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**Title:** Deadly embrace : the decision paths to Uruzgan and Helmand

**Issue Date:** 2015-04-02

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## Chapter 6 The Dutch Case

### 6.1 Introduction: Setting the Stage

The context in which the decision was taken to commit Dutch forces to South Afghanistan should largely be seen in relation to NATO's expansion to the South and the Dutch desire to acquire a greater role as a reliable NATO partner. The 'defining moments' of the reconstruction of the Dutch case were principally found in the determination of the director of operations (MOD), General Pieter Cobelens, in close cooperation with the director political affairs (MOF), Hugo Siblesz, to forge a prominent role for Dutch forces within NATO's expansion to South Afghanistan.

Throughout the whole process of deciding if and how the Dutch forces were to contribute to the stabilisation of South Afghanistan, several strategic decisions were not taken without being articulated at the political level. For one, the objective that needed to be attained, secondly, the selection of the province and thirdly, the number of troops. These decisions were taken at the military level, as such implicitly questioning the primacy of politics in the matter.

NATO's stabilisation operations and the Alliance's desire to expand its footprint is the setting in which the senior civil and military decision-makers anticipated and developed the activities that led to the use of military means for the stabilisation of Uruzgan.

### 6.2 The Foreign Policy Problem: The Logic of Participating in NATO's Expansion to the South of Afghanistan

The political context of NATO's expansion to South Afghanistan in a counter clockwise manner was decided upon in October 2003 through the adoption of UN Resolution 1510.<sup>1</sup> There was true desire to advance further stabilisation efforts through an expanding ISAF presence whereby the counter terrorist operations of the United States would be reduced. Not fully aware at that time about an upcoming insurgency in the South, most member states did envisage the Southern provinces to be less permissive than other regions in Afghanistan. It was evident that NATO needed to show its muscle in order to allow the United States to focus its attention on Iraq. Dutch foreign politics has, as described earlier, always placed a great emphasis on good relations with the United States and through being a trustworthy NATO member it would be able to display its dedication.

1 Resolution 1510 United Nations Security Council (13 October 2003), S/RES/1510 (2003).

From the perspective of most of the military and civil respondents of this study, both the relationship with the United States and ‘responsible alliance behavior’ were foundational for their respective choices with regard to the deployment of Dutch forces to Uruzgan. Some respondents indicated they believed the Netherlands was dedicated to making a true difference in Afghanistan and wanted to enhance its commitment to the facilitation of a stable Afghan state. Others pointed to the fact that the foreign policy of the Netherlands was indecisive about the posture it envisioned, complicating the formulation of goals when it came to employing its military instrument.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the ambition to contribute military forces for NATO’s expansion to South Afghanistan, another issue surfaced, namely the desire to use the Dutch military in a high risk area and showing their ability to ‘do the job’ a desire very much rooted in the performance of the Dutch military during the fall of the enclave of Srebrenica.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, an implicit desire of the Netherlands to be a key player in the international arena could be fulfilled. By providing troops and other resources for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan, the Dutch were yet again a serious partner for important allies such as the United States and the United Kingdom. A feature which has constantly been underlined by the Dutch NATO secretary, general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: ‘One needs to step up and take responsibility in order to be taken seriously within the international arena. The Alliance expects its members to act when needed and when they do so, they will experience a difference in treatment in general and by the United States in particular’.<sup>4</sup>

The observations of De Hoop Scheffer were emphasised by various military and political respondents who claim to have experienced that they ‘mattered’ to their international counterparts and, as a result, received a ‘seat at the table’.<sup>5</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ben Bot, remembered: ‘Back in the days of Uruzgan, we were players in the major league [...] We truly belonged to the club of important nations and were invited to everything. We have clearly and painfully experienced the difference in treatment once it became clear we would end our mission in Uruzgan. We dropped somewhere to the last spot on the international rating list’.<sup>6</sup>

Most politicians and diplomats, and some military respondents as well, referred to the ‘responsibility’ of the Netherlands to contribute to a safer and better world. One of them was Minister of Defence, Henk Kamp. He felt very responsible as he explained: ‘There is a lot of

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2 Interviews Nijssen, Swartbol, Noom, Van Oosterom

3 This event has been extensively described in chapter 5.

4 Interview De Hoop Scheffer *Translated from Dutch*

5 Interview Schaper, Godderij, Berlijn, Nijssen, Siblez, Cobelens, Swartbol.

6 Interview Bot. *Translated from Dutch*

suffering in the world. We have to act against those who cause this suffering and despair. By definition, intervention includes military means [...] we are obliged to contribute'.<sup>7</sup>

The director of the directorate general policy of the Ministry of Defence, Co Casteleijn, identifies the so-called 'burden sharing' factor within the NATO alliance as the primary reason for the Dutch participation in Phase III of NATO's expansion in Afghanistan. 'If NATO views the Netherlands as a serious contributor of troops for NATO missions, than we should provide our troops like a true committed ally. As such, we demonstrate our political leverage. Of course, being a reliable NATO partner is closely related to maintaining good relationships with the United States [...] At the time however, they were not at all exercising political pressure on us to commit our forces, that happened much later'.<sup>8</sup>

On the whole, respondents [civil and military] underlined the general tendency present in the Netherlands to downplay the existence of national interest in relation to the deployment of troops. Jack de Vries, political advisor to Balkenende, explains 'in the Netherlands it is quite hard to define our national interest because it is heavily entangled with party politics and a coalition government'.<sup>9</sup> And, when acknowledged, it often occurs behind the scenes. Also in the case of Uruzgan, the term national interest was not part of the vocabulary used to either explain or promote the mission. This does of course not imply in any way the Dutch to not have national interests, but very much shows the normative disposition that in principle the Netherlands is to engage in stabilisation activities in support of international order and stability without a reference to their own interest.

### 6.3 Occasions for Decisions: Military Trilateral Initiative

Deliberations about a deployment had commenced in the autumn of 2004.<sup>10</sup> These initiatives predated formal Dutch governmental confirmation of its intention to commit troops which occurred in February 2005.<sup>11</sup> Anticipating required troop contributions for the expansion, various nations, amongst them the Netherlands, had started their own multilateral talks with possible partners on a working level (directorates of operations of the respective Ministries of Defence). Hence, the initiatives developed by their director of operations did not come as a surprise to the military planners. The director of operations, General Cobelens,

7 Interview Kamp. *Translated from Dutch*

8 Interview Casteleijn. *Translated from Dutch*

9 Interview De Vries. *Translated from Dutch*

10 Interview Cobelens, NL LNO PJHQ, Van Klaarbergen.

11 Interview Cobelens, Kamp, Hartog, Keij, Huiben, Noom.

had been informed about the British plans via a Dutch liaison officer (LNO) stationed at the British Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) in August 2004.<sup>12</sup> In his letter to Cobelens, he outlined the British plans to deploy forces to the South and their interest in doing so in a multinational setting of likeminded nations.<sup>13</sup>

The director of operations was officially sounded out by the British somewhere in the autumn of 2004 with the idea of contributing forces for NATO's expansion to the South. In addition, Cobelens had already established various informal contacts with the Canadians and the Americans as well since he anticipated a possible mission in the South of Afghanistan. 'Within NATO, we were one of the only nations capable of conducting such a mission [high operations]. In addition, we had already deployed our special forces to the Kandahar region'<sup>14</sup>, Cobelens revealed the Minister was constantly informed by the Chief of Defence about the ideas and initiatives to deploy to the South. 'We fed the Minister of Defence with the various possibilities and options. As director of operations you do have a lot of power, and as such one has to have integrity and deliver reliable information'.<sup>15</sup>

The dynamics of the military bilateral talks<sup>16</sup> of these likeminded nations reportedly took General Jim Jones, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) by surprise: 'They hammered out the whole thing without NATO's assistance, behind closed doors.... We were not aware of the details'.<sup>17</sup>

This finding supports the evidence found for this case where both the military and diplomatic head of the Dutch mission to NATO declared they were not in the loop when it came to the planning of the mission to Uruzgan. Both reported they were hardly – if ever – involved in either the informal negotiations or initial planning.<sup>18</sup> Nor were they approached by partner nations' delegates to explore possibilities.<sup>19</sup> The explorative talks about a mission had, as mentioned earlier, started between the two directors of operations of the respective

12 Based on archive DOPS, personal archive LNO and interview with NL LNO, 19 June, 2013, by phone Northwood – Breda

13 Interview NL LNO Norfolk – Breda, 18.06.2013

14 The British had already opted for Helmand. The archive of the operations directorate does reveal however, a American situation report about Uruzgan (delivered by the US PRT in Uruzgan) delivered to the British. It describes potential strengths and weaknesses of the province for the Brits. One of the anticipated weaknesses would be the low visibility of the province and political impact and profile. Also, it mentions the political kudos of allowing Canadians to have Kandahar.

15 Interview Cobelens. *Translated from Dutch*. This information is confirmed by Minister of Defence Kamp when he was interviewed. *Translated from Dutch*

16 In fact, there were trilateral talks since Canada was equally involved in this as well. However, this study only studies the deployment of the British and Dutch forces. As mentioned throughout this study, interesting parallels are also evident when looking at the Canadian case. See Matthew Willis, 'An Unexpected War, A Not-Unexpected Mission. The origins of Kandahar 2005', *International Journal* 67(4) (2013) 779-1000.

17 Willis, 'An Unexpected War, A Not-Unexpected Mission', 789.

18 Interviews Schaper and Godderij *Translated from Dutch*

19 When the Netherlands kept on delaying its formal political approval for the deployment of Dutch troops the Dutch delegation at NATO was approached various times by partnering nations, but until then they were not in the loop. In fact, as indicated by Godderij, he had to contact The Hague himself in order to stay informed.

defence staffs. Consequently, informal talks<sup>20</sup> on a working level at the three Ministries of Defence in Canada, the Netherlands, and, the United Kingdom were intensified.

These informal talks between the three nations carried great value in the sense that without this partnering, none of these nations would likely have deployed their forces. In addition, shared thinking and observations about available provinces and probable time-frames, amongst other things, are named to have figured in their calculations.<sup>21</sup>

The exchange of information on a military level received a more formal status once the steering group military operations was informed about the deliberations concerning a possible deployment to South Afghanistan somewhere at the end of January 2005. Both on national level and international level, various documents started to appear. Following up on the letter sent to the MOD in August 2004, the Dutch liaison officer at British permanent joint headquarters had sent another letter in March that year in which he had briefly set out the ongoing planning of the British and their intent to cooperate with the Netherlands and Canada in a trilateral framework and to set up joint planning and information systems.<sup>22</sup>

The intensification and more formal communication appearing in March 2005 was logical given the upcoming NATO Stage 3 informal force generation<sup>23</sup> meeting, held in Brussels on the 16th of March. At this meeting, SACEUR intended to undertake early discussions with nations in the planning and force generation for operations. He was very well aware any national planning declared at the meeting had to be considered informal since most nations were still in, or had not even started, the process of obtaining parliamentary or governmental approval.

At this point, one could start to wonder if the military was in fact not marching too fast, given the fact that officially politicians had not been informed yet.

Some perspectives:

Political and military processes often evolve parallel of one another, but in this particular case, the political process had not even started. This is quite exceptional and as far as I know it is the first time it has occurred in this manner. I have not experienced this before. The military planning process began to dictate the political need [...] Foreign Affairs and the politicians rather easily bought into the plan. Personally (and as the counsellor of

20 As pointed out by operational military planner Keijj, 'Communications, even only on a military level, can never be seen as informal. It signals much more than just 'explorative talks'. His observation was underlined by the NL LNO at PJHQ who remembers how the UK was relying on NL's participation early on in the autumn of 2004.

21 Willis, 'An Unexpected War, A Not-Unexpected Mission', 780, pagina nummers uitzoeken

22 Interview Dutch LNO PJHQ, *Translated from Dutch*; and letter (19.08.2004) from LNO to DOPS

23 The procedure for staffing an operation or mission is often referred to as "force generation". This procedure ensures that Alliance operations or missions have the manpower and materials required to achieve set objectives. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50316.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50316.htm) (latest modification 26.08.2014, last accessed 08.08.2013).

the Prime Minister), I believed the operations directorate was moving fast, too fast actually, since we still needed to assess the political sensitivities and determine our level of ambition.<sup>24</sup>

Both [pol/mil] processes are intrinsically connected to one another thereby influencing each other as well. Through the course of political decision-making, more clarity about the preconditions of the deployment is likely to occur. Military planning and preparation can provide more insight and information about the vocal points of the assessment framework, thereby possibly acquiring a prominent role in the political decision-making process. The inherent tension between the processes remains. Military preparation and the needed international agreements facilitating a possible deployment [...] can result in irreversible consequences in the sense that the political decision-making will be reduced to [...] 'going through the motions' no matter how strongly this will be denied by the politicians.<sup>25</sup>

Political and military processes, at the time when we are still exploring our options for a possible military mission, occur simultaneously. Being a military organisation, one tries to look ahead considering possible military contributions.<sup>26</sup>

These provisional actions initiated at the military level were contingent on a response from the political level but their impact on the decision path that evolved was nevertheless far from limited.

#### 6.4 Emergence of a Decision Unit: The Actions of a Single Group

The provisional initiatives of the director of operations - in response to the British informal request- were supported from the start by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by one of the most important players, the head of political affairs, Hugo Siblesz. Cobelens was very well aware of the need to have at least informal back up for his informal international explorations for

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24 Interview Swartbol *Translated from Dutch*

25 J.A. van Reijn, 'De missie Uruzgan: politieke besluitvorming nader bezien', *Carré* 30(5) (2005) 20-24. Van Reijn's perspective is based on his extensive experience at the military political strategic level as amongst other positions, chief plans and director operations at the Ministry of Defence. His observations are also shared by some politicians, mainly from smaller opposition parties who describe the article 100 procedure as 'political theatre'. Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg van de vaste commissies voor Buitenlandse Zaken en voor Defensie, 22 februari 2006, Kamerstukken II 2005-2006, Dossier 27 925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 207, 17, 31, 43.

26 Interview Cobelens. *Translated from Dutch*

a mission to South Afghanistan and approached Siblesz once he had been sounded out by the British.<sup>27</sup>

At the time when I was contacted by Cobelens, the matter had not yet been discussed at a political level. [...] Since the risks of such a mission are political, we [MOF] have to be well informed about the risks and possibilities by the military. [...] We assessed a deployment of Dutch forces to be an interesting possibility for us to play a relevant role in Afghanistan. We defined our interests as contributing to NATO's expansion to the South. The military assured us they were up for the job. Soon thereafter, I informed our Minister [of Foreign Affairs].<sup>28</sup>

Both Siblesz and Cobelens believed Dutch forces were well equipped and trained to take on the difficult task of stabilising one of the Southern provinces in Afghanistan. Within the military, there was a desire [especially within the army] to prove itself under true combat circumstances in order to make up for the damaged reputation it had acquired ever since Srebrenica. In addition, the ongoing cutbacks Defence was facing fed the desire to show the military's utility, often referred to as the 'use them or lose them' phenomenon. These lines of thought were known at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they were supportive of the evolving idea to contribute Dutch forces for NATO's expansion in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, the informal explorations even occurred outside the scope of the steering group military operations. However, some months after the first talks, the steering group was informed about a possible contribution to NATO's expansion to South Afghanistan as well. After that, not only the key players in the steering group but also their respective key advisors and civil servants were actively engaged in the decision path that unfolded.

## 6.5 Decision Unit Dynamics: The Process of Interpretation

Even though the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs joined hands in the opportunity to commit troops to NATO's expansion to South Afghanistan, a common definition of the task at hand, had not yet surfaced. In fact, despite the military genesis of the activities to commit forces to South Afghanistan, the Defence staff also questioned

27 Interview Siblesz en Cobelens *Translated from Dutch*

28 Interview Siblesz. According to one of the involved diplomats the Minister of Foreign Affairs was informed at a rather late stage (summer 2005) as such contradicting the information as provided by Siblesz *Translated from Dutch*

29 Interview Siblesz, Nijssen, Van Oosterom *Translated from Dutch*

and at times even criticised the possible mission. There were quite some differing views on the possible mission at the Ministry of Defence. First of all, the directorate general policies supposedly held reservations against the mission. When confronted with this assertion, the director of the directorate general policy at the Ministry of Defence explained the role of the directorate:

Our role within the Ministry is to ask difficult questions. Some people may interpret our critical questions as opposing arguments, but we should rather be seen as the devil's advocate. It is our task to guard the Minister from issues that have not been investigated. As such, we ask those questions beforehand, in order to be truly able to support an initiative. This culture differs from the one at Foreign Affairs. There if a certain direction is taken, it is not done to voice criticism or start discussions. I personally believe, discussion are good [...] until the last moment, just before the final version of the military advice was presented we have asked difficult questions.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, there were military planners who questioned the advisability of the mission at times. Some of them did experience stark – personal – hesitations and reservations towards the deployment of troops to the Southern regions of Afghanistan. 'I have struggled with the mission and have had severe doubts. I wanted to be sure I had covered all possible risks [...] One has to study his conscience very well'.<sup>31</sup> Another planner even stated he refused to sign the order he had to distribute for the planning directorate of the MOD. 'I felt the numbers of troops and equipment were insufficient to do the job'.<sup>32</sup>

Notwithstanding critical remarks and hesitations, the majority of the senior and civil military decision-makers believed a possible Dutch contribution to NATO's expansion to the South of Afghanistan was feasible, thus the activities for a deployment advanced. However, the planning capacity at the Defence staff was limited to five planners who had to deal with both answering questions from Parliament and planning operations concurrently.

As explicated by one of the planners from the Afghanistan team, there was a 'split' between having to provide guidance for the operational commands and dealing with political matters such as questions from Parliament: 'Unlike the United Kingdom which has separated the political and strategic level of planning<sup>33</sup>, we had to do both things at the same time. [...] All of us knew we needed a political goal and subsequently derive our military

30 Interview Casteleijn. *Translated from Dutch*

31 Interview Van der Have. *Translated from Dutch*

32 Interview Huijben. *Translated from Dutch* The planner handed back the order - unsigned - to his superior.

33 The Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) is an adaptable and agile HQ created to command Joint and Combined military operations, and provide politically aware military advice to the Ministry of Defence. It is at the forefront of work throughout British Defence to further improve joint operational capability. UK Ministry of Defence, 'Guidance: The Permanent Joint Headquarters', <https://www.gov.uk/the-permanent-joint-headquarters> (last accessed 13.08.2013).

mission from it. But in this case, there was no political goal when we started planning. [...] joining the mission seemed more important than any other goal'.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, a so called 'upscaling construction' was launched to create additional planning capacity. All armed services were represented in the planning department of the Defence staff but the army provided additional planners from the army command. The army command was to provide the bulk of the personnel needed for the mission to South Afghanistan so in itself, as commented on by the military respondents, it was valid to reinforce the planning staff with mainly army planners.

The upscaling construction apparently did have some disadvantages. The planners of the Defence staff indicated it had been quite difficult for those who had come to reinforce them to catch up. This occurred primarily because they had missed the orientation and analysis phase of the planning process.<sup>35</sup>

The supposed lack of professionalism and lack of quality of the military planning capability at the Defence staff has been noted by quite a number of military respondents. Apart from the presumed low level of expertise and training for providing both strategic and operational analysis needed for the notification letter to Parliament (based on the assessment framework as described earlier), the planning staff had been charged with having complicated the planning of the deployment by communicating a maximum number of troops beforehand. Normally, the strength of the force package would be the outcome of the planning process.

Yet, there is a tendency within the military, stemming from their anticipation of political approval for deployment of their forces, to keep their demands low. Consequently, the limitation in terms of troop numbers is often put upon themselves. In the case of Uruzgan, this was certainly the issue. The limitation of the troop numbers was described by many military respondents as a 'self-inflicted wound'.<sup>36</sup> Anticipating possible political rejection when requesting permission to compose a robust task force, the Defence staff had come up with a number of 1000 troops. Minister of Defence Kamp recalled this number to have been presented to him by the military staff and explained that once the number was communicated within the political levels, there was no way back.<sup>37</sup> As such, it became quite difficult to increase the number of troops when this was required by the appointed units.

34 Interview Hartog. *Translated from Dutch*

35 In a military planning process much information is collected during the so called orientation phase. This phase is to ensure the staff has a common understanding of the background and underlying causes of the problem and understand the political objectives. Afterwards, the staff is to acquire a clear understanding of the problem/task.

36 Interviews Vleugels and Keij.

37 Interview Henk Kamp. *Translated from Dutch*

Some reflections on the self-inflicted wound:

The discussion about the required number of troops was an artificial discussion. During a presentation by both Berlijn<sup>38</sup> and Cobelens, one could understand, when reading between the lines, they wanted to have more troops. I mean, be honest and realistic and present your true requirement instead of anticipating resistance while doing so. When you come up with a phased approach with regard to deploying troops, you only do so to safeguard political support for the mission. There was a true belief that the politicians would only approve a certain number of troops which resulted in debates about how to make sure this quantity would not be increased [...] over the course of years I have been annoyed about the troop numbers discussion in Parliament [...] one needs to be able to send the right number of troops when required.<sup>39</sup>

During the political decision-making process additional limitations or conditions are put upon the deployment of forces. [...] [It is] Not the operational situation in the area where the forces are to deploy which dictates the planning, but the political situation in the Netherlands comes to drive the planning process. Ironically, a [any] limitation can result in an increase of risks for the deployed units, and a decrease in the effectiveness of the mission.<sup>40</sup>

The Dutch Prime Minister did not engage that much with the preparations for the mission to Afghanistan, neither did he provide (additional) guidance. He had been informed about the matter but kept a certain distance. Some respondents implied that Jack de Vries, the Prime Minister's political advisor and assistant, was against the mission and to have cared more about party politics and the electorate. De Vries himself cannot recall he had been against the mission:

I do not believe I was against the mission but yes, I did care about how things would end up from an electoral point of view. It was my task to advise the PM on how things would develop within the coalition and within Parliament and to point the PM to possible political risks. This can partially be best described as party politics but I also had to guard the profile of the PM<sup>41</sup>

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38 The Chief of Defence.

39 Interview Casteleijn. *Translated from Dutch*

40 Reijn, 'De missie Uruzgan'.

41 Interview De Vries. *Translated from Dutch*

The Prime Minister was kept in the loop throughout the planning of a possible deployment which was taking greater shape every day. Consequently, Prime Minister Balkenende, and his Minister of Defence Kamp and Minister of Foreign Affairs Bot met at the Ministry of Defence on the 3rd of May 2005 to be briefed on the developments and progress. Three weeks later, an additional meeting about the possible deployment to the South was held with all senior civil and military decision-makers involved (represented in the steering group military Operations). It was there that it was decided Minister Bot would sound out the political factions with regard to their provisional support for the mission.<sup>42</sup>

## 6.6 Occasion for Decision: Political Involvement

Strengthened by the support of Prime Minister Balkenende and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence, the provisional 'go ahead' for the planning of the mission was provided during another SMO meeting on the 8th of June.<sup>43</sup> The day before, a two day working conference had commenced in London dealing with Phase III of NATO's expansion to the South. At this meeting, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and their (potential) partners, Denmark, Romania and Australia shared their thoughts and insights on committing to stabilising the South of Afghanistan. The various representatives at the conference were divided into working groups which dealt with the various aspects of NATO's expansion to the South: operations, logistics, communication, information, medical, and, intelligence.

In order to properly continue their planning, now that more official commitments had been made on an international level, the Netherlands needed to select a province in South Afghanistan. During the various meetings and contacts between the three nations, Canada had expressed its desire to take on Kandahar and consequently the United Kingdom decided to assume responsibility for Helmand. The Netherlands needed to make up their mind about which province would suit Dutch capabilities best, hence Ministerial approval was sought to deploy a recce team to Afghanistan.

Inspired by the (internationally) held belief that the Southern regions needed to be stabilised in an integrated manner, combining diplomatic, development, and Defence efforts simultaneously, the Netherlands deployed a so-called joint fact finding mission on 14 June. The party comprised of three military planners, an intelligence and a civil military officer, a diplomat and a representative of the Ministry of Development Cooperation.

42 Lenny Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming van de missie Uruzgan: een reconstructie*. Research Paper 90 (Breda 2009) 13.

43 Hazelbag, 'Politieke besluitvorming van de missie Uruzgan', 14.

Even though in the initial order it was envisioned having a civilian representative of the directorate general policy join the team, no such thing happened. According to the head of the directorate, this was a result of their, at that time, strong belief their personnel were not to engage with the details of the mission. This view changed throughout the course of events as the importance of the involvement of the directorate even on this level became apparent.

The following anecdote perfectly illustrates the shifting dimensions in terms of roles and responsibilities in civil military relations - albeit in this case for the conduct of reces - at the Ministry of Defence:

As a civilian strategist, I experienced what I coined the ‘Cobelens factor’, or put in other words, the ‘can do mentality’ as rather difficult. At the time of the fact finding mission to the South, there had been a discussion about the role of the DAB in these kinds of reces. One point of view [and my own opinion as well] was that regarding practical matters such as these, our directorate would not play an important role. However, eventually my people increasingly participated in reces. At one point in time, Foreign Affairs decided to include their own people in fact finding missions. This decision ultimately led to the participation of our directorate as well. However, the exact role of our directorate in this regard had not been that clear. Later on, we developed procedures for matters with regard to the reces to ensure a smooth cooperation. One really needs to be involved to be able to provide a sound judgment.<sup>44</sup>

Officially, the fact finding mission had been – as stated earlier - executed to gather information about the most desirable province for the deployment of Dutch troops. But as one of the primary planners of the operation to Uruzgan [who was also part of the fact finding team] explains: ‘Formally, a strategic recce was conducted to provide advice about which province the Netherlands was to deploy its forces to. Informally, this decision [Uruzgan] had already been taken by the Director of operations. It would have been a lot easier if we could have known this up front; at least I was not aware of his preference’.<sup>45</sup> His view is supported by various military and political respondents.<sup>46</sup>

Not all members of the fact finding mission agreed Uruzgan was indeed the best option for the Netherlands. One of the planners recalls, ‘With the limitations provided to us in terms of numbers of troops, the only logical outcome of the recce should have been Nimruz. However, it did contain the disadvantage of long logistical lines. On top of that, it would not

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44 Interview Casteleijn. *Translated from Dutch*

45 Interview Huiben, *Translated from Dutch*

46 Interview Klarenberg, Swartbol *Translated from Dutch*

have been fair to our counterparts – in terms of risk sharing - if we had assumed responsibility over a relatively small and benign province'.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly enough, initially [long before the fact finding mission] Kandahar had been the first choice of director of operations Cobelens. Casteleijn remembered this discussion well and commented: 'The fact that we wanted to deploy our forces to the province of Kandahar in hindsight truly illustrates our naivety. We thought it was manageable since we already had deployed our special forces to the region. There was a lot of uncertainty about which province would ultimately be the one where we would be in the lead. In the end, we even feared Uruzgan to be the most dangerous province of all'.<sup>48</sup>

The planning of the mission had been very much influenced by the boundaries set to the Dutch deployment: providing stability in Uruzgan within a two year time frame, with a maximum of 1200 troops and a budget of 320 million euro's<sup>49</sup>. This resulted in, according to those involved in the planning [with a sense of understatement], a 'challenging task'.<sup>50</sup>

Consequently, the objectives informing the planning were not based on a proper assessment of the task but were driven by restrictions, partly put on themselves by the military [troop numbers], and partly put on the military planning process by the politicians [budget and time frame]. What needed to be achieved in Uruzgan, explaining why the Netherlands would commit its forces in the first place, was according to many respondents, not explicated. As such, various reasons for the deployment, like supporting the United States, prevention of terrorism on Dutch soil, the development of the Uruzgan, eliminating the Taliban, support for the facilitation of democracy in Afghanistan, etcetera, have been named by both the military planners as by the diplomats.

From the very beginning, it was evident to the military planners that an integrated approach to the stabilisation of Uruzgan was a prerequisite for sustainable results. The belief in an integrated approach had been expressed by Foreign Minister Bot in a speech he held at a conference on security and development in 2006, but was by no means a Dutch invention.<sup>51</sup> The terminology and concept had already - as mentioned earlier - been developed in Canada

47 Interview Huiben, *Translated from Dutch*

48 Interview Cobelens. *Translated from Dutch*

49 Article 100 letter to parliament, Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, vergaderjaar 2005 – 2006, 22 december 2005, Kamerstuk 27925, nr. 193, 6 (In Dutch).

50 One of the planners of the MOD had voiced his concern about the limit set to the amount of personell to be deployed to Uruzgan (Interview Huiben) *Translated from Dutch* Also, the commander of the Taskforce 1, expressed his concerns which eventually led to the commitment of additional troops (Interview Vleugels). *Translated from Dutch*

51 Minister Bot referred to the 3D approach as the trinity of politics, security and development - in reference to the Clausewitzian trinity of army, people and government-. 'In places where we are trying to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, our military efforts should support and be seen to support this overall effort. Where we are trying to win over the population for a more peaceful and stable order, our developmental instruments should support and be seen to support the overall effort'. Minister of Foreign Affairs Bernard Bot, 'The Dutch Approach: Preserving the Trinity of Politics, Security and Development', Speech presented at the SID and NCDO Conference on Security and Development, The Hague (7.04.2006). <http://cicam.ruhosting.nl/teksten/act.07.grotenhuis.speech%20Minister%20obot.pdf> (last accessed 15.08.2013).

as well as in the United Kingdom.<sup>52</sup> Already in April 2005, during a meeting in The Hague where concepts of the nations who would deploy their forces to the South were discussed, the Canadians had presented their 3D approach. Their terminology, combined with the terminology provided by NATO in their fragmentary order about the creation of Afghan Development Zones (ADZ),<sup>53</sup> was included in the operations plan of the first task force.<sup>54</sup>

Also, the use of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)<sup>55</sup> as a focal point of the stabilisation effort, supported by a battle group, had been decided upon at the international working conferences. The PRT was seen as the embodiment of the integrated approach, facilitating the stabilisation of Uruzgan.

### 6.7 The Process Outcome: Provisional Consensus

Meanwhile, the planning of the mission had developed in a mature and well-prepared fashion, requiring political approval and guidance for further execution. The group of senior civilian and military decision-makers reached provisional consensus, but with still a lot of information needed to be collected on the details of such a deployment. In order to gain approval for their instigated provisional actions and to continue on the decision path that emerged, Parliament needed to be notified. This action signalled that subsequent decisions would be contingent on not only the inclusion but ultimately also confirmation of Parliament with the taken route.

### 6.8 The Action and the Subsequent Occasion for Decision : Notification of Parliament

On June 16th 2005, two days after the fact finding mission had left for Afghanistan, the Dutch Parliament was informed by the government about the latter's intention to deploy troops in the Southern part of Afghanistan, in a joint effort with the United Kingdom and Canada.

■ The term '3Dapproach' was first used by Canadians in 2004. See: 'Address by Prime Minister Paul Martin on occasion of his visit to Washington DC', 29 April 2004. The British have introduced the comprehensive approach in their joint discussion note 04/05 published by their Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre in 2005. See: UK Ministry of Defence, 'Comprehensive Approach, Joint Discussion Note 4/05 (January 2006)', [http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.rrc.nato.int%2Fsystems%2Ffile\\_download.ashx%3Fpg%3D3313%26ver%3D1&ei=aX7GU8DmNKrH7Aa1n4GIBg&usq=AFOjCNEF5HllugtO\\_UUFuwzRhg7aludNtg&sig2=W4Bi3beSo1Jdqrw\\_cwZcAFA](http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.rrc.nato.int%2Fsystems%2Ffile_download.ashx%3Fpg%3D3313%26ver%3D1&ei=aX7GU8DmNKrH7Aa1n4GIBg&usq=AFOjCNEF5HllugtO_UUFuwzRhg7aludNtg&sig2=W4Bi3beSo1Jdqrw_cwZcAFA) (last accessed January 2013).

53 For a description of Afghan Development Zones, see chapter 4, P 89-99.

54 Interview Van Klaarbergen. *Translated from Dutch*

55 For a description of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, see chapter 4, P 91-94.

Officially and formally, this so-called ‘notification’, is the starting point for finding out the desirability and feasibility of a military mission. But as already shown, in reality and for all practical purposes, the prospects and possibilities for the intended deployment had been under political, diplomatic and military scrutiny for over a year. In Brussels, as well as in The Hague, deliberations were well underway with all parties and partners involved, about how a robust contribution to ISAF’s next stage in the stabilisation of Afghanistan, could be envisioned.<sup>56</sup>

The announcement was, due to political sensitivities, somehow hidden in a more general letter to parliament regarding a NATO meeting.<sup>57</sup> Anticipating political sensitivities regarding a possible deployment, both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs had already probed coalition party D66 [Liberal Democrats] and opposition party PvdA [Labour].<sup>58</sup> Consequently, both parties agreed to further explorations and planning to the South of Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup> However, some Members of Parliament had expressed their annoyance about the ‘concealing feature’ of the letter.<sup>60</sup>

## 6.9 The Changing Configuration of the Unit: An (Inter) Governmental Coalition

The configuration of the decision group in which the senior civilian and military decision-makers had acted thus far had changed since parliament was informed about a possible deployment of forces. Now not only domestic politics came into play, but also the informal military working groups that were engaged with the details of the military endeavour acquired a more prominent status in the sense that the conditionality of the actions of the three nations further specified the interdependency of a joint approach.

Indeed, five days after Parliament had been informed, General Cobelens and some of his staff members<sup>61</sup> left for another trilateral working conference. The objective of the

56 Lenny Hazelbag, ‘Political Decision-making of the Mission in Uruzgan, a Reconstruction’, in: De Weger, M, Osinga, F. and Kirkels (eds.) *NL-ARMS 2009. Complex Operations: Studies on Lebanon (2006) and Afghanistan (2006-present)* (Breda 2009) 251-276; Meulen and Grandia, ‘Brussels Calling: Domestic Politics under International Pressure’.

57 Brief van de Minister van Defensie, 16 juni 2005, Kamerstukken II 2004-2005, Dossier 28 676 NAVO, nr. 22.

58 The letter was supposed to initiate further consultation between the government and parliament, after which the article 100 procedure was to result in a decision about the deployment. However, opposition party D66 had already announced its point of view before the letter appeared. In a television broadcasting (*Buitenhof*) fraction leader Boris Dittrich expressed his sincere doubts the mission. Klep, *Uruzgan*, 23.

59 Klep, *Uruzgan*, 22

60 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming van de missie Uruzgan*, 15

61 The party included an operational planner, a communications officer and information officer

meeting held in Ottawa was to seek concurrence on a common approach to ISAF Stage III in preparation for NATO's force generation conference to be held on the 25th of July.<sup>62</sup>

Apart from the national delegations of the three lead nations, there were also representatives from relevant NATO commands: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Joint Forces Command Brussum (JFCB), American commands and staffs: Central Command Tampa (CENTCOM), Joint Staff and Pentagon, and other potential force contributors for Stage III such as Romania and Australia.

Even though most nations had not yet concluded their operational analysis, a potential outline about the structure of forces required<sup>63</sup> for the region was presented. The Americans advised a minimum of one provincial reconstruction team and one battle group or taskforce per province and emphasised the need to train both the Afghan national police and army if one was to achieve long term stability and security.<sup>64</sup>

On the 25th of July, the formal force generation conference for NATO's Stage III operations to the South of Afghanistan was held in Brussels. Following from the advice provided by the director of operations of the MOD, the Netherlands offered to assume responsibility over Uruzgan but did announce some preconditions adjunct to their bid. The Dutch commitment was first of all limited to force strength of around 1100 (excluding the F16 squadron). Secondly, the Dutch favoured a phased approach to stabilisation of the province and wanted to remain autonomous in their decision as to whether or not a new phase would be initiated (the so called incremental approach as explained earlier). Thirdly, the Dutch demanded that their fighter jets and helicopters to be stationed at Kandahar airport - so they would be able to provide air support<sup>65</sup> to the Dutch troops – before the Dutch would start their operations. The fourth precondition was the requirement of a partner nation to support the Dutch in Uruzgan. Australia had already announced its intention to support the Dutch provincial reconstruction team with 200 soldiers. The fifth condition attributed the requirement of NATO funding for the military base at Kandahar. The Dutch believed it would be unfair if the three lead nations would be the only ones financing this essential piece of NATO's infrastructure in the South. The last, and imperative aspect for the Dutch, as will be shown later on, was the de-confliction between the American counter terrorist operations under

62 The outcome of the working group meetings held in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of June was discussed. The intent was to – after possible required adjustments - present the results to the operations directorates of Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

63 During the meeting in Ottawa, the Dutch director operations suggested the force generation for stage III should focus on PRTs supported by a military structure versus a military structure supported by PRTs. A decision had to be made concerning which element would be in the lead, since this would inevitably influence the force structure.

64 The information provided in the paragraphs about the meeting in Ottawa contains an unclassified summary of the data collected from documents of the operations directorate at the MOD. In addition, lieutenant colonel Bert Keij (one of the members of the planning party) provided insights about the meeting. Interview Keij. *Translated from Dutch*

65 Ever since Srebrenica, where air support could/had not been delivered to the Dutch troops in need, the provision of air support for Dutch troops became a crucial factor for the conduct of international operations.

the mandate of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the stabilisation operations headed by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).<sup>66</sup>

Anticipating political approval would soon materialise, a warning order was sent to those military units likely to be deployed to Afghanistan on the 16th of August of 2005. Meanwhile, a third trilateral conference was to take place in The Hague on the 17th and 18th of August 2005. NATO was to include all developed concepts of the working groups on operational, logistical, informational, communicational and medical matters in their final operations order<sup>67</sup> for the expansion to the South. At the time of the conference, both Canada and the United Kingdom had received political approval for the participation of their forces in the stabilisation of respectively Kandahar and Helmand. Denmark – a partner of the British - was still awaiting political approval. Australia announced it investigated a partnership with the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan and expected to receive a decision in November. They had already decided however, to deploy a Special Forces unit of 350 men to Uruzgan, operating under direct command of the Americans from September 2005 onward.<sup>68</sup>

Given the limitation to the Dutch mission in terms of troop numbers, it became paramount to find a suitable partner in order to be able to effectively expand coalition presence in the province. As such, the Australian deliberations to reinforce the Dutch PRT with at least 200 military were warmly welcomed by the Netherlands. It was agreed bilateral meetings would be initiated in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well.<sup>69</sup>

### 6.10 Process of Interpretation: Domestic versus International Pressures

The process of interpretation was ongoing, at times requiring new decisions and inputs, but to a great degree continuing the activities as had unfolded from the outset. Thus, as preparations continued, a second recce was executed from the 8th to 14th September. The operational and logistic picture of the province needed enhancement and the developed concept of operations needed to be validated. On the whole, the team concluded the concept

66 Discussion note of Directorate General Policy, Directorate Operations on the NL contribution to the Force Generation Conference Stage 3 in Afghanistan directed to the Minister and his secretary of State, 21.07.2005. Keyfiles, Directie Operatieën (DOPS), disk 225, Semi Statisch Informatiebeheer Rijswijk.

67 NATO's operation order was to be presented at the NAC in October 2005.

68 Minutes working group meeting, 24.08.2005, Keyfiles, Directie Operatieën (DOPS), disk 225, Semi Statisch Informatiebeheer Rijswijk.

69 Minutes working group meeting, 24.08.2005, Keyfiles, Directie Operatieën (DOPS), disk 225, Semi Statisch Informatiebeheer Rijswijk.

of operations to be sustainable. The gathered information was processed in ‘first impression reports’ and distributed to the various military commands engaged in the planning.<sup>70</sup>

On the 19th September 2005, the United Kingdom called for a bilateral consultation with the Netherlands at its embassy in The Hague. The meeting covered British plans<sup>71</sup> for Helmand and the pending political approval for Dutch forces to deploy. The British emphasised their need for close coordination with the civilian part of the stabilisation effort in close coordination with the Netherlands and Canada, and proposed to establish a network of political advisors and to set up a monthly political-military video conference between the three capitals.<sup>72</sup>

Quite some turbulence, doubt, and nuisance, about the feasibility of the mission to Uruzgan evolved at the Defence staff in October 2005. The main source of commotion was the information provided in a report about the province by the Dutch military intelligence service. The report was initially provided to the Defence staff since the intelligence estimate about the security situation and the possibilities of exerting influence on the spoilers in the region was needed to compose a proper military advice.

Apparently, an intelligence assessment and a supplementary intelligence report were circulating within the staff. Hence, it was not clear to the military planners which verdict about the security situation needed to be included in the military advice about the mission. As such, guidance was sought and the Minister and his Secretary of State were to decide on which formulation would best describe the level of insecurity in Uruzgan.<sup>73</sup>

A day before the report was sent to the Defence staff, the director of operations, General Cobelens, had already expressed the Dutch concerns regarding the security situation in Uruzgan at the trilateral working conference<sup>74</sup> in Tampa, in the United States. Also, the deputy Chief of Defence and the director of political affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had conducted explorative talks with the Australians in Australia, trying to safeguard the presence of an international partner in Uruzgan.

On the 27th of October, the Chief of Defence presented the military advice, composed by his military planners and the directorate of general policy, to the Minister of Defence. As the head of the directorate remembered:

70 Recce reports, Directorate Operations, Ministry of Defence 2006, Defence Archives, Rijswijk. Liefst nog met vindplaats (archieffonds, inventarisnummer, ev. Folionummer)

71 The British elaborated on their plan for Helmand, outlining a phased presence of three year whereby they would focus on the development of good governance, security, and, social-economic development, and, the fight against the drugs in the region.

72 Interview Casteleijn.

73 Internal memo on the intelligence report on Uruzgan, Directorate Operations, Ministry of Defence, Defence Archives, Rijswijk archieffonds, inventarisnummer, ev. Folionummer

74 During the conference Cobelens emphasised the Dutch perspective that NATO should be able to make a visible difference from OEF. Cobelens stated that if partners will prolong the current working methods of operations, there is a concern that partners will miss a window of opportunity to change. Otherwise, OEF would be prolonged with a NATO flag on top of it. Sources: Directorate Operations, Ministry of Defence, Defence Archives, Rijswijk.

Military advice provided to the politicians about a possible mission requires a long way to appear in its definite form. It does take an enormous amount of time and effort to finally get the signature of the Minister for the military advice. And when it finally does appear in its final setting, the Minister, nor me, will tamper with it. However, in the case of this particular mission, the military advice was adjusted after the appearance of a report from our military intelligence service. At the end of October in 2005, a crisis appeared when this report disclosed the true dangers of the mission.<sup>75</sup>

The day after the military advice had been presented to the Minister of Defence, the Council of Ministers conveyed but did not come to a decision about the mission. Shortly after, the Minister left for a visit to Afghanistan in a troubled state of mind with the information he had acquired about the security situation in Uruzgan. During this visit, he expressed his concerns about the feasibility of the mission and cast doubts as to whether the deployment was worth the risk. He especially referred to the fact that very likely counterinsurgency operations needed to be executed, something he was not a proponent of. He was cautioned to use such terminology by the directorate of general policy since it was assessed to create more opposition against the deployment. As such, it was decided to refrain from using the terms.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of the information collected during the visit to Afghanistan and the information provided to him in the military advice, Minister Kamp had drafted a list of sixteen specific points he wanted to have explicated or guaranteed before he would deploy his forces. The drafting of this list anticipated possible questions and worries of Parliament about certain issues of the mission, like the separation of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the NATO mission. The Minister preferred to have matters defined and arranged before he would present the mission to Parliament.<sup>77</sup>

The most prominent issues on the Defence Minister's list included a need for American involvement in terms of troops and training activities in and around Uruzgan. He desired the continued presence of American forces in the North of Uruzgan since Dutch forces were unable – as indicated during a recce executed by the army staff<sup>78</sup> – to maintain the American firebases Anaconda and Cobra. Limited troop presence in the north of the province would

75 Interview Casteleijn, *Translated from Dutch*

76 Interview Kamp and reports of DOPS 2006 Directorate Operations, Ministry of Defence, Defence Archives, Rijswijk. *Translated from Dutch*

77 Interview Kamp and reports of DOPS 2006 Directorate Operations, Ministry of Defence, Defence Archives, Rijswijk. *Translated from Dutch*

78 In November 2005, a third recce was executed primarily by members of the army staff destined to deploy with the first rotation. The main finding of the recce was the worrying security situation in the north of Uruzgan. It is assessed the Dutch will not be able to maintain the American firebases, and it is also anticipated that more firepower and additional vehicles are needed to be able to perform in a sufficient manner. Source: Recce rapporten dated 13 November 2005 retrieved from Defence archives. *Translated from Dutch*

create further instability, as such requiring American reinforcement. In addition, American reconstruction and fighting capability was envisioned to be crucial in the South east bordering province Zabul. Moreover, the Minister wanted a continuing American engagement in the development and training of Afghan police and military capability.<sup>79</sup>

Other points on the list encompassed the financing of airfield Kandahar by NATO instead of those nations executing operations in the Southern provinces and the provision of extra NATO troops if the Dutch required them. Furthermore, Kamp wanted the Afghan administration to provide capable administrators and police forces needed for the stabilisation of the province, and the Afghan government was to provide services for the Dutch troops to hand over captives in a responsible manner. Also, sufficient funding was to be allocated for the taskforce to be able to execute reconstruction activities.

The sensitive<sup>80</sup> matter of Dutch Special Forces operating in Kandahar province under the OEF mandate [one of the issues on the 16 bullet list of Kamp] was solved rather quickly by assigning the Special Forces to the task force in Uruzgan, which was to operate under the ISAF mandate. The disentangling of the Special Forces engagement from OEF was not without paradoxes since the Dutch government in chorus required guarantees for American support in case of emergencies. Yet the United States were not very keen on special bilateral agreements that exceeded what under the circumstances could be considered a normal kind of mutual assistance. It took some tough negotiating at the highest levels in Brussels to formulate a solution that satisfied The Hague.<sup>81</sup> Looking back on how in general OEF and ISAF were formally defined as worlds apart, the former head of military intelligence, Major-General Van Reijn ironically remarked: 'Evidently, the operational reality in Uruzgan and the political reality in the Netherlands, do not always coincide'.<sup>82</sup>

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence jointly tackled the issues as listed earlier and exploited their specific channels. Diplomatic channels were utilised to exert pressure on Afghan authorities to appoint trustworthy and capable administrators to Uruzgan; a demand also stressed by Foreign Minister Bot during a meeting with Karzai in Vienna on the 14th of November. At this meeting, the situation in Uruzgan was also discussed and possibilities for developing a Memorandum of Understanding between the Netherlands, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Afghan government regarding the treatment of Afghan prisoners, were addressed. Minister Bot indicated President Karzai warned him about the worsening security situation in the province.<sup>83</sup>

■  
79 Interview Kamp and reports of DOPS Archive 2006. *Translated from Dutch.*

80 Separating ISAF's endeavors at stabilization and reconstruction from OEFs counter terrorism campaign, became a central issue in legitimising the deployment to Uruzgan

81 Meulen and Grandia, 'Brussels calling: domestic politics under international pressure', 22.

82 Reijn, 'De missie Uruzgan'.

83 Interview Bot. *Translated from Dutch*

The possible international repercussions on the lingering decision-making process were delivered in a letter from the head of the general policy directorate at the MOD to Defence Minister Kamp. He put forward several political considerations<sup>84</sup> the Minister was to consider before coming to a final conclusion. Meanwhile, the version of events with regard to the security situation [as presented in the military intelligence rapport] found its way to the public arena as the media started reporting on a possible Dutch mission to a dangerous area in South Afghanistan.<sup>85</sup>

At the end of November, almost half a year after Parliament had been notified, a political decision was still pending. Several diplomatic activities<sup>86</sup> were carried out to somehow influence the troubled state of affairs of attaining political approval. Even though a decision was anticipated before Christmas, the last weeks of the year remained turbulent. A meeting with international partners scheduled in December, to further refine the planning of the deployment, was postponed until January and no orders were provided to the designated military units to advance their deployment activities.

Consequently, a long range of meetings and discussions were held with various political parties and authorities behind closed doors. The Council of Ministers discussed the mission three times<sup>87</sup> over the course of three weeks. At one of these meetings, the Chief of Defence even briefed the Council, something which had never happened before. He was also requested to brief Parliament about the intended mission to Uruzgan. As explicated by the director of political affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 'They wanted to see a uniform explaining what the mission was all about.'<sup>88</sup>

However, the political mood had not changed quite to the benefit of providing the political endorsement it required.<sup>89</sup> At this point, the Dutch NATO Secretary General could no longer hide his frustration with the continuing delay of a Dutch political decision and publicly cast his doubts in the media.<sup>90</sup> He urged a quick and positive decision. According to the press, his intervention annoyed some of the Ministers. An anonymous source from

84 The main issues as addressed by Casteleijn in his letter to the Minister on the occasion of the military advice answer the political consideration regarding the division between OEF and ISAF, the threat of the Taliban, the tension between reconstruction and offensive operations, the suggested incremental approach and the troop number discussion, the rules of engagement, local Afghan government capacity and credibility, the finances of the mission and a plan B in case the Minister would decide not to deploy his forces to Uruzgan (Interview Casteleijn). *Translated from Dutch*

85 Dam, 'Uruzgan, The CNN factor'.

86 Meulen and Grandia, 'Brussels Calling: Domestic Politics under International Pressure', 21-22.

87 The deployment to Uruzgan was discussed at the board of Ministers at the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2005.

88 Interview Siblesz. *Translated from Dutch*

89 Again, formal approval of parliament is not needed. However, the desirability of gaining political support in terms of a broad parliamentary majority has become a trend ever since Srebrenica.

90 Meulen and Grandia, 'Brussels Calling: Domestic Politics under International Pressure', 21.

within the Cabinet was quoted as saying: ‘When things go wrong with this mission and people get killed, De Hoop Scheffer doesn’t have to do the explaining’.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, international partners started to become slightly nervous. Even the British Minister of Defence, John Reid, started to delay his activities concerning the deployment of his own forces, while referring to the uncertainty of Dutch parliamentary approval. The British had already – given the planned start of their activities in Helmand in May 2006 – begun with their practical preparations such as shipping their material and goods. These ships were brought to a halt in international waters, now awaiting approval to carry on since they were stopped by the Minister of Defence. But even more worrisome, it was assessed by British officials, Reid would – in case the Dutch would not deploy – no longer present the British military and financial plans regarding their deployment to the House of Commons. If the Dutch argument about security situation in the South, defining it as too dangerous to start reconstruction activities, it was thought that the British Defence Minister would ask NATO to reconsider the possibility of the stabilisation of the Southern provinces in Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup>

Pending a political decision, telexes between Ottawa, London, and, the Hague, were running overtime. The content of the correspondence indicated a potential political rejection of the mission would not only jeopardise the position of the Netherlands within the alliance, but would endanger ISAF’s expansion to the South, and as such would undermine NATO’s credibility as a whole. It was furthermore assessed that a Dutch rejection of the mission would also play into the hands of officials in Washington who already had expressed their severe doubts about the added value of multilateral institutions such as NATO.<sup>93</sup>

Hastily, anticipating possible international diplomatic mayhem, the diplomatic posts of the Netherlands in Washington, Brussels, Canberra, Budapest, Copenhagen, Ottawa, and London were instructed with ‘lines to take’ with regard to the unfortunate delay of a decision. On the 23rd of December, messages were sent to the capitals referring to the political situation in the Netherlands, promising to send off a translated version of the Article 100 letter soon and anticipating a resolution of the matter by the beginning of February 2006.<sup>94</sup>

## 6.11 Process Outcome: The Article 100 Letter and Its Delivery to Parliament

91 Amerikaanse topambtenaren naar Den Haag: Bert Bakker (D66); ‘Ik hel steeds meer over naar een Nee’, Het Parool, 30 November 2005. *Translated from Dutch*.

92 Diplomatic correspondence 20.12.2005. Brussels, Washington, London, Ottawa, The Hague, Defence Archives, Rijswijk.

93 Defence archives, diplomatic correspondence 20.12.2005. Brussels, Washington, London, Ottawa, The Hague, Defence Archives, Rijswijk.

94 Interview Nijssen, *Translated from Dutch*

The delivery of the Article 100 letter to parliament resulted in a deadlock which delayed the decision-making procedure to a great degree. However, before this episode is addressed it is important to discuss the drafting of the letter. As outlined earlier in this chapter, when it comes to the deployment of Dutch forces no easy or hasty decisions are made. Indeed, the assessment framework, foundational for the Article 100 letter, serves to balance the objectives set for the mission and attends to both political and military matters. On the basis of an analysis of the conflict, a judgement should be made about the means available to the international community (political, economic, and military) to stabilise the conflict.

Cabinet should elaborate on why it believes that the military instrument is the most suitable instrument (means) in terms of political desirability. Its judgement is heavily dependent on the advice provided by the Defence staff. The military advice answers questions like suitability and availability of military units since the contribution has to match the composition and character of the multinational armed force and must be tailored to the anticipated tasks. The development of the military advice is, as indicated by the military planners, to a great extent channelled through the use of the assessment framework. The planners referred to the assessment framework as a 'checklist'.<sup>95</sup>

The most important review criterion for the mission would have been the government's assessment of the military deployment's utility. In the case of Uruzgan, the solution was found in pragmatic reasoning. The government acknowledged the process of state building and democratisation had to start from scratch and would take an undefined period of time to take root. This message however would be difficult to convey in political and military terms. It in fact implied a blank cheque in terms of commitments in time. Consequently, the Dutch effort was presented in the earlier mentioned manageable fashion of two years. This also fitted in the strategy of the international community directed to foster commitment for the Afghanistan by defining measurable results within set time frames.<sup>96</sup>

As illustrated by one of the military planners:

We needed to get a political mandate for at least two years, but knew we needed more time to achieve the goals set for the mission [...] The political objective was to participate in ISAF [...] not difficult in terms of providing military advice but unsatisfactory. We joined the mission on the basis of incorrect thoughts; it was more important to provide troops for at least two years instead of achieving a certain objective like a stable environment.<sup>97</sup>

95 Interviews military planners.

96 Klep, *Uruzgan*, 123-132; Article 100 letter to parliament, brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II vergaderjaar 2005 – 2006, 22 december 2005, Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 193.

97 Interview Hartog, *Translated from Dutch*

In order to acquire unanimous approval from the coalition partner D66, who had been against the mission from its outset, a gathering was held with a delegation of the party shortly before the mission was discussed in the Council of Ministers on the 16th of December. At the meeting, the Chief of Defence and the head of the directorate general policy of the Ministry of Defence were to brief them about the mission. Shortly before they met, the head of the party in parliament, Borris Dittrich, held a press conference in which he declared his party to be in opposition to the mission. His statement forced both D66 Ministers and Cabinet into an awkward situation. Hence, now that international agreements had been made and the Minister of Defence and Foreign Affairs had carefully worked on all the major issues possibly hampering the mission, party politics<sup>98</sup> seemed to stretch the matter more even before a Cabinet decision was taken.<sup>99</sup>

At this point, in all likelihood, a political crisis was likely to arise regarding the deployment of Dutch forces to South Afghanistan. One of the opposition parties (PvdA) had also expressed its hesitations and was now sure the mission would not materialise as they did not expect D66's Ministers to oppose the position of its party in Parliament. On the 21st of December, the evening before the mission was to be presented at the Council of Ministers, Foreign Affairs Minister Bot tried to massage the Ministers of D66 into agreeing with the mission and offered them the possibility of changing the word "*decision*" in the article 100 letter into "*intention*". This was believed to facilitate a way out of the stalemate and both Ministers agreed on the issue.

It was however not foreseen that the employment of the term *intention* would in fact initiate another episode in the already difficult state of affairs. When, finally, after months of deliberation, Parliament was officially informed about a mission to Uruzgan on the 22nd of December, the content of the letter was not discussed, but the use of the word *intention* became the centre of attention. In fact, Parliament refused to debate the letter while the status of it was reduced to an *intention* instead of a *decision*.

It would take until the 13th of January 2006 for Parliament to deal with the matter. The main cause of the delay was rooted in the use of the term *intention*, but another reason was the material right Parliament believed it had acquired over the years in terms of delivering its consent about the deployment of forces. The time between the 22nd of December and the 13th of January was used to deal with all procedural matters regarding the way in which the

98 The hassle caused by the public statements of D 66 leader Borris Dittrich are attributed to as party politics. The prevalent reading of the course of events point to the power struggle within the party about its future leadership. Apparently, Dittrich anticipated the mission would not materialize (due to a lack of parliamentary support) and assumed his public performance shortly before the mission would be decided upon within the council of Ministers could potentially strengthen his position in the party. As soon as the D66 Ministers voted for the mission, his position became untenable and he resigned. He has admitted to having played a game and to have lost. The 'game' has been heavily criticized in parliament during the general consultation held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February. For an overview of the casted critique see: Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg van de vaste commissies voor Buitenlandse Zaken en voor Defensie, 22 februari 2006, Kamerstukken II 2005-2006, Dossier 27 925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 207, 28 and 37

99 Hazelbag, 'Politieke besluitvorming van de missie Uruzgan', 20.

mission would be discussed in Parliament. It was agreed there would be a round of written questions, a hearing and a confidential briefing before a general consultation<sup>100</sup> would be held before matters could be forced to a conclusion.<sup>101</sup> As explicated by Foreign Minister Bot:

In my years as Minister of Foreign Affairs I was amazed about the great level of detail Parliament involved itself with. There were tons of very detailed questions. Questions whose relevance and interest were unknown to me, and mainly served to promote either the respective Member of Parliament or the party itself. These questions made me sick. I know it is difficult to be a good Member of Parliament, but these questions no longer serve any purpose, instigate an inconceivable amount of work, and, in the end, nothing is done with the information' provided.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile, the media exploited the Parliamentary interlude to advance the discussion initiated by the opposition as to whether the intended deployment was a reconstruction or a fighting mission. This binary representation had caused quite some nuisance amongst the senior civil and military decision-makers since the Article 100 letter had outlined both the importance of reconstruction, as well as the importance of advancing security through combat, also pointing to the risks of the mission. In fact, the objective of the mission was presented as supporting and strengthening the Afghan authorities, and by doing so enabling them to eventually provide their own security and stability:

In line with the ISAF mandate the Dutch detachment will focus on enhancing stability and security by increasing the support of the local population for the Afghan authorities, and decreasing the support for the Taliban and associated groups. Fostering good governance, efficient police and armed forces, enhancing the constitutional state, the execution of CIMIC and reconstruction activities, and the stimulation of reconstruction activities by others are important elements of this approach.<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, even though the Article 100 letter carefully described both the fighting and reconstruction efforts that had to be undertaken by the taskforce in order to stabilise

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100 For a detailed overview of the general consultation see: Kristić, 'De Staten-Generaal en de inzet van de Nederlandse krijgsmacht', 146-147. *In Dutch*

101 For a day to day reconstruction of the version of events between the 22nd of December until the 13th of January see: Hazelbag, 'Political Decision-making of the Mission in Uruzgan, a Reconstruction'.

102 Interview Bot, *Translated from Dutch*.

103 Article 100 letter to parliament, brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II vergaderjaar 2005 – 2006, 22 december 2005, Dossier 27 925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 193, *Translated from Dutch*.

Uruzgan, the reconstruction effort swayed most of political actors and the media.<sup>104</sup> Finally on the 13th of January, the third version of the Article 100 letter was debated in Parliament. By no means were the risks of the mission hidden or not explicated:

This is a mission with real military risks. It has to be noted that the armed forces have gained a lot of knowledge and experience with risky missions in places like Iraq and Afghanistan and that they have accomplished these missions successfully. Although it cannot be ruled out that on the Dutch side there will be casualties, the government is of the opinion that with the knowledge and experience gained, with the build-up and the size of the Dutch contingent, and with the assurances of help and assistance from NATO, the risks have been brought down in such a way that the mission is a responsible one. Stabilizing and reconstructing Afghanistan, in particular the South where the Taliban originate is of the utmost importance to furthering international lawful order as well as to combating the international terrorism that is a threat to Europe also. Especially because of the latter interest, the government considers the risks to be acceptable.<sup>105</sup>

The main justification of the mission, as presented in the letter to Parliament, was the prevention of another terrorist attack by taking away their breeding ground in Afghanistan. This was an argument which had not been used earlier nor represented typical Dutch rhetoric such as contribution to relief of international suffering. Furthermore, no causal link between deploying troops to Uruzgan and by doing so preventing a possible terrorist attack in the Netherlands had been established in the minds of the Dutch population.<sup>106</sup> Interestingly enough, all parliamentary reports and correspondence from the outset of the planned mission throughout the deployment were filed in a dossier called 'Fighting International Terrorism'.<sup>107</sup>

104 Articles focussing on the reconstruction effort: "Volgens Bos is de gevechtsmissie gescheiden van de wederopbouwmissie waar de Nederlanders aan zullen meedoen" cited in: 'Optimisme over doorgaan Afghanistan-missie', Elsevier, 31 januari 2006; "Nederland gaat deelnemen aan de ISAF-missie van de NAVO in de Afghaanse provincie Uruzgan. Deze missie is gericht op wederopbouw" cited in: NOS, 'Missie Uruzgan gaat door' (version 21.02. 2006), <http://nos.nl/artikel/54336-missie-uruzgan-gaat-door.html>; 'Vrijdag 3 februari heeft de Nederlandse Regering besloten definitief deel te nemen aan ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) stage 3. Medio dit jaar vertrekken 1200 militairen naar Uruzgan voor hun wederopbouwmissie' cited in: Ministerie van Defensie, 'Persbericht 03-02-2006', <http://www.defensie.nl/documenten/persbericht/2006/02/03/persmap-0>.

105 Article 100 letter to parliament, brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II vergaderjaar 2005 – 2006, 22 december 2005, Dossier 27 925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 193, *Translated from Dutch*.

106 Christ Klep, *Uruzgan*. 124.

107 All parliamentary documents related to the mission in Afghanistan are stored under file number 27 925, named 'Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme' (Fighting International Terrorism). See: [http://www.parlement.com/9291000/d/uruzganbesluit\\_2005.pdf](http://www.parlement.com/9291000/d/uruzganbesluit_2005.pdf)

## 6.12 The Foreign Policy Action: The Deployment of Forces

As delineated in the previous paragraphs, much of the planning of the mission had already occurred before a formal decision to deploy had been made; even political approval for explorations was sought quite late. The planning was very much influenced by the boundaries set for the Dutch deployment: providing stability in Urzugan within a two year time frame, with a maximum of 1200 troops and a budget of 320 million Euro's<sup>108</sup>, resulted in – according to those involved in the planning with a sense of understatement - a 'challenging task'.<sup>109</sup>

The stabilisation of Urzugan was communicated as an integrated effort, but it had not yet been caught in a joint plan. The military planners at the Defence staff had developed a concept of operations based on the information gathered at the international working conferences and during the recesses. Based on the acquired information, the planners assessed an incremental approach to best suit both the Dutch capabilities and the task of stabilising the province. The approach advocated a phased<sup>110</sup> unfolding of troop presence throughout Urzugan allowing a fine alignment of the strengths and weaknesses of the units versus the anticipated risks. The concept and other documents such as NATO's operations order, and military estimates were provided to the assigned commander of the taskforce<sup>111</sup> and his staff in order to draft a plan.

Most (mainly military) respondents indicated the lack of a strategy - explicating the objectives that needed to be attained, which forced the staff of the first taskforce to formulate these objectives themselves. As explained by General Vleugels: 'We can deal with quite some vagueness when it comes to planning a military operation. But this was not a purely military operation. We were to stabilise the region with a set of actors. The coordination of that

108 Article 100 letter to parliament, brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II vergaderjaar 2005 – 2006, 22 december 2005, Dossier 27 925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 193 (In Dutch).

109 One of the planners of the MOD had voiced his concern about the limit set to the amount of personnel to be deployed to Urzugan (Interview Huiben, *Translated from Dutch*). Also, the commander of the Taskforce 1, expressed his concerns which eventually led to the commitment of additional troops (Interview Vleugels, *Translated from Dutch*).

110 In the operational concept, the following phases were distinguished: Phase 0: 'Build up'. The deployment taskforce is to assume their construction activities and a small forward detachment is to collect information and take over the projects of the American provincial reconstruction team; Phase 1: 'Containment'. The majority of the task force is to deploy and take over responsibility of the province from the Americans, but will still keep their presence limited to Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood. The objective during this phase is to gain situational awareness and to create freedom of movement; Phase 2: 'Ink spot I'. Extra infantry capability in order to enlarge the Dutch presence and influence in the province; Phase 3: 'Ink spot II'. Additional infantry capability to further enlarge the Dutch presence and influence in the province. During this phase, the taskforce will be at its highest strength. It was explicated in the concept of operations only the Dutch would decide when a next stage would commence and it was even anticipated phase 3 would not occur within the provided time frame of two years.

111 Shortly before the letter was sent to parliament, brigadier Vleugels was contacted by the chief of Defence and informed he would be commanding the first taskforce in Urzugan.

effort, be it in either a plan or a guiding document, was not provided. As such, we had to deal with it ourselves.’<sup>112</sup>

The emergent feature of a strategy for Uruzgan, initiated from the operational military level, was commented on by respondents as inherently connected to the complexity of contemporary missions.<sup>113</sup> A blatant contradiction can be found in the views provided by many of the same respondents. Most of them agreed a strategy should have been explicated, whilst they also pointed to the fact that they think a strategy would not have made a great difference in terms of the drafting of the concept of operations and the plan.<sup>114</sup>

Generally, the confusion seemed to arise from the understanding of what strategy is and is not. Some respondents believed strategic guidance provided by the Chief of Defence is strategy, others [mainly civil respondents] believed everything the Ministry of Foreign affairs does is strategy and some even claimed strategy to be a theoretical invention which does not appear in practice. Most civil respondents pointed to the fact that they were not accustomed to drafting strategies at all and, in addition, did not believe that setting concrete goals would be helpful since it would imply accountability.

Some perspectives:

Politicians do not like to be held accountable. Vagueness is part of their language [...] Missions like these need to be designed with a sense of pragmatism. Indeed, we did not have a clear interdepartmental strategy, but it was all new. Consequently, the planning was done in a pragmatic manner.<sup>115</sup>

Preferably the goals set in a campaign plan have to be identified by The Hague but if it is decided on grounds of ‘situational awareness’ that those who have most information and experience are to draft the plan, then this initiative should be backed up by The Hague. Only then can a true unity of effort of all activities be guaranteed.<sup>116</sup>

Composing a plan is a matter of experience. In The Hague, one focuses more on the broad issues. The big question is of course how one translates big political matters into a plan. The politics about and surrounding the deployment is more important than the plan. The

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112 Interview Vleugels, *Translated from Dutch*

113 Interview Bot, Kamp, Berlijn, Oosterom, Vleugels

114 Interview Berlijn, Vleugels, Vd Have, TNO planners, Huiben.

115 Interview Oosterom, *Translated from Dutch*

116 Interview Middendorp, *Translated from Dutch*

experience and information primarily resides with the military. As such it is not strange that the military came up with the plan.<sup>117</sup>

One has to be pragmatic with these kinds of operations. It is a fact of life. We did not receive many guidelines, if we had, our lives would have been easier [...] looking back the plan was too idealistic [...] no one provided us the parameters about what we were to achieve. The joint effort as such was not clear. It should have been the political level explicating the use of the effort.<sup>118</sup>

According to the Chief of Defence, an interdepartmental comprehensive campaign plan did in fact exist and he stated he does not understand the claim of its absence.<sup>119</sup> However, most military and civilian respondents and the official government evaluation<sup>120</sup> conducted about the deployment to Uruzgan have indicated a lack of a comprehensive interdepartmental campaign plan. The planning staff at the Ministry of Defence drafted a Dutch operations order for Uruzgan. It derived from the NATO operations order but this was purely military in the sense that the other departments had not provided their input.<sup>121</sup> This was despite the communicated message throughout government and parliament that it was to be an integrated mission attending to all three aspects: Defence, Development and Governance.

The so-called 'master plan'<sup>122</sup> drafted by the staff of the first taskforce in the first quarter of 2006, was the first attempt to operationalise the propagated comprehensive approach. Although essentially a military plan, the master plan utilised an effects based approach. This approach encompassed a description of effects beyond the field of military expertise, such as developing governance and the rule of law. Consequently, Vleugels did feel the need to call for additional expertise, since the Dutch army had not until then exercised effects based operations. He had previously worked with operational analysts from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (TNO)<sup>123</sup> and believed in their added value, especially in their knowledge about measuring effects and called in their help. The two analysts both refer to the drafting of the plan as an interesting and pioneering event.<sup>124</sup>

117 Interview Casteleijn, *Translated from Dutch*

118 Interview V.d Have *Translated from Dutch*

119 Interview Berlijn *Translated from Dutch*

120 See: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 'Algemeen overleg, Eindevaluatie Nederlandse ISAF missie in Uruzgan', <http://www.tweedekamer.nl/vergaderingen/commissievergaderingen/details/index.jsp?id=2012A00340>.

121 Interview Huiben.

122 The master plan (classified document) outlined the mission of the task force.

123 TNO: Toegepast Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek <http://www.tno.nl/index.cfm?Taal=2>

124 Interviews Smeenk and Gouweleeuw. *Translated from Dutch*

As acknowledged by various military planners<sup>125</sup>, the civilian analysts,<sup>126</sup> the matter as to which goals needed to be achieved with the Dutch effort in Uruzgan remained largely unanswered. Cabinet acknowledged it would be rather difficult to answer this question. Various goals were formulated: the creation of rule and law, the development of the Afghan national army and police, but no concrete goals were set. All in all, the goals remained broad and vague.

The competing views, as to if and how a plan needed to be drafted to direct the efforts of the taskforce did cause some nuisance between some of the civil and military actors. Even though the civil military relations in the steering group military relations were commented on as rather good, those who had to do the actual planning did experience some difficulties, especially with regard to developing a joint approach and understanding of the approach to be taken in Uruzgan. The main point of discussion was the earlier mentioned absence of goals formulated by the three departments at the strategic level.<sup>127</sup>

Some perspectives:

We [the planners] did have several meetings with the other departments [Development and Foreign Affairs] but neither of them plan their activities [...] neither of them is equipped to draft a plan so they outsourced the whole undertaking.<sup>128</sup>

[During the writing of the plan] we already indicated to the Department of Foreign affairs and the Department of Development Aid that they had to take into consideration their responsibility for more than half of the effects to be obtained in Uruzgan.<sup>129</sup>

The goals for the mission were not clear. [...] The [master] plan has [...] never attained a formal status.<sup>130</sup>

While the planning staff of TFU 1 developed the master plan, they came to acknowledge they did not know enough about the situation in Uruzgan in terms of development and governance. As such, the planners asked for a civil assessment in order to be able to conduct a proper analysis. However, such a civil assessment was not available and time was running



125 Interviews Huiben, Noom, Gool, Kruitwagen, Klaarbergen, Van der Have.

126 Interviews Smeenk and Gouweleeuw

127 See: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 'Algemeen overleg, Eindevaluatie Nederlandse ISAF missie in Uruzgan', <http://www.tweedekamer.nl/vergaderingen/commissievergaderingen/details/index.jsp?id=2012A00340>.

128 Interview Hartog, *Translated from Dutch*

129 Interview Van Klaarbergen, *Translated from Dutch*

130 Interview Noom, *Translated from Dutch*

out. They did include the civilian effects that needed to be obtained but was as described by the planners beyond their area of expertise.

Only a month before the deployment of the taskforce [one year after the initial assessments, subsequent reconnaissances, talks, meetings and research had been conducted] a civil assessment<sup>131</sup> was drafted. The Netherlands Embassy in Kabul had initiated the writing of such an assessment using data collected by the Afghan (though Western sponsored Non-Governmental Organisation) Tribal Liaison Office (TLO) Uruzgan.<sup>132</sup> It presented a social analysis of the region, addressing the three lines of operation of security, good governance and economic development and identified projects which would need to be executed in order to quickly establish the reconstruction effort. It did not however explicate how the mission was to be achieved in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, the civil assessment was completed only when the first Dutch troops were already in theatre (July 2006).<sup>133</sup> As pointed out by most civil and military respondents, the civil assessment should have preferably been guiding the planning.

After the planning staff of TFU 1 had developed their master plan, it was delivered to the Ministry of Defence for approval and commitment. Since the developed campaign plan addressed all three lines of operation [development, governance, and, security] it was presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, anticipating additional input or comments from their side. Explicated by many other involved planners, but fittingly formulated by chief army plans: 'Foreign affairs and development cooperation both portrayed the 'not invented here syndrome' when the plan was presented to them'.<sup>134</sup>

The workings of the 'not-invented here syndrome', was commented on by most of the civilian respondents of the other departments as not being accustomed to planning in general and into a plan designed by the military in particular. The Department of International Development Aid especially believed the military was not going to address their input and was awaiting the civil assessment.

131 In this document, the tribal conventions foundational to formal government structures and the traditional social and political structures in Uruzgan were outlined. It articulated government institutions to not sufficiently represent the ethnic and political composition of the province and hence have limited influence and described local meetings to be controlled by tribal authorities and of great importance for the acceptance of government by the inhabitants of the province. Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation. Dutch Embassy, Kabul. 'Civil Assessment (unclassified version) (2006)' [http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/kamerbrieven-bijlagen/2006/10/o\\_368-bijlage-2.pdf](http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/kamerbrieven-bijlagen/2006/10/o_368-bijlage-2.pdf) (last accessed 02.02.2012).

132 Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind: the Implementation of Cooption as a Tool for De-Escalation of Conflict; the Case of the Netherlands in Afghanistan's Uruzgan Province', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35(5) (2012) 713-734, 721.

133 Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation. Dutch Embassy, Kabul. 'Civil Assessment (unclassified version) (2006)', [http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/kamerbrieven-bijlagen/2006/10/o\\_368-bijlage-2.pdf](http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/kamerbrieven-bijlagen/2006/10/o_368-bijlage-2.pdf) (last accessed 02.02.2012); Brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II vergaderjaar 2007 – 2008, 15 februari 2008, Dossier 27925, Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 295 (in Dutch).; Brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, Van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Den Haag, Kamerstukken II vergaderjaar 2005 – 2006, 21 juli 2006, Dossier 27925, Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 221 (in Dutch).

134 Interview Van Klaarbergen, Translated from Dutch

Notwithstanding this, the master plan was not valued for its effort to fill the gap formed by an absent interdepartmental strategy or campaign plan. As commented on by one of the political advisors who later on deployed with the taskforce:

I was quite impressed by the master plan [...] It would have been better if the departments had managed to come up with an overarching plan whereby strategic guidance was provided. Nevertheless, both the master plan and the civil assessment did provide a basis to start from. [...] In theatre however, it proved quite a challenge to keep the civilians to stick to the plan.<sup>135</sup>

Most planners believed the emergent planning and evolving trait of the campaign plan, characterized by bottom up initiatives, to have been inevitable for this mission. They refer to the fact that the lack of integrated planning with other departments and the vagueness about what it was the Netherlands wanted to achieve in Uruzgan to have been the main grounds of the emergent features of both the planning and the plan for the stabilisation effort in Uruzgan.

It nevertheless caused some difficulties and missed opportunities as well. The chief plans of the army command indicated a proper plan, available long before the task force was to be deployed, would have been much better for the planning and commencing of development efforts in particular:

We could have already applied for funding of projects. Through a joint analysis with the embassy, we could have started project planning months before the deployment and funds would have been available when arrived in Uruzgan. Now, we were faced with procedures of Foreign Affairs in the field, causing months of delay with regards to getting approval for projects and funding. So we were actually behind on reality [...] One of the reasons is the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have that much experience with project planning nor the capability.<sup>136</sup>

Throughout the course of events, the Dutch population had been informed by the media about the political struggles to gain approval for the deployment of Dutch forces to Uruzgan. The debate, which had primarily taken place within a smaller group of civil and military decision-makers, had now found its way to the public arena. Until November 2005, the

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135 Interview Messerschmidt, *Translated from Dutch*

136 Interview Van Klaatbergen, *Translated from Dutch*

media had reported in a very limited fashion<sup>137</sup> about the progress of planning activities and concerns about the feasibility of the mission.

It was not until the appearance of the military intelligence report about the perilous security situation and the public statements of D66's faction leader Dittrich against the mission that the media began to catch up with the events leading to the deployment of forces to Uruzgan. The main perspective was with reference to the security matters and the potential dangers of the mission, following the political lines of argumentation in the debate about the deployment of forces to Uruzgan.<sup>138</sup> The most interesting political communiqué was a statement from the Minister of Defence, publicly stating that he would withdraw his troops if the situation in Uruzgan did not allow them to carry out the tasks they were assigned to.<sup>139</sup>

As described earlier, once the Article 100 letter was delivered to Parliament on the 22nd of December, a variety of articles and reports started to appear and the common tone remained a relatively negative one about the security in the province and the potential dangers of the mission, but also addressing the political tensions within the coalition and the use of the word *intention* instead of *decision*.<sup>140</sup>

Subsequently, the debate in the media took two different directions: a focus on the precarious security situation but mainly with a positive judgement about the feasibility of the mission, thereby following the official line of argument as communicated by the government, and a focus on the political decision-making process and the occurred political row.<sup>141</sup>

When the third version of the Article 100 letter was sent to Parliament on the 13th of January, the media interest increased significantly, and most reports were in fact supportive of the mission but kept focus on the dangers of the mission.<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, the debate in the media hardly paid any attention to the troubles in the province of Uruzgan and the purpose of and the need for the mission. According to a media analysis conducted on all articles of the four leading newspapers<sup>143</sup> about Uruzgan that appeared within the decision-making

<sup>137</sup> A study from Marloes ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect', investigating all media coverage about the political decision-making process (DMP) about the mission to Uruzgan from the notification on June the 16th 2005 until the ultimate decision taken on the 13th of February 2006 finds that it was not until the appearance of the report of the military intelligence report the media actually started frequently reporting about the mission. From the 82 articles which appeared in the leading newspapers (*Trouw*, *Volkskrant*, *De Telegraaf* and *NRC Handelsblad*) from the 16th of June until 22nd of December (the first phase of the political DMP), when the article 100 letter was sent to parliament., 76 appeared after the appearance of the intelligence report on the 17th of November 2005. In total of the 372 articles written about the mission within the earlier indicated timeframe of DMP, only 22.04% appeared in the first phase and most of them where 'ordinary' articles in the sense they were not cover news or opiated articles and in generally adopted a rather neutral perspective on matters. Ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect', 67, 72-75.

<sup>138</sup> Ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect', 75.

<sup>139</sup> Buitenhof, 30.04.2006. See: <https://www.google.co.uk/#q=uitzending+Buitenhof%2C+30+April.+2006>

<sup>140</sup> In this second phase of the DMP, 28.9% of all articles that have appeared within the earlier indicated time frame of the political decision-making process were published in the leading newspapers. Ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect', 76.

<sup>141</sup> Ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect', 83, 93.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>143</sup> The four leading newspapers in the Netherlands are: *De Telegraaf*, *Trouw*, *De Volkskrant*, and *NRC Handelsblad*.

process, the reporting on the deployment to Uruzgan continued to focus on the political struggle in both Cabinet and Parliament.<sup>144</sup>

Meanwhile, the political debate in Parliament allowed for several interpretations about what it was the Dutch were aiming to achieve in Uruzgan. Even though the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seemed to be singing from the same hymn sheet, the opposition parties sparked the debate with their reading of events, topped with the opinions of experts and other authorities, and a Babylonian confusion was born.

There was a need for careful deliberation as to how a mission to the volatile South would be presented to Parliament and to the Dutch population. However, Cabinet was not able to steer the debate and many have argued this to be a result of the absence of a strategic narrative. The study *'Uruzgan and the CNN factor'* indicated the need for a clear communicated narrative to be a prerequisite to not only guide instruments of power, but also to engender popular debate.<sup>145</sup>

As such, the Chief of Defence acquired public exposure in order to explain the mission to the Dutch population. This in itself was a novelty. As he explained:

The military has to deal with the whims of politics. This is a result of democracy and part of the societal contract. However, the military is part of the larger picture and of course politicians need to take into consideration and to include them in their communication to the populace [...] our missions are dependent on public support. I felt a true conviction [of the need] to communicate with the Dutch population about our deployment to Uruzgan. To explain to them what it was we needed to do in Afghanistan. Consequently, I briefed the media every two months in order to reach the Dutch citizens and to create understanding and support for our mission.<sup>146</sup>

The most pressing argument needed for support was believed to lie in propagating the importance of bringing stability to poor and defenceless Afghans. This objective was to adhere to Dutch popular sentiments, but it was only just mentioned in the media. In fact, there was, as described earlier, a fundamental misconception about the type of mission Uruzgan was likely to be. This was compounded by the way the mission was presented to the public, namely in a binary fashion: a fighting or a reconstruction mission. This delineation had in fact not been made in the Article 100 letter. As commented on by the special advisor to the Prime Minister: 'There was major difference between what we prepared and discussed

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144 Ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect', 107.

145 Ten Dam, 'Uruzgan The CNN effect'.

146 Interview Berlijn. *Translated from Dutch*

at the SMO and what the media made of it. It is all about perception. Particularly in this case, the narrative was paramount to opposition'.<sup>147</sup>

All respondents involved in the planning of the operation signalled the gap between the political need to emphasise the development part of the mission (reconstruction) and the military understanding of the potential dangers and battles (fighting).<sup>148</sup> As explained by one of the special assistants to the Prime Minister:

The political sensitivities were evident. [...] The political decision-making did not evolve in the sense that it tried to sell a fighting mission as a reconstruction mission. There was a genuine objective of facilitating reconstruction in Uruzgan. At the same time, the risks of the mission have been attended to and been taken into account [during the decision-making process].<sup>149</sup>

Some perspectives on the fighting and reconstruction debate:

We never employed the term 'fighting mission' due to our desire to reconstruct the province. Also, using words like counterinsurgency would have implied we were going to fight [...] We avoided using these terms because the mission would have been viewed through a different lens.<sup>150</sup>

The story about the mission needed to be explained [in the Netherlands] as a reconstruction effort. As such, we needed to include reconstruction in the whole debate.<sup>151</sup>

After Iraq, we had learnt the lessons of the importance of political support. As such, one of our goals was to guarantee great popular support for this mission. The deployment was framed as a reconstruction mission; consequently the dangers have not been articulated in a sufficient manner. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence especially had framed the mission in too positive a sense. The Prime Minister did not engage actively in the framing of the mission. He had only expressed his wish and support to make the mission happen. To him, the provision of Dutch troops was a matter of common sense.<sup>152</sup>

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147 Interview Van Oosterom, *Translated from Dutch*

148 Interviews military planners.

149 Interview Swartbol, *Translated from Dutch*

150 Interview Bot, *Translated from Dutch*

151 Interview Casteleijn, *Translated from Dutch*

152 Interview De Vries, *Translated from Dutch*

In conclusion, the necessity of the deployment was not easily apprehended by the Dutch audience. However, the need to tell the public why the mission in Afghanistan was worth pursuing has often been made by commentators, politicians and generals. Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer especially regularly acknowledged that somehow electorates refused to believe in the ongoing necessity of NATO's endeavors in Afghanistan. He blamed himself and all those politically responsible for failing to communicate the message. Looking back he ventured: 'We haven't been convincing enough'.<sup>153</sup>

### 6.13 Conclusions

The context in which the decision was taken to commit Dutch military forces to NATO's expansion to South Afghanistan was greatly conditioned by military alliance politics. Hence, from its inception, the dynamics of coalition initiatives as emerged between Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have been vital. Their cooperation might have been habituated by Alliance politics in the sense that all three nations anticipated NATO's expansion to the South of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, neither one of them sat back nor waited to be asked by NATO to contribute their forces. As such, the often assumed pressure of NATO, dictating the actions of its member states is qualified as far more complex and nuanced.

The initiative for the mission and the initial negotiations with partnering nations was a distinct military undertaking. Even when put in the political context of NATO's expansion to the South and the Dutch desire to be a loyal and trustworthy NATO/US ally and to 'do good', the role of the director of operations, General Cobelens, undoubtedly shaped the decision to deploy a taskforce to Uruzgan. It was due to his ability to anticipate and react to international developments within both a political and military context, his network and persuasive ability, that the Dutch engagement was instigated in the first place. Most – if not all – respondents agreed, and even British respondents recall the person of Cobelens and his dedication to commit Dutch troops to the stabilisation of Afghanistan.

By himself however, even supported by partnering nations, Cobelens could not have initiated this mission. He was strengthened by the support of the highest diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the head of the directorate of political affairs, Hugo Siblesz. Contributing to NATO's expansion throughout Afghanistan had not, by itself, been at odds with both departments' view on further Dutch commitment in Afghanistan; in fact especially within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a sincere belief was held that Dutch forces

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<sup>153</sup> 'De Hoop Scheffer: Nederland doet afbreuk aan de NAVO', *NRC Handelsblad*, 25 February 2010.

would implement a Dutch approach to stabilisation, a way of doing things that would ‘outdo’ the Americans.

The beliefs and ideas of the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands with regard to the use of their military for NATO’s expansion to the South of Afghanistan can be best described as complementary in the sense that they both envisaged benefits from committing troops, albeit for different reasons. In addition, the senior civil and military decision-makers were supportive of the idea of integrating diplomatic, military and developmental efforts. The foundations for a more integrated way of both planning and executing operations between the various departments had been laid in both operations in Iraq and North Afghanistan (Baghlan).

Preventing another potential military debacle<sup>154</sup> had very much structured the minds and practices of the senior civil and military decision-makers. As such, the development of the assessment framework was to prevent ill informed decisions made by politicians about the use of military means. However, the framework had acquired for itself the veneer of an instrument for rational decision-making but cannot in itself prevent teleological reasoning [reasoning towards an end or a goal].<sup>155</sup> Ideally, an intention to send troops for a mission should be the result of having assessed all facets of the assessment framework. Some argue the assessment framework is supposed to create the impression of having contributed to well-designed and thorough decision-making, but the practice of its use for past missions has showed a reversal of this procedure: first a decision in principle was made, followed by the use of the assessment framework in its political setting. This trend has persisted in the case of the mission to Uruzgan while a decision in principle had in fact already been taken (June 2005) after which the political arena was explored. In addition, the objectives to be attained [which are supposed to be foundational to the framework] were according to most civil and military respondents not clearly articulated. Consequently, the application of the framework did not result in a unanimous verdict from the political decision-makers about the feasibility of the mission.

Even though the respondents point to the logic of committing Dutch forces to NATO’s expansion to the South, the inevitability was not clearly articulated in a strategy designed at the political strategic level, nor was the propagated integrated approach embodied in a synchronised effort. As such, the steering group military operations had not acquired the ability to provide strategic guidance. Neither had it produced an interdepartmental approach to the initiation of an overall strategy that would best serve the comprehensive approach to operations. Instead, two documents were written: the master plan, written by the military including civil effects, and a civil assessment, written by the Dutch embassy in Afghanistan. Neither one of the documents guided the planning. In fact, the master plan appeared shortly

154 In reference to the events that had unfolded in Srebrenica

155 A point made by Moelker in ‘Culture’s Backlash on Decision-making’, 33.

before the deployment and the civil assessment appeared when the task force had already arrived in theatre.

The undisputed inevitability of the mission resulted in the working of a 'trap' in a very coercive manner. The mission was viewed to be too important, and in fact essential for the Netherlands for various reasons, like being a trustworthy NATO partner. As such, the logic of the deployment seems to have been dictating the course of events long before Parliament was notified. Even potential show stoppers such as the appearance of the intelligence report, or a clear justification in terms of formulating the ends, did not bring the intention to deploy military forces to a halt.

In fact, once the deployment was endangered by struggles in Parliament and party politics, it was due to the efforts of Foreign Affairs Minister, Bot, that the troubled and delayed decision-making procedure was massaged into a positive outcome. Not only did he come up with the solution of providing D66 with a 'way out' by juggling with the words intention and decision, he also used much of his time at the end of 2005 to facilitate a solution. So at the end, more political ownership of the decision-making process occurred.

When contrasting these findings with the propositions as put forward in chapter two, several issues come to light. For one, the inputs into the decision-making process on the use of military means for the stabilisation of Afghanistan were not instigated by political guidance on this particular 'foreign policy problem' as such (proposition I). Instead the initiation of the decision-making process seemed to be a military initiative. Even when put in the political context of NATO's expansion to the South and the Dutch desire to be a loyal and trustworthy NATO/US ally and to 'do good', the role of the director of operations, General Cobelens, undoubtedly shaped the decision to deploy a taskforce to Uruzgan.

The decision-making dynamics that consequently advanced indeed revealed a process of interpretation in which the senior civil and military decision-makers perceived and deduced constraints and pressures imposed on them by the domestic and international environment (proposition II). Within this process, it seemed that particularly the domestic constraints and pressure in terms of national politics and sensitivities prevailed. Once the decision-making process hampered and started to impact the deployment of NATO forces to South Afghanistan on the whole, international pressure increased.

The reconstruction of the decision-making has furthermore showed that a strategy articulating the purpose of the use of the military means has not been the output of the process in itself (proposition III). Instead, two separate documents, a military and a civilian document, were drafted and were to direct the Dutch stabilisation efforts in Uruzgan. No strategic ownership was acquired at the strategic level, nor were these documents integrated and employed to provide strategic guidance.

