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Chapter 5 The Strategic Context

5.1 Introduction

Once a state engages its armed servants into operations abroad, the assumption is that they are to attain a certain goal. A certain political objective, preferably deduced from the state's foreign and security policy, is to guide the effort. However, policy visions do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, policies need to be interpreted by official agents and implemented. This turns out to be a fairly complex endeavour, especially in an interdependent world. Hence, foreign and security policy is an area of government where 'delivery' is particularly difficult often resulting in situations whereby formal decision-making structures are bypassed¹ or become highly intricate.

In this chapter, a short overview of the foreign and security policy behavior of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom will be presented, mostly in reference to actions regarding the deployment to South Afghanistan since this is the period under study. Subsequently, the relations between senior civil and military decision-makers of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom will be introduced. All in all, this chapter serves as an introduction to the context in which the decisions were taken to engage in South Afghanistan.

5.2 The Netherlands: A Small Power with a Desire to Make a Difference

The Netherlands can be best characterised as a small power with limited military capabilities. Its economic relations benefit from stable international relations, and as such it strongly promotes the international rule of law, which is believed to be foundational for international stability. Consequently, the strategic cultural tenets present in Dutch security politics are to advance the international rule of law, project stability and use the military as an instrument to boost Dutch international significance, often in support of the major player in the international order: the United States.²

Even though it is problematic to identify a perpetual denominator in Dutch foreign politics, three pillars can be distinguished: Atlanticism, Europeanism, and multilateral

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1 William Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* (London 1975) cited in: Paul Williams, 'Who's Making UK Foreign Policy?' *International Affairs* 80(5) (2004) 909-929, 929.

2 Rem Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-BUILDER and the Hesitant Ally: How Defence Transformation Divided NATO 1991-2008* (Leiden 2011) 281.

activities in support of the international legal order as the common denominators on which Dutch foreign and security politics are founded.³

Some however argue not enough scientific evidence has been produced to be able to talk about a continuum in Dutch foreign policy.⁴ This could be explained by the fact that the earlier described aspects of Dutch foreign policy often lead to a ‘hedging strategy’.⁵ It allows the Netherlands not to be concrete about its choices and to neglect setting priorities.⁶ Or, as put by others, Dutch security politics are rather pragmatic, *à la carte*: whenever needed an idealistic argument is made but in turn all options are kept open.⁷

However, the one common thread throughout this *à la carte* behavior during the last subsequent Cabinets that ruled the Netherlands is that they all have unconditionally prioritised fulfilling the commitments of being a reliable NATO partner, also referred to as the ‘Atlantic Reflex’.⁸ Other alternatives like bolstering a collective security regime within the United Nations, or the European Union, were declined or mattered less to the political elite.⁹

Although the Netherlands has favored peace support operations, it has also accepted the need for high-intensity operations in order to remain relevant to the United States. This allowed the Netherlands to have a security policy acceptable both to Atlanticists as well as Europeans.¹⁰ Compounded with an increased role of the media and public opinion driven by moral considerations, the Dutch government often appears to be entrapped in its self-chosen rhetoric of international justice.¹¹

In a study addressing the behavior of the Netherlands political elite in the international arena when it comes to the distribution of foreign aid (from the perspective of the decision-makers), it is viewed to be ‘activist’ (43.4 %). The study also points to another role of the

- 3 Jan Rood and Marieke Doolaard, ‘Activisme als risico: buitenlands beleid onder Balkenende’, *Internationale Spectator* 64(11) (2010) 567–571.
- 4 Yvonne Kleistra, *Hollen of stilstaan : beleidsverandering bij het Nederlandse ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken* (Delft 2002).
- 5 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-Builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 300.
- 6 *Aan het Buitenland gehecht. Over verankering en strategie van Nederlands buitenlandbeleid. Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid* (2010 Den Haag) 47, 55; Kleistra, *Hollen of stilstaan*.
- 7 Fred van Staden, ‘Nederlands veiligheidsbeleid en het Atlantische primaat. Over bekende ambities en slijtende grondslagen’ in: Segers, M.L.L., Hellema, D.A. & Rood, J.Q.Th. (eds.), *Bezinning op het buitenland. Het Nederlands buitenlands beleid in een onzekere wereld* (Den Haag 2011) 9–30, 28.
- 8 Commissie Davids, *Rapport commissie van onderzoek besluitvorming Irak* (Amersfoort 2010) via <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2010/01/12/rapport-commissie-davids.html>, 119; Staden, ‘Nederlands veiligheidsbeleid en het Atlantische primaat’, 9; Thomas Gijswijt, ‘De trans-Atlantische elite en de Nederlandse buitenlandse politiek sinds 1945’ in: Segers, M.L.L., Hellema, D.A. & Rood, J.Q.Th. (eds.), *Bezinning op het buitenland. Het Nederlands buitenlands beleid in een onzekere wereld* (Den Haag 2011) 31–46.
- 9 Staden, ‘Nederlands veiligheidsbeleid en het Atlantische primaat’, 9.
- 10 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-Builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 300.
- 11 Bert Jan Verbeek and A. van der Vleuten, ‘The Domestication of the Foreign Policy of the Netherlands (1989–2007): the Paradoxical Result of Europeanization and Internalization’, *Acta Politica* 43 (2008) 357–377, 365.

Netherlands, namely a ‘powerbroker’ role (29.4 %).¹² The activist role, defined as perception of opportunity in an orderly environment, does seem to be an overall feature in Dutch foreign politics.

However, the activist role the Netherlands desires to play in the international arena is often ambitious but not necessarily an outcome of articulated goals in foreign and security policy. Apparently, the Netherlands is seen to lack a tradition to engage in farsighted policy making with regard to international politics seemingly resulting in tacit habitual reflexes and blind spots. Hence, there seems to be a profound belief amongst foreign policy makers that foreign policy is to be ad hoc and reactive by definition. In consequence, it would not require thoughtful analysis with a long term view. As such, one is unable to distinguish core values and interests in recent foreign and security policy papers. Only general terminology such as fostering international peace and security and the rule of law is found, but is not specifically related to a clear goal or objective or choice for that matter.¹³

In addition, the change of a set order of topics on the international agenda into a dynamic constantly changing series of events has seriously complicated the activity of policy making. The use of military means especially became less obvious because a clearly defined enemy and a comprehensible bi-polar system had ceased to exist since the end of the Cold War. This allowed for a stretching of the concept ‘security’ which enabled organisations like NATO to maintain their relevance.¹⁴ Consequently, senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands started to readjust their view on the use of military means into a structure-focused understanding of interventions and a military emphasis on stability projection. The military would prefer not be deployed to fight wars, but rather contribute to stability in order to enable liberal institutions to take root.¹⁵

In the early nineties, the Netherlands started participating in UN-mandated peace operations, and afterwards all expeditionary missions were justified on the basis of its contribution to stability. It has led to an aversion to ‘waging wars’, preferring to term deployments ‘peace support’, ‘stabilisation’ or ‘policing’ operations instead. It has also contributed to ‘stability’ being an overarching objective of Dutch security policy rather than decisively removing threats.¹⁶ In 2004, a so called ‘Stabilisation Fund’ was founded by the

12 The study identifies four role nations can assume with regard to the provision of foreign aid assistance: 1. Good neighbor: combines perception of constraint in an orderly environment; 2. Merchant role: combines perceptions of constraint with those of an anarchic international environment; 3. Power broker role: combines perception of opportunity in an anarchic environment; 4. Activist role: combines perception of opportunity in an orderly environment. Both the rhetoric and actions of the Netherlands is studied from 1975 until 1991. Breuning, ‘Words and Deeds’.

13 Yvonne Kleistra, ‘Nederlands buitenlandbeleid als een donut’ in: Segers, M.L.L., Hellema, D.A. & Rood, J.Q.Th. (eds.), *Bezinning op het buitenland. Het Nederlands buitenlands beleid in een onzekere wereld* (Den Haag 2011) 123-150, 123, 137.

14 Kleistra, ‘Nederlands buitenlandbeleid als een donut’, 127, 141.

15 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-Builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 291-292.

16 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-Builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 300.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its main goal is to fund activities that lie at the cross roads of peace, security, and, development and additionally invests in a variety of countries that are either in conflict or threatened by it.¹⁷

The above mentioned characterisations seem to be confirmed by the government's strong tendency to frame its international military operations as moral undertakings, with reference to the Netherlands' constitutional aim of promoting the international legal order.¹⁸ The use of euphemistic idiom in order not to employ the term 'war' is a trend throughout Dutch history. In colonial times, the Dutch framed conventional offensives in Indonesia as 'police actions' and their objective was labelled as 'bringing justice and security'.¹⁹ For recent missions, like Iraq but also Afghanistan, stabilisation seemed to be the most employed idiom and was further exploited for the mission to Uruzgan²⁰ combined with the employment of terminology as 'the Dutch approach', a term commonly exercised ever since the Dutch mission to Iraq.²¹

It entails, as described by Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, 'a vaguely defined idea of a better, subtle, comprehensive and culturally aware national approach – a 'national way of war''.²² The concept has, as indicated by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Bot, been employed in the political arena to seek parliamentary approval and public commitment for the dangerous and controversial deployment to South Afghanistan'.²³

All in all, the security posture of the Netherlands, both nationally and internationally, is best captured as a medium power, pursuing good relations with the United States through, among other things, being a trustworthy member of NATO and projecting the international

17 Kleistra, 'Nederlands buitenlandbeleid als een donut', 131

18 Anamarija Kristić, *De Staten-Generaal en de inzet van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht. Een onderzoek naar de parlementaire betrokkenheid bij de besluitvorming over deelname aan internationale militaire operaties* (PhD dissertation, Tilburg 2012) 202.

19 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, 'The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counter-Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36(6) (2013) 867-897.

20 Brief van de ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en van Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II, vergaderjaar 2005–2006. Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, Kamerbrief 221.

21 See Soeters et al., 'Epilogue' in Jan van der Meulen, Ad Vogelaar, Robert Beeres and Joseph Soeters (eds), *Mission Uruzgan. Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan* (Amsterdam UP 2012), 329–30; Joseph L. Soeters, 'Afghanistan Talks: Experiential Isomorphism in Afghanistan', in G. Caforio, G. Kümmel and B. Purkayastha (eds), *Armed Forces and Conflict Resolution: Sociological Perspectives* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing 2008); Joseph L. Soeters, *Ethnic Conflict and Terrorism: The Origins and Dynamics of Civil Wars* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2005). For an overview contradicting the image of the Netherlands as a consensus-seeking, internationally legalistic, peaceful nation see Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate, 'A Gentle Occupation: Unravelling the Dutch Approach in Iraq, 2003–2005', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 23/1 (March 2012); Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, 'The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counter-Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2013; Petra Groen, 'Colonial Warfare and Military Ethics', 277–97; Willem Klinkert, *Van Waterloo to Uruzgan and the contributions by Hans Blom, Martin Bossenbroek, Ben Schoenmaker and Arthur ten Cate in Jan Hoffenaar* (ed.), *Nederland en zijn Militaire Traditie* (The Hague: Instituut voor Militaire Geschiedenis 2003). For a perspective of military practitioners on the matter, see: Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D Approach and Counterinsurgency. A Mix of Defence, Diplomacy and Development. The Case of Uruzgan'. Master thesis (2009) University of Leiden.

22 Brocades Zaalberg, 'The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counter-Insurgency', 3.

23 Interview Bot.

stability needed for its economic position. Its military instrument is one facet of pursuing this goal but its use is by no means easily decided upon as will be explained later on in this chapter.

5.2.1 The Senior Civil and Military Decision-Makers and Their Relations

The most prominent senior civil and military decision-makers at the strategic level in the Netherlands are the Minister of Defence, the Chief of Defence and his director of operations, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his director of Political Affairs, and the respective (political) advisors of the Prime Minister. These actors are all aided by their respective civil or military staff officers. The role of the Prime Minister himself rather depends on his own interest in the matter, more than a predefined role to which he is to adhere. The Prime Minister at the time, Jan Peter Balkenende, did not seem acquire an active role in setting the agenda or guiding the decision-making with regard to Dutch military endeavours.²⁴ Like witnessed during decision-making events for military involvement in Iraq, he refrained from direct involvement and entrusted his Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence to plan the operation.²⁵

The relationships between the Dutch senior civil and military decision-makers has been heavily influenced by the events of Srebrenica. In a study conducted by René Moelker, civil military relations during the decision-making process of the deployment of Dutch forces to Srebrenica were scrutinised.²⁶ Ethics supposedly had the upper hand as the rationale or motive. Among the politicians, 'Gesinnungsethik'²⁷ was prevalent. These ethics - driven by good intentions and the wish to intervene in order to address humanitarian necessity - were dominant amongst the politicians whereas among the military a large group of persons was inclined to look at the consequences of possible outcomes of decisions. As such, they had

24 The Davids Committee was entrusted to investigate how and why the Dutch government had come to support the American-British invasion into Iraq. Amongst other things it concluded that the prime minister had not been in the lead during the decision-making process and had not concerned himself with the consequences of the decision: 'The Prime Minister took little or no lead in debates on the Iraq question; he left the matter of Iraq entirely to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Only after January 2003, did the Prime Minister take a strong interest in this issue. However, by that time, the stance defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was firmly established as government policy'. See: Commissie Davids, *Rapport commissie van onderzoek besluitvorming Irak*, 529; the respondents, as will be shown in the next chapter, have indicated that in the case of Afghanistan, the Prime Minister had also refrained from acquiring an active role in the decision-making.

25 The Prime Minister took little or no lead in debates on the Iraq question; he left the matter of Iraq entirely to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. See: Commissie Davids, *Rapport commissie van onderzoek besluitvorming Irak*, 529.

26 Moelker, 'Culture's Backlash on Decision-making'.

27 The research report of NIOD, one of the sources used for the study by Moelker, refers to Weber and his differentiation between the two kinds of ethics exercised by civil and military agents. According to Max Weber, there are two kinds of ethics operating with bureaucracies: 'Gesinnungsethik' and 'Verantwortungsethik'. Agents acting on 'Gesinnungsethik' (ethic of intentions) presumably do not take the consequences of their decisions or actions into consideration but act on good intentions. Those agents who act on 'Verantwortungsethik' (ethic of responsibility) consider the consequences of actions, since they in the end are held responsible and will be asked to justify their actions. See: Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf* (München and Leipzig [1919] 2010).

voiced their grave concerns against the deployment of forces.²⁸ Yet, ever since the end of the last century, the relations between the civil and military senior decision-makers have evolved - especially since integrated missions to Iraq and Afghanistan - into quite a robust and professional level.

Decision-Making Process for the Use of Military Means

The use of military means has by no means been easily decided upon ever since the fall of the enclave of Srebrenica.²⁹ This was a defining moment for the Netherlands when it comes to the use of military means for international missions. In July 1995, thousands of Muslims, officially under the protection of the United Nations and its Dutch peacekeepers, were killed by Serbian militaries. The inability of the Dutch forces to prevent the massacre of these men has structured the Dutch views on use of force³⁰ and military interventions to a great extent.³¹ Ever since, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence have tried to carve out a new role for the Netherlands on the world stage and for their military.³² This recourse to rules and standard operating procedures is likely when consequential calculations have produced prior catastrophes³³ as has been the case with the deployment of Dutch forces to Srebrenica. The Netherlands wanted to contribute its forces – also showing off its newly established air mobile brigade – to restoring peace in the Balkans.³⁴ This was a decision in which costs and benefits were reflectively calculated, but it turned out to be disastrous.

28 Moelker, 'Culture's Backlash on Decision-making', 16.

29 For the official report about the fall of the enclave see: <http://www.srebrenica.nl/Pages/OOR/23/379.bGFuZz1OTA.html> (last accessed 12.08.2013) and studies about the fall of the enclave: Erna Rijdsdijk, 'Lost in Srebrenica: Responsibility and Subjectivity in the Reconstructions of a Failed Peacekeeping Mission' (PhD dissertation, Amsterdam 2012); Christ Klep, 'Somalië, Rwanda, Srebrenica. De nasleep van drie ontspoorde vredesmissies' (PhD Dissertation, Utrecht 2008).

30 Jan van der Meulen and Joseph Soeters, 'Dutch Courage: The Politics of Acceptable Risks', *Armed Forces & Society* 31(4) (2005) 537-558.

31 The decision to become one of the main suppliers of troops for a peace mission moved many at the time. Dutch politics were dominated by the call to intervene on moral grounds. This humanitarian motivation, coupled with the ambition to improve Dutch credibility and prestige in the world, led the Netherlands to offer to dispatch the Air Mobile Brigade. By playing down the possible risks of the behaviour of the warring parties so much, a large circle of those involved in this policy, and in particular its advocates, took on a large responsibility for it. In practice, Dutchbat was dispatched: on a mission with a very unclear mandate; to a zone described as a 'safe area' although there was no clear definition of what that meant; to keep the peace where there was no peace; without obtaining in-depth information from the Canadian predecessors in the enclave (Canbat); without adequate training for this specific task in those specific circumstances; virtually without military and political intelligence work to gauge the political and military intentions of the warring parties; with misplaced confidence in the readiness to deploy air strikes if problems arose, and without any clear strategy for leaving. <http://www.srebrenica.nl/Pages/OOR/23/384.html> (last accessed 12.08.2013)

32 Verbeek and Vleuten, 'The Domesticization of the Foreign Policy of the Netherlands', 365.

33 March and Olsen, 'The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders'.

34 As outlined by Christ Klep and Donna Winslow: 'The Netherlands became involved in the peacekeeping efforts in the Bosnian War at an early stage. The Dutch sent observers, a communications battalion and a transport and logistics battalion in 1992. During 1993 discussions centred on the matter of sending a combat unit. Initially both the Minister of Defence and the Army Staff had strong reservations about the risks and usefulness of deploying a combat unit to a country still caught up in a major civil war. Also, the Netherlands Armed Forces were in the process of large-scale reductions and reorganisations

Hence, concrete standards on the basis of which government decides on the deployment of military means, are laid down in the so called 'Assessment Framework'. The framework consists of a series of political and military benchmarks that are used to consider the desirability and feasibility of Dutch participation in an international crisis control operation. The political facets of the framework take into consideration whether the purpose of a military operation is to create the conditions for reconstruction and/or delivering development aid. If so, then the analysis will take the provision of development aid into account. Secondly, the mandate is an important aspect of the political facets especially taking into consideration that deployment of Dutch military units has to be in accordance with international law. If the operation is not carried out at the request of the country involved, then it has to be based on a clear, preferably United Nation's security council's, mandate.³⁵ The mandate must therefore include the political and military objectives of the operation, and should clarify if the operation is being conducted under Chapter VI or Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Also, the political aspects include a description of other participating countries and their role.³⁶

The introduction of this assessment framework is an addition to the framework for the decision-making process on the deployment of military forces as laid down in article 100 of the Constitution.³⁷ This notification procedure includes sending a so called 'Article 100 letter' to Parliament. In essence, the letter signifies Cabinet – after it has been probed by an international organisation or state – to notify Parliament about their intention to explore possibilities for a new military mission or to change an existing military mission in a drastic manner. By doing so, one can denote - at a relatively early stage – if the foreseen mission is to receive broad political support and by doing so prevent the genesis of all sorts of rumours and speculations about a mission playing into the hands of the opposition. On the basis of this letter, parliament debates the issues involving the deployment. In order for government to deploy its military forces, at least fifty percent of parliament has to endorse the proposal. Government could decide to deploy its forces without parliamentary approval but this is not viewed as desirable.³⁸

following the 1993 'Defence Priorities Review'. However, these objections were put aside by parliament, press and public opinion, all of whom demanded quick and decisive humanitarian intervention in the Bosnian War. This interventionism was strongly fuelled by very disturbing pictures from prison camps in Bosnia and scenes of ethnic cleansing'. See: Chris Klep and Donna Winslow, 'Learning Lessons the hard Way - Somalia and Srebrenica Compared', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 10(2) (1999) 93-137, 96.

35 Operation Allied Force contained the bombing of Serbian targets in order to refrain them from carrying out more hostilities against the Albanian Kosovars is an exception to this prescription.

36 Kristić, 'De Staten-Generaal en de inzet van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht', 177-180.

37 Ramses A. Wessel, 'The Netherlands and NATO' in: Juha Rainne, *Legal Implications of NATO Membership: Focus on Finland and Five Allied States* (Helsinki 2008) 137-161.

38 See: Kristić, 'De Staten-Generaal en de inzet van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht'; Christ Klep, *Uruzgan. De Nederlandse Militairen op Missie, 2006-2010* (Amsterdam 2011).

The assessment framework was developed with the best of intentions to prevent another (military) debacle. However, one could remain sceptical regarding its utility in practice. The framework is often referred to as a checklist not necessarily resulting in a deep analysis of the use of military means in pursuit of achieving political goals, nor does it itself seem to guarantee a constructive and rational decision-making process³⁹ or imply that a military mission will only be conducted if all components of the framework are efficiently dealt with.

The sensitivity with regard to military missions has, over the course of the years, resulted in an increase of parliamentary involvement with military missions. As such, Parliament has gained quite some additional but informal influence on military operations. In fact, the parliamentary involvement through the Article 100 letter encapsulates the diffusion between authority and accountability of deploying military forces.⁴⁰ The level of detail with which Parliament involves itself seems to be a consequence of the tendency present at the strategic civil military level to mainly describe tactical and technical activities in their advice about a possible mission instead of the objectives that need to be attained. In other words, not the why but the how – describing the kinds of activities that are to be executed - is explicated, providing no analysis on a strategic level, or even operational level for that matter.⁴¹ This is compounded by the same level of input provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which also focuses primarily on what kind of developmental and governmental projects it will finance, instead of outlining the political objectives that need to be attained.

Parliamentary involvement does trigger another component affecting coalition politics characteristic of the Dutch political system. This is the institutionally created position of junior parties within coalitions that offers a potential for lopsided influence with regard to the framing of the foreign policy action. Recent insights in political decision-making suggest that the ways in which individuals and groups represent a problem is key to understanding the policy choices that are considered and eventually chosen.⁴² In Dutch deliberations over sending troops to South Afghanistan, the junior coalition party, D66, attempted to frame a potential military contribution to the stabilisation of South Afghanistan as in fact a contribution to the American Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) which many Europeans associated with unlawful acts of torture and rendition. They argued that the military would

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39 Interviews Hartog and Bot; Marloes ten Dam, 'Uruzgan, Het CNN effect' (Master thesis, Utrecht 2012); Klep, *Uruzgan*; Moelker, 'Culture's Backlash on Decision-making', 33.

40 As indicated by Anamarija Kristić: 'parliament can play its own game and exercise influence on governments decision [...] knowing that government will appreciate wide political support for these very important and far-reaching conclusions [...] The political relationship between government and parliament appears to be of a much greater impact on parliamentary involvement than the constitutional framework and the exchange of information: Kristić, 'De Staten-Generaal en de inzet van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht', 233- 235.

41 Interviews Keij, Huijben, Klaarbergen, Noom.

42 Juliet Kaarbo, 'Coalition Cabinet Decision-making: Institutional and Psychological Factors', *International Studies Review* 10(1) (2008) 57-86, 67-68.

be forced to fight the Taliban and would end up in a war that was supposed to be the domain of OEF. Senior parties in the Cabinet tried to counter this by framing the decision in terms of international responsibility and being a good ally and tried to disentangle the NATO mission from OEF.⁴³

Also, coalition cabinets have proven vulnerable to the strategies of junior parties in influencing the decision-making processes.⁴⁴ Again, as will be showcased in the next chapter, the junior party of the coalition (D66) anticipated it could halt the desire of the major governing parties to deploy troops. Even though they did not manage to impede the deployment, they certainly managed to delay the decision-making process to a significant degree, causing a lot of nuisance both nationally and internationally.

Steering Group Military Operations

The official forum in which the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands meet and discusses the planning and conduct of military operations is the 'Steering Group Military Operations' (SMO).⁴⁵ The emphasis of this forum is directed towards fostering a dialogue on military missions between (initially) the departments of Foreign Affairs, and Defence. Later on, the group was extended to include representatives from the Ministry of General Affairs (to be compared with the Cabinet Office in the United Kingdom) and the Ministry of Development Cooperation.

With regard to the mission to Uruzgan, the group successfully encouraged a joint approach to the Dutch effort in Afghanistan. Generally speaking, judging from the views as provided by the respondents, the relations between the civil and military actors in this group can be described as rather good. However, their cultural differences in terms of habits - such as the military need for clear goals and objectives versus the civilian desire for vagueness - surfaced every now and then and were such as to require political space for manoeuvre.

The common ground between the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs seemed to be their dedication to providing military troops and resources for NATO's expansion to the South of Afghanistan. The policy adopted by both ministries in 2006 was based on the belief of integrating defence, diplomacy and development. This concept - contrary to claims made

43 Kaarbo, 'Coalition Cabinet Decision-making', 67-68; Jan van der Meulen and Mirjam Grandia, 'Brussels Calling: Domestic Politics under International Pressure' in: Jan van der Meulen, Ad Vogelaar, Robert Beerers and Joseph Soeters (eds.), *Mission Uruzgan. Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan* (Amsterdam 2012).

44 Kaarbo, 'Coalition Cabinet Decision-making', 67-68; Hans J.P. Vollaard and Niels J.G. van Willigen, 'Binnenlandse steun voor buitenlands beleid' in: Duco Hellema, Mathieu Segers and Jan Rood (eds.) *Bezinning op het buitenland: Het Nederlands buitenlands beleid in een onzekere wereld* (Den Haag 2010), 193-216

45 The steering group was initiated in 2002 and aims to facilitate an interdepartmental approach to military missions. Its agenda setting is kept secret as well as its reports (information provided by the secretary of the SMO: Pieter - Henk Schroor).

in the media⁴⁶ - was already at the heart of both British and Canadian policy with regard to (post) conflict states.⁴⁷

The events that unfolded in Srebrenica very much influenced the relationship between the civil and military senior decision-makers. Only after the appearance of the NIOD⁴⁸ report commissioned by the Dutch government, which came out seven years after the fall of the enclave, were the politicians accused of having deployed their military without a proper mandate and without appropriate equipment. Until then, it had been the military who were primarily blamed for the fiasco which impacted the relationship between the two in the sense that the military felt left in the cold by the politicians who should have provided the preconditions. In turn, the politicians had become very careful with the deployment of the military. Hence, their enthusiasm had been tempered and ever since military deployments have been a result of critical analysis.⁴⁹

In conclusion, Dutch foreign and security politics are to a great extent focused on its trans-Atlantic pillar. The desire to be a trustworthy NATO ally has resonated throughout the last two decades, most prominently in its support of military undertakings in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. The initiation of military missions and the consequent decisions required primarily evolve in the Steering Group Military Operations. This forum has proven beneficial for the relations of the Dutch senior civil and military decision-makers. The steering group has shown to be a useful tool for keeping one another informed.

However, the use of the military in the Netherlands is by no means easily decided upon. First and foremost, this is attributed to the processes and decision-making tools as designed and implemented after Srebrenica and secondly, coalition politics by definition requires consensus. The need for this consensus consequently determines the political agendas of the political parties, as such potentially leaving the advancement of the decision-making process to a great extent in the hands of party politics.

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- 46 Jay Solomon, 'US takes Dutch military as role model in Afghanistan', *Wall Street Journal*, 30 April 2009; 'Nederlandse 'watjes' hadden succes in Irak', *Trouw*, 12 April 2007; 'Overleven in Uruzgan', *NRC Next*, 10 April 2007; 'Uruzgan, na vier jaar', *NRC Handelsblad*, 31 July 2010; 'The Dutch model: flower strewers partly vindicated', *The Economist*, 12 March 2009.
- 47 For Canadian policy see: Martin, Paul, 'Address by Prime Minister Paul Martin on occasion of his visit to Washington D.C.', Washington, D.C., April 29, 2004; *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*. Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (2005 Ottawa) 20. For British policy on the matter see: *The Comprehensive Approach. Joint Discussion Note 4/05*. Joint Doctrine & Concepts Centre, UK Ministry of Defence (2006 Shrivenham)
- 48 In November 1996, the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (then: Netherlands Institute for War Documentation) was instructed by the Dutch Government to carry out a study of 'the events prior to, during and after the fall of Srebrenica'. On 10 April 2002, this report was made public and consequently both the political and military establishment resigned acknowledging the great mistakes that had been made and had now been presented in this report. For a complete reading of the findings of the report see: <http://www.niod.nl/nl/projecten/srebrenicarapport>
- 49 An inheritance of the Srebrenica debacle was the eminence of air support. The lack of it had seriously complicated the ability of the Dutch forces to properly respond against the atrocities committed by the Serbian forces. The blurred lines within the chains of command through the UN and differences in opinion about mandate resulted in failing close air support. The legacy of Srebrenica has consequently resulted in the ever present strong national air component operating alongside the ground forces to prevent a recurrence of the tragic events in former Yugoslavia.

5.3 The United Kingdom: The Grandeur of a Great Power

The United Kingdom can be best described as a medium power with substantial military capabilities. A player in the major league of nations, the United Kingdom not only engages in operations as a loyal partner of the United States, but also tends to view itself as a 'force for good'. Ever since the First World War, a relative decline in British economic and military power can be observed. They nevertheless maintained their relevance on the international stage through the mobilisation of 'soft power' [diplomatic] resources.⁵⁰ The foreign policy rhetoric and policy behaviour of the United Kingdom is predominantly guided by a 'power broker' conception of their state's role in the international arena.⁵¹

Three traditional pillars can be distinguished in British foreign policy: multilateralism, Atlanticism and neo-liberalism.⁵² Multilateralism was not only consistent with the adherence of the governing party [Labour] to international institutions and their respective liberal values, but it also provided a chance to utilise the soft power capability to shape the rule-based international order.⁵³ In practice, Prime Minister Blair's consecutive Cabinets have utilised a combination of both formal and informal multilateralism: either a formal kind through established international organisations or through informal coalitions of the willing.⁵⁴

Atlanticism, or the often claimed 'special relationship'⁵⁵ with the United States, as the dominant approach within chosen foreign policy actions resonates in many studies analysing British foreign and security policy.⁵⁶ For many years, especially at the operational level, the British and American relationship featured degrees of intimacy and trust which has informed the notion that their bond is indeed special. Their political elites have continued to share a common internationalist worldview and cooperate diplomatically to advance a joint view of the global order of relations. Their collaboration, especially on defence policy [within NATO and bilaterally] and the integration of their intelligence operations has gone further than with any other state, unprecedented in its scale and trust.⁵⁷

50 Joseph S. Nye, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York 2004).

51 Breuning, 'Words and Deeds', 235-254.

52 Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* cited in: Williams, 'Who's making UK Foreign Policy?', 929.

53 Tim Dunne, 'Blair's Britain and the Road to War in Iraq', in: Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (2nd edition, Oxford 2012) 419-440, 423.

54 Williams, 'Who's making UK Foreign Policy?', 926.

55 See: John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (2nd revised edition, Basingstoke 2006).

56 Steve Marsh and John Baylis, 'The Anglo-American "Special Relationship": the Lazarus of International Relations', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17(1) (2006) 173-211.

57 David Hastings Dunn, 'UK-US Relations After the Three Bs-Blair, Brown and Bush', *Defense & Security Analysis* 27(1) (2011) 5-18.

In December 2003, both the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence published White Papers highlighting Britain's dependence on the United States in relation to defence, security, and foreign policy. Influenced by the conflicts that had transpired in the Balkans in recent history, the geopolitical framework for the British had expanded. However, the documents only addressed the means rather than the ends of British foreign policy.⁵⁸ To illustrate: the White Paper produced by the FCO, *UK International Priorities* described Britain's relationship with the United States as a 'vital asset...essential to achieving many of our objectives, especially in ensuring our security'.⁵⁹ The Defence White Paper, *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, stated that 'the most demanding expeditionary operations, involving intervention against state adversaries, can only plausibly be conducted if US forces are engaged, either leading a coalition or in NATO'.⁶⁰

Moreover, Prime Minister Blair believed he could be the 'bridge builder' between the European continent and the United States. This was a political balancing act in which he sought to be America's closest ally, and a committed European partner attempting to deliver Europe as a beneficial party to the table.⁶¹ Some have nuanced the 'special relationship' and 'bridge builder' view arguing that since the end of the Cold War, British governments have exercised little influence over American administrations and their respective 'shared values'. Also, the proclaimed British position as a bridge builder between the United States and Europe had been contested since European countries refused to have their relationship with Washington channelled through London.⁶²

The neo-liberal pillar in British foreign and security policy was most prominently discernable in its positions on trade, economic development, and international (development) aid by organisations such as the World Bank.⁶³ Also, the liberal views were prominently articulated as values that needed to be upheld to safeguard a stable international community.⁶⁴ In the late nineties, a so called 'ethical foreign policy' was introduced, concurrently with designing military forces ready for rapid and decisive action.⁶⁵ As articulated in the Labour party manifesto (communicated four years before the intervention

58 Hew Strachan, 'Conclusion' in: Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron, and Hew Strachan (eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (London 2013) 327-346, 328, 332.

59 'UK International Priorities', Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2003). <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmfaff/745/74507.htm>

60 *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, UK Ministry of Defence (2003). http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/publications/whitepaper2003/volume1.pdf.

61 Hastings Dunn, 'UK-US Relations After the Three Bs', 6.

62 William Wallace and Tim Oliver, 'A Bridge too far: the United Kingdom and the Transatlantic Relationship' in: David M. Andrews (ed.), *The Atlantic Alliance under Stress: US-European Relations after Iraq* (Cambridge 2005) 152-176, 152-156; Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* cited in: Paul Williams, 'Who's making UK Foreign Policy?', 55.

63 Dunne, 'Blair's Britain and the Road to War in Iraq', 425.

64 Jason Ralph, 'After Chilcot: the 'Doctrine of International Community' and the UK Decision to Invade Iraq', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 13(3) (2011) 304-325, 309.

65 Jonathan Bailey, 'The Political Context: Why We Went to War and the Mismatch of Ends, Ways and Means', in: Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron, and Hew Strachan (eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (London 2013) 5-26, 6.

in Afghanistan): ‘Labour wants Britain to be respected in the world for the integrity with which it conducts its foreign relations’ and it wants to ‘restore Britain’s pride and influence as a leading force for good in the world’.⁶⁶

During the decade in which Prime Minister Blair was in power, a doctrine of ‘liberal interventionism’ was developed in a quest for moral progress in a world facing many opponents of liberalism.⁶⁷ Consequently, the prominence of values in British foreign and security policy appeared to be validated in the emerging military threats against what was perceived as the ‘Western way of life’.⁶⁸ Blair’s liberal interventionism, publicly introduced in his famous Chicago speech,⁶⁹ evolved in various military engagements all over the world [Iraq, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan], all under the banner of ‘doing good’.⁷⁰

The ethical rhetoric of British security policy also resonated in the ideological framework of liberal internationalism applied to Afghanistan. National security objectives related to combating international terrorism were informed by a broader understanding of the significance of a normative international order in which countries like Afghanistan would be able to flourish and by doing so no longer provide assistance for terrorist groups. The British aim to seek for a greater balance between military, social, and, political objectives for the stabilisation of Afghanistan, was novel and perhaps even foundational for NATO in developing a ‘comprehensive’ approach.⁷¹

In conclusion, British foreign and security politics, especially as it emerged under the leadership of Prime Minister Blair, became well known for its ‘ethical’ components. Nevertheless, the transatlantic bond has remained a consistent feature in its strategic posture.

5.3.1 The Senior Civil and Military Decision-Makers and Their Relations

The most prominent senior civil and military decision-makers at strategic level in the United Kingdom are the Prime Minister and his staff; the civilian Ministers of the Ministry of Defence; and the members of the military Chiefs of Staffs Committee, principally the Chief of Ministry Staff (CDS). Supposedly, as posited in recent research, civilian officials from the Civil and Diplomatic Services in the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Cabinet Office, Foreign &

66 *Labour Party manifesto 1997. New Labour: Because Britain deserves better.* Labour Party (1997 London); See also ‘Robin Cook’s speech on the government’s ethical foreign policy. The speech by Cook that started it all’, *Guardian Unlimited*, 12 May 1997.

67 Dunne, ‘Blair’s Britain and the Road to War in Iraq’, 421.

68 Bailey, ‘The Political Context’, 7.

69 Tony Blair, ‘Doctrine of the International Community’, delivered at the Economic Club, Chicago, 22 April 1999, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1297.asp>. (last accessed 28.04.2014).

70 Oliver Daddow, ‘Tony’s War? Blair, Kosovo and the Interventionist Impulse in British Foreign Policy’, *International Affairs* 85(3) (2009) 547–560.

71 Williams, ‘Empire Lite Revisited’.

Commonwealth Office (FCO) and other government departments have a less evident and often underrated role than their military counter parts.⁷²

The roles and responsibilities of senior civil and military decision-makers are subject to bureaucratic intricacies, often not formalised in a widely accepted set of regulations. This in itself is a characteristic feature of the British constitutional and legal system, in which basic principles are formulated, expressed and adjusted less through fundamental texts than through precedent, practice and (especially) process. As put forward in the report *Depending on the Right People: British Political-Military Relations 2001-2010*:

Some key military decisions were also taken with insufficient political oversight. [...] These problems were the result of a situation in which there was no well-understood model for how Ministers, senior military officers and civil servants should work together. All interpreted their roles in different ways, with effectiveness depending on the quality of individuals and the personal relationships between them. In the phrase of Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's chief of staff, good decisions depended on 'the right people' being involved and behaving in the right way. Although in theory the British model could be flexible and fast-acting, it brought incoherence, inconsistency and opacity. It was not resilient enough to deal with the extraordinary pressures of the Iraq and Afghanistan crises. It contributed to a continuing breakdown of trust between politicians and senior military officers, and disunity and division of purpose within the government.⁷³

In his book, *High Command*, in which many of the involved actors commented on the intricacies of the decision-making for the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, Christopher Eliot has put forward the suggestion offered by some of his sources that on occasions an 'executive of two' [consisting of Prime Minister Blair and his Chief of Defence Staff Walker] was running the decision-making. However, General Sir Michael Walker commented on this as an exaggeration whilst explaining that it was in fact the Secretary of State for Defence Reid who habitually led discussions with the Prime Minister. The confusion present both amongst senior civil and military decision-makers as to who actually had authorised a particular course of action was indeed endemic for the (lack of) accountability within the decision-making process.⁷⁴

As indicated above, relations between senior level military and civilian actors in the United Kingdom have been damaged in recent operations, Iraq and Afghanistan in particular. Flaws in the decision-making process to intervene in both countries have been the topic of

72 James de Waal, *Depending on the Right People. British Political-Military Relations, 2001-2010*. Chatham House Report (2013 London) 9.

73 *Ibid.*, VI.

74 Christopher Elliot, *High Command* (Hurst forthcoming) 267.

blaming either one of the two groups.⁷⁵ Some respondents argued that there seems to be an institutional overreliance on the military.⁷⁶ Others claimed civilian decision-makers were intimidated by the military. The author of the book *Losing Small Wars*, Frank Ledwidge, does believe the army to have been calling the shots when it came to the deployment to Helmand. 'The politicians were standing behind. The tactical structure was dictating the planning instead of the other way around.'⁷⁷

Former diplomat, Sir Sherard Cowper Coles,⁷⁸ who has been both British ambassador in Afghanistan and British special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, takes this line of argument a bit further as he states: 'the military are stuck and cannot stand criticism. People have not been very critical towards the military and politicians are afraid of military. No politicians have military experience'.⁷⁹

This is, according to some, exactly the reason why there is friction amongst civil and military actors. As explained by General MacKay: 'Complex civil military relations, a lot of friction. [...] The supremacy of civilians in the decision for the use of force has eroded' [...] most politicians do not have military experience and knowledge. However, the system needs to advise the politicians but there is a limited ability to understand the military process'.⁸⁰

Decision-Making Process for the Use of Military Means

Some of the inherent features of British politics rooted in their 'Westminster model'⁸¹ are the majority rule, the prerogative powers of the executive power and the absence

75 Michael Clarke (ed.) *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-06. White Hall Paper 77* (London 2011); Waal, 'Depending on the Right People. British Political-Military Relations, 2001-2010'.

76 Interviews Korski, McKay.

77 Interview Ledwidge.

78 Sir Sherard Cowper Coles has heavily criticized the military for its attitude and behaviour with regard to the planning and execution of operations in Afghanistan. 'Many of the military think they are brighter than they really are. Look at their COIN campaign: are we working for good governance without a national (Afghan) political settlement?' Interview Cowper Coles.

79 Interview Cowper Coles.

80 Interview McKay.

81 The Westminster model 'is a short cut for the majoritarian democratic parliamentary system as used in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries. It is 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. Historically, the Prime Minister was seen as *primus inter pares* (first among equals) but in modern times in fact leads a Cabinet of ministers which exercises executive authority on behalf of the head of state. Thus, the sovereign, who reigns but does not rule, is the focal point for the nation while the prime minister and his colleagues undertake executive decisions. In the United Kingdom, this system of government originated with parliamentary convention, practices and precedents but has never been formally laid out in a written constitution'. See: <http://www.nassauinstitute.org/articles/article652.php?view=print>. As Arend Lijphart has argued in his famous book *Patterns of Democracy* [in which he compares government forms and performance of thirty six countries] majoritarian democracies can potentially create sharp divisions between those in power and those who are not in power. This primarily derives from the fact that the model does not allow much influence for opposition over government policy: 'In the most deeply divided societies...majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy. What such societies need is not a democratic regime that emphasises consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes'. See: Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven, CT 1999) 33. For more on British governance see: Roderick Rhodes, *Beyond Westminster and*

of a constitution. Given the fact that no constitution is in place, British politics are very much informed by traditions. As outlined by Mark Bevir and Roderick Rhodes in their interpretation of British governance: 'when unpacking the idea of tradition we must not reify traditions. Tradition is a starting point not something that fixes or limits future actions (...) are contingent, produced by the actions of individuals. The carriers of traditions bring it to life. They settle its content and variations by developing their beliefs and practices, adapting it to new circumstances, while passing it on to the next generation'.⁸²

This is an important aspect since it helps explain that actions of those engaged in the decision-making on the use of military means are likely to act in accordance with traditions, beliefs and habits. The use of military force in itself can be decided upon by the Prime Minister. His powers with regard to the use of military means are described in the Royal Prerogative Powers.⁸³ These are a series of powers officially held by the Queen that have been passed to the government of the day. They enable decisions to be taken without the backing of, or consultation with parliament. Yet, it is common for Cabinet to keep Parliament well informed on decisions that entail the use of force and about the progress of the military campaigns. This is achieved primarily through statements in the House of Commons and debates.⁸⁴ In practice, the active agreement of senior Ministers, and eventually the endorsement of parliament are viewed to be desirable.⁸⁵

The Royal Prerogative and lack of involvement of the British parliament in approving the deployment of armed forces has long been criticised for what is perceived to be an absence of democratic accountability of the use of force. In other words: a democratic deficit. The conflict in Iraq and subsequent arguments over the legality of military intervention, have contributed significantly to raising the political profile of this issue. Recently, there have been several attempts to establish an obligation for Cabinet to obtain parliamentary approval for the deployment of military forces.⁸⁶

The perceived lack of democratic accountability when it comes to the use of force also transpires in the secrecy that has traditionally masked the cabinet system and its surplus of subcommittees. Moreover, the basis of politics on conventions rather than strict rules made the use of force vulnerable to the vagaries of the respective Prime Ministers. Nevertheless, the members of Cabinet are expected to display collective responsibility and present a united

Whitehall: the Sub-Central Governments of Britain (London 1992); David Marsh, 'Understanding British Government: Analysing Competing Models', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 10(2) (2008) 251-268.

82 Mark Bevir and Roderick Rhodes, *Interpreting British Governance* (London and New York 2003) 33-34.

83 See: Richard Heffernan, 'Prime Ministerial Predominance? Core Executive Politics in the UK', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 5(3) (2003) 347-372, 357-358.

84 See: Paul Bowers and D. Annex. 'Parliament and the use of force', *World War II* 5 (2003) 2.

85 Heffernan, 'Prime Ministerial Predominance?', 357-358.

86 Claire Taylor and Richard Kelly, Parliamentary Approval for Deploying the Armed Forces: An Introduction to the Issues. Research Paper 08/88 House of Commons Library (2008 London). See: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2008/rp08-088.pdf>.

front. In order to do so, historically Cabinets have habitually attempted to reconcile internal divisions on their own terms before embarking upon a particular course of action.⁸⁷

In line with this tradition, Prime Minister Blair, like his predecessors, preferred to work in small ad hoc committees⁸⁸ composed of his most trusted civil servants, Ministers and advisers rather than with the cabinet as a whole.⁸⁹ His presidential style of policy-making generated rigorous criticism, with it even being dubbed as overly secretive, ad hoc, informal and susceptible to groupthink.⁹⁰ This will be further outlined below in the description of the Reid Group and its role in the decisions made with regard to the deployment to Helmand.

The Reid Group

In the particular case of Helmand, the Prime Minister chose to exercise his powers in terms of setting out a clear road regarding British involvement in Afghanistan but soon thereafter delegated the particulars to the Reid Group. Secretary of State for Defence John Reid was asked by Tony Blair to form a senior cross-departmental group, which was to supervise the planning for the deployment to South of Afghanistan. As such, the role of this particular group was to deal with the decisions that needed to be made with regard to British involvement in South Afghanistan.

As commented on by the Secretary of State for Defence John Reid himself: ‘We had established a group, learning the lessons from Iraq, which I chaired, unusually. It would normally been a Foreign Office lead but the Prime Minister asked me to lead it to bring together DfID, the Foreign Office, Treasury, MOD and so on, to work down from the concept, the strategic concept⁹¹, right down to the operational level’.⁹²

Across government, most Ministers and their efforts for the deployment to South Afghanistan were guided by either Blair or Reid. Only a few Ministers, like the chief of the Treasury, were sceptical, most were broadly in favour since Afghanistan was generally viewed as the ‘good war’ as opposed to Iraq. The argument which is believed to have swayed Ministers most was that Afghanistan was a job the international community had started and

87 Williams, ‘Who’s making UK Foreign Policy?’.

88 As described by Williams: ‘Britain’s cabinet system and its plethora of subcommittees has traditionally been cloaked in secrecy and based on conventions rather than strict rules. As a consequence, cabinet behaves differently under different Prime Ministers and it is difficult for outsiders to gain reliable information about how and where specific decisions are taken. On the other hand, regardless of whose cabinet we are analysing, its members are expected to display collective responsibility and present a united front to the outside world’, Williams, ‘Who’s making UK Foreign Policy?’, 917.

89 Anthony Seldon dubbed these groups as ‘denocracy’ because they tended to conduct their meetings in Blair’s office ‘The Den’. Anthony Seldon, *Blair* (London 2004) 692. Cited in: Williams, ‘Who’s making UK Foreign Policy?’, 916.

90 Williams, ‘Who’s making UK Foreign Policy?’, 917.

91 It is not clear to what strategic concept John Reid refers. His advisor Josh Arnold Foster could not recall such a concept either. John Reid had been approached twice for an interview for this study to present his views. He however declined the requests.

92 Evidence presented to CI by John Reid 3 February 2010. See: <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/45011/20100203am-reid-final.pdf>.

should finish by consolidating the progress made so far, ensuring the investment was not wasted.⁹³

According to special advisor to the labour government, Matt Cavanagh⁹⁴, little debate had taken place. He described that in the beginning of the discussions about the deployment there was relatively little debate at Ministerial level, in the Reid Group or anywhere else for that matter, about the detail of the plan or troop numbers'.⁹⁵ Special advisor to John Reid, Josh Arnold Foster⁹⁶, like Cavanagh, remembered very little debate about the mission as such since the Prime Minister wanted it to happen.⁹⁷ Foster in fact referred to the words of Lord Hailsham, who coined the phrase 'elective dictatorship'⁹⁸ to describe the United Kingdom.

The lack of debate in the initial phase of the decision-making might have been instigated by not addressing the right questions whilst conducting the assessment of the task at hand. As pointed out by many respondents but also clearly articulated by Reid's private secretary in his writings about the decision-making process: 'Key questions were unanswered: Where was the grand strategy that previous Afghanistan campaigns had been fought on? What were the strategic objectives that could be honed into a convincing narrative worth fighting for? That was not for the military to define, and without a proper sense of what long-term influence we wanted in the region, we had little reference to measure our response'.⁹⁹

Special advisor to the Defence Minister Arnold Foster described his concern at the time to have been about the top-down approach. He believed the interdepartmental group could have been used by departments as a platform rather than genuinely working together. He describes most papers considered by the group as being referred to as DfID, Foreign Office, or Ministry of Defence papers.¹⁰⁰

93 Cavanagh, 'Ministerial Decision-Making in the Run-Up to the Helmand Deployment', 50.

94 Matt Cavanagh was a special adviser in the last Labour government from 2003, and worked on Afghanistan from 2005.

95 The discussion about the troop numbers will be dealt with in the UK case chapter 7.

96 Josh Arnold Foster was a special advisor to Defence Secretary John Reid from 2005- 2006.

97 Josh Arnold-Foster, 'Cross-Government Planning and the Helmand Decision, 2005-06', *The RUSI Journal* 157(2) (2012) 44-47.

98 Elective dictatorship is a phrase popularised by the former Lord Chancellor of the United Kingdom, Lord Hailsham, in a Richard Dimbleby Lecture at the BBC in 1976. It refers to the fact that the legislative programme of Parliament is determined by the government, and government bills virtually always pass the House of Commons because of the nature of the majoritarian first-past-the-post electoral system, which almost always produces strong government, in combination with the imposition of party discipline on the governing party's majority, which almost always ensures loyalty. In the absence of a codified constitution, this tendency toward executive dominance is compounded by the Parliament Acts and Salisbury Convention which circumscribe the House of Lords and their ability to block government initiatives. See: Lord Hailsham, 'Elective Dictatorship', *The Listener*, 21 October 1976. 496-500.

99 Nick Beadle, 'Afghanistan and the Context of Iraq', *Whitehall Paper* 77(1) (2011) 73-80, 73,74.

100 Arnold-Foster, 'Cross-Government Planning and the Helmand Decision', 45.

The Post Conflict and Reconstruction Unit

Although the Reid group was formed to oversee the planning of the stabilisation effort, another more permanent institutional construct had emerged with the aim of planning and coordinating comprehensive missions to (post) conflict states: the Post Conflict and Reconstruction Unit (PCRU).¹⁰¹ The unit was created in 2004 as a result of the absence of a civilian reconstruction and development capability in Iraq. However, the aspirations for the role of the PCRU were rapidly reduced since they were answerable to the Foreign Office, the Ministries of Defence and International Development, instead of the Cabinet Office. This weakened their mandate and influence since the Permanent Undersecretaries refused PCRU an operational role beyond being an inter-departmental facilitator and supplier of personnel for missions.¹⁰²

Furthermore, the PCRU was to facilitate cross-Whitehall divisions of labour, but this turned out to be complex since it did not play to departmental strengths. The impression of special advisor to the Defence Minister of the different groups of officials within the various departments was one of ‘all working on the same issue, but not necessarily going in exactly the same direction (...) while working-level officials seemed to cooperate well, more senior officials within all departments may not have been as joined up as they needed to be. Of course, it is all too easy for political figures to blame the failure to achieve truly joined-up government on bureaucratic in-fighting. The relationships between different officials will frequently reflect the relationship between their Ministerial masters.’¹⁰³

As such, the role of the PCRU was limited to providing stabilisation advisers and it provided, only upon invitation from its parent departments (FCO, DFID and the MOD), periodic planning support or facilitation.¹⁰⁴ Thus, in essence the unit was more engaged with the provision of personnel instead of truly planning and coordinating the stabilisation effort for Helmand.

In conclusion, British foreign and security politics, especially as it emerged under the leadership of Prime Minister Blair became well known for its ‘ethical’ components. Nevertheless, the transatlantic bond has remained a consistent feature in its strategic posture. The initiation of military missions and the consequent decisions required are by and large guided by the Prime Minister, notwithstanding a great role that was allowed for the military within the process. For this particular mission, a strategic group that was to

101 In 2007, the unit was renamed to Stabilisation Unit (SU).

102 Tom Rodwell, ‘Between Idea and the Reality: the Evolution and Application of the Comprehensive Approach. Hollow Men and Doctrine in Helmand?’ (MA Dissertation, London 2010) 11.

103 Arnold-Forster, ‘Cross-Government Planning and the Helmand Decision’, 45.

104 Gordon Stuart, ‘The United Kingdom’s Stabilisation Model and Afghanistan: the Impact on Humanitarian Actors’, *Disasters* 34(3) (2010) 5368-5387; King, A., ‘Understanding the Helmand campaign: British military operations in Afghanistan’, *International Affairs* (86)2 (2010) 311-332.

guide the deployment of military forces was ordered by Blair. A close trustee, his Secretary of State for Defence, was to chair the group. However, no coordinated effort embodied by an interdepartmental strategy materialised. All this illustrates that the use of military means is not bound by formal procedures. In fact, officially the Prime Minister by the rule of the Prerogative Powers can decide to employ military forces by himself. However, in practice, he often chooses to compose ad hoc committees and consensus is sought in Cabinet meetings prior to deciding on the actual act of deploying military means.

5.4 Conclusion

While describing the foreign and security policy of the two nations, outlining the relations between the senior civil and military decision-makers, and consequently describing the decision-making with regard to the use of military forces, the contours of why these actors decided to engage their forces in South Afghanistan surface. The motivations underlying the reasoning of the senior civil and military decision-makers of both nations have been named to be the most prominent and most consistent pillars of British and Dutch foreign and security policies: the desire to be both a trustworthy Alliance member and reliable partner to the United States.

At first glance, one can best define this desire to be rooted in a rationalist calculation of interest, namely maintaining relevance as a partner. However, taking a second look at the behaviour in the international arena by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands with regard to both NATO and the United States, the rationale appears to be more of a shared belief, at times even a habitual reflex. By themselves, the actions of the senior civil and military decision-makers were in line with these traditional pillars of foreign and security policy.

The foreign and security policy of both nations also contains a rather normative component, albeit more profoundly articulated in the United Kingdom consistently throughout the time Prime Minister Blair was in office. Ever since Labour had come to power in the United Kingdom the 'forces for good' became a driving force in their foreign policy not only rhetorically but in practice as well in the sense that their military forces were used to bring about security in places such as Kosovo and Sierra Leone. Also, the Netherlands, albeit less prominently, attained the posture of an active contributor to international stability through the deployment of military forces. Hence, both nations strongly adhered to an imposition of liberal values and frameworks in the belief this would bring about a safe and secure international community.

The relations between the senior civil and military decision-makers in the two countries differed in quality. Whereas in the Netherlands most of the senior civil and military decision-

makers commented on their relations as being rather good and professional, there seemed to be more mistrust between the British senior civil and military decision-makers. To a certain degree this can be explained by the failures of civil military cooperation in Iraq and the disappointing results of the operation overall. Prime Minister Blair's preference to 'wheel and deal' with the military caused quite some annoyance as well in the sense that the senior civilian decision-makers felt their opinion was of less importance.

The institutional differences between the two countries resulted in, amongst other things, different settings in which the actors met. In the United Kingdom mostly ad hoc committees were set up primarily featuring like-minded advisors or trustees of the Prime Minister; in the Netherlands the forum in which the senior civil and military actors meet is institutionalised. One could argue this official forum to better facilitate the development and implementation of military operations in the sense that a permanent dialogue at the civil military interface is guaranteed. However, that the PCRU could have performed the function of ensuring an institutionalised cooperation and hence dialogue between the senior civil and military decision-makers. However, the unit is more seen as a provider of civilian personnel for deployments and not so much as facilitating cooperation and dialogue, let alone providing strategic guidance.

Also, institutional settings have been proven to provide vocabularies that frame thought and understandings and define what are legitimate arguments and standards of justification.¹⁰⁵ Whereas a coalition system, by definition, requires a great deal of negotiation and communicative acts, this is less the case in a majoritarian system. As such, the language exercised by the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Dutch coalition system is seen to better portray the beliefs of the group as a whole. This is in opposition to the language exercised by the group of decision-makers in the British Westminster system. They habitually use the language that has been imposed upon them by their Prime Minister.

Now that the strategic context and the respective relations between the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have been outlined, the actions of these actors that ultimately resulted in the deployment of their military forces to South Afghanistan will be reconstructed in the following chapters.

■
105 Charles Wright Mills, 'Situating Actions and Vocabularies of Motive', *American Sociological Review* 5(6) (1940) 904-913.