-structured elite interviews with senior civil and military decision-makers. Document analysis, interviewing and observation, are structured by means of a set of broad topics and general questions reflecting the theoretical focus of this study.

The analysis of the cases employs both a deductive and an inductive method since existing theories on human action, decision-making, civil military relations, and strategy are guiding the propositions formulated for the collection of the data. However, possible explanations as to what accounts for current developments in the translation of political goals into a military operation follows an inductive logic – informed by combining the theoretical insights with the empirical findings.

#### 3.4.1 Elite Interviews

The data collection for the reconstruction of the series of actions that resulted in the use of British and Dutch military means in South Afghanistan relies heavily on the technique of elite interviewing. Particularly in political science, process tracing frequently involves the analysis of developments at the highest level of government.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, elite interviews can, through direct and focused questioning, shed light on decisions and actions that lay behind an event or series of events. Through the interviewing of key actors (the elites) detailed information about the process in question can be gathered since accounts are obtained from the actors involved in the events under study. The nature of interviewing also allows interviewers to probe their subjects and gather information about the underlying context and events that have cumulated into the decisions that were made.<sup>33</sup>

By interviewing key players in the decision-making process, data about the debates and deliberations that preceded decision-making and action taking can potentially supplement official accounts with first-hand testimonies.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the most appropriate sampling procedures are those that identify key actors that have had most or important involvement with the decision-making process. As such, one is not to draw a representative sample of larger population actors that can be used as the basis to make generalisations about the population

32 Tansey Oisín. 'Process tracing and elite interviewing: a case for non-probability sampling', *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40.04 (2007). PP 768-769.

33 Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 768-769.

34 Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 773

as a whole, but to draw a sample that includes the most important or active players that have participated in the events under study. Consequently, random sampling runs against the logic of the process tracing method, as it creates a risk of excluding important respondents from the sample purely by chance.<sup>35</sup>

Instead, the goal with process tracing is to reduce randomness as much as possible. The most important actors need to be identified and approached directly.<sup>36</sup> As opposed to surveys, interviewing allows researchers to ask open-ended questions and enables the respondent to talk freely, without the constraint of having to answer according to fixed categories. In this way one can gather rich details about the thoughts and attitudes of key actors concerning the actions under study.<sup>37</sup> By allowing researchers to communicate with key players directly, and by enabling them to frame that communication according to theoretical interests and priorities, interviews can facilitate the collection of data that is highly relevant and specific to the research objectives being pursued.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, elite interviews relate to particular gaps in archival documents, as interviews can compensate for both the lack and limitations of documentary evidence. Important decision-making processes often lack an accompanying body of documentation, for various reasons such as that written materials were not created due to a perceived lack of importance in documenting the actions or because certain actions were seen to be too sensitive to document in written form. In addition, important documents may also be lost, as they are unintentionally discarded or classification regulations can also warrant that key documents are withheld from public analysis.<sup>39</sup>

While interviews may compensate for possible distortions in written sources, the interviewees themselves can misrepresent their own positions in ways that raise questions over the reliability of their statements. In particular, senior decision-makers may attempt to slant their accounts, and inflate or minimise their own role in an event or process depending on whether or not there is anything at stake.<sup>40</sup> In addition, as observed by Alexander George and Andrew Bennett policy-makers often have an incentive to skew their accounts in order to portray a 'careful, multi-dimensional process of policymaking' to the public.<sup>41</sup>

35 Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 766-768. More on sampling for elite interviews see: Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, 'Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4) (2002) 673-676; Kenneth Goldstein, 'Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4) (2002) 669-672.

36 Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 781.

37 *Ibid.*, 768-769.

38 *Ibid.*, 788.

39 Philip H.J. Davies, 'Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services', *Politics* 21(1) (2001) 73-80 cited in: Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 774.

40 Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 774.

41 George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 102 in: Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 774.

It follows from this observation that one of the most employed critiques of the method of (elite) interviewing refers to the objectivity and reliability of the provided information by the interviewees. In particular, interviews are often conducted in retrospect. Consequently, lapses of memory can limit the utility of these interviews.<sup>42</sup> In order to critically evaluate the data collected by these interviews, four questions, as listed by George and Bennet, were employed for the evaluation of the information: who is speaking, who are they speaking to, for what purpose are they speaking, and under what circumstances?<sup>43</sup>

An important point of caution when conducting elite interviews is that the interviewer should consider the ways in which possible power relations between interviewer and interviewee can shape the production of the interview data.<sup>44</sup> This is particularly important for this research, since many of the military respondents in the Dutch case are superior officers higher up the chain of command in relation to the interviewer. However, the most important military actors in the Dutch case have retired from active duty. As such, a power relation between them and the interviewer did not exist. As far as the active duty military respondents are concerned, they in no way exercised their potential power. Some superior officers, frustrated with the events that had unfolded in the run up to the deployment to Uruzgan, voiced some emotional accounts. At times, the interviewer went back to them and showed the impact of their provided response and the great degree of frustration, often voiced towards persons. Since it is not the intention of this research to get into personal fights and the settling of scores, the interviewer did caution against including inappropriate accounts and provided the respondents with the possibility of nuancing their comments.

In-depth (semi-structured) interviews with the focus group of senior civil and military decision-makers listed below were executed. This decision unit is the main level of analysis since it is their task to provide guidance for the execution of military operations. The opinions of the interviewees are not only an important source for reconstructing the process, but their experience and beliefs about how and why military means were used for the stabilisation effort in South Afghanistan are crucial to this research as well. Their behaviour is supposedly based on their ideas on what would be acceptable to the constituents. Orientations such as internationalism or pacifism relate to public notions of national roles, and build upon the structuring of the publics' views by underlying core values.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, these strategically engaged agents must construct inferences about their counterparts in order to decide what best suits the achievement of their ends. Their own commitments, beliefs on the basis of which they are prepared to act, are located in the

42 See: Mark Kramer, 'Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis: Should We Swallow Oral History?', *International Security* 15(1) (1990) 212-218 cited in: Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 775.

43 George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 99.

44 See: Andras Bozoki, 'Elite Interviews', [http://eurospheres.org/files/2011/04/10\\_Bozoki\\_Elite-interviews.pdf](http://eurospheres.org/files/2011/04/10_Bozoki_Elite-interviews.pdf)

45 Cantir and Kaarbo, 'Contested Roles and Domestic Politics', 11.

minds of these agents.<sup>46</sup> As Alexander Macleod points out, black-boxing senior decision-makers would be perfidious since their communication is usually the outcome of a collective process, involving power struggles, policy disagreements and partisan infighting.<sup>47</sup> As such, it is believed that the selection of this group of actors as the primary unit of analysis will best serve the possibility of reconstructing the events and activities.

### **The Interviews**

General interviews were held during a pilot study which was executed to determine the focus and selection of cases. This pilot study was executed in September 2010 in Kandahar, South Afghanistan. Initially, the four countries operating in this region: Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States and their experiences converting their political ambition to contribute to the stabilisation of the Southern provinces were to be included in the study. The outcome of the pilot however indicated the desired in – depth reconstruction of the activities and events to only be possible if the case studies were limited to two cases (see case selection). However, the interviews conducted during this pilot study have served for contextual purposes of the study.

The case related interviews were carried out with a selected group of actors within the senior civil and military decision-makers of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Generally speaking, the majority of them are working at the strategic level at either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Ministry of Defence. This does not withstand that for specific parts of the reconstruction, such as the writing of the plan, actors that were employed at other levels within the respective organisations were interviewed.

#### General Interviews (Context)

1. Scholars
2. Politicians and military

#### Case related interviews

1. Politicians
2. Special advisors/political assistants
3. Military planners (strategic and operational level)
4. Diplomats
5. Military commanders (operational and tactical level)

46 Nicholas Onuf, 'Speaking of Policy', in: Vendulka Kubálková (ed.), *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY 2001) 77-95, 79-80.

47 Alex Macleod, 'Just Defending National Interests? Understanding French Policy Towards Iraq Since the End of the Gulf War', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7 (2004) 356-387, 364.

The interviews conducted for contextual purposes were primarily used in chapter five that discusses the foreign and security policy and the civil military relations in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as where the case related interviews evidently served to reconstruct the cases (chapter six and seven). A list of all respondents is attached as an appendix to this dissertation.

### 3.4.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to acquire detailed information on why and how the military instruments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were used for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan. This study relies on primary sources such as operational debriefs and reports, parliamentary reports, policy papers and secondary sources such as media coverage and academic publications.

Access was granted to the Defence archives in Rijswijk, the Netherlands by the Ministry of Defence. In close coordination with one of their primary researchers, Rokus van den Bout, the required information was sought and selected both from their digital and printed archives. Classified information was used as means of verification and/or informing additional questions to the interviewees as will be addressed below.

## 3.5 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

Linking concepts to observations: connecting ideas with facts is a complex undertaking. During this process, an important question needs to be answered with regard to the measurement of validity about the concepts and facts, namely: ‘do the observations meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the concepts?’. This question addresses whether operationalisation and the scoring of cases sufficiently reflect the concept the researcher seeks to measure and as a result addresses both reliability and validity.<sup>48</sup>

Although measurement of validity is interconnected with causal inference, it also concerns the relation between measurement validity and disputes about the meaning of concepts: ‘The clarification and refinement of concepts is a fundamental task in political science, and carefully developed concepts are, in turn, a major prerequisite for meaningful discussions of measurement validity. Contextual specificity of measurement validity—an issue that arises when a measure that is valid in one context is invalid in another’.<sup>49</sup>

48 Robert Adcock, ‘Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research’, *American Political Science Association* 95(3) (2001) 529–546, 529.

49 Adcock, ‘Measurement Validity’, 529.

The conceptualisation of inquiry of data by definition includes a frame as to what is in fact the proper way to generate scientific insights. Taking into consideration that explorative qualitative research is habitually viewed to be of less standing than quantitative research the argument made here is that qualitative research does in fact fulfil a profound role in the process of requiring scientific knowledge. It should be noted that even though explorative research in itself does not evolve in 'definitive' knowledge nor does the testing of hypotheses. The testing of hypotheses is aimed at tentatively accepting or rejecting certain theoretical explanations of phenomena, not definite by nature.<sup>50</sup>

The potential for generalisable results – albeit modest - for Western European states is believed to be included in the case study selection: both countries represent two important Western European states and NATO members when it comes to providing troops for stabilisation missions.

### 3.6 Limitations

The study does contain certain limitations. First of all, access to classified data – as has been allowed for the Dutch case - could not be arranged for the British case. Archive material was important for the triangulation of the gathered data through the interviews. However, many studies and reports about the decision-making process on the deployment to Helmand have appeared in the United Kingdom and public hearings have been conducted. As such, much secondary data could be collected allowing triangulation purposes for the British case as well.

Secondly, this study heavily relies on elite interviews and, as such, on the memories of the interviewees. In retrospect, the facts present in their minds might not be accurate or might even have been manipulated for self-serving purposes. By means of cross checking the data from these interviewees with other involved actors who were interviewed and by means of triangulation with archive material and other secondary data, the data collected with these interviews were carefully selected before being presented. This does not withstand a certain level of subjectivity present in the facts recollected from these interviews but the level of this potential subjectivity is believed to be validated by, as mentioned earlier, triangulation with other sources.

Thirdly, it is the essence of interpretive research to study the acts of social agents. Ultimately, observation is interpretation: social reality constitutes meanings and they cannot be studied in any 'objective' manner. This could be viewed as a limitation to this

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50 Swanborn, P. G., 'Kwalitatief onderzoek en exploratie', *Kwalon* (9) 2 (2004) 7-13.

study. However, the impossibility of objective observation should by no means justify not trying to pragmatically interpret social reality with as much detachment as possible. Finally, 'to know if social reality is really real makes no analytical difference: the whole point is to observe whether agents take it to be real and to draw the social and political implications that result'.<sup>51</sup>

Lastly, the fact that the author is an active duty officer comes with advantages and disadvantages. The chief advantage of being an active duty officer is her field experience and being in the privileged position of getting access to various (classified) operational documents and reports. This also constitutes the disadvantages of her position, namely she is 'part' of the instrument under study and much of the data she is allowed access to, is classified. By being aware that she already has some preconceived ideas based on her experience, she tried to keep distance and whenever needed received feedback from her supervisors. The classified information about both the planning and the execution of the mission and operational debriefs she gained access to, served to formulate the questions for the semi-structured interview lists as designed for the structured and focussed comparison. The information has been triangulated with the information gathered through the interviews and has served as a reliability test of the gathered qualitative data.



<sup>51</sup> Pouliot, 'The Essence of Constructivism', 328-329.