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Chapter 9 Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, the questions that instigated and guided this research will be answered. First of all, the question of why the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decided to provide military means for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan will be answered. Secondly, the question as to how this political ambition was converted into a military operation will be answered, followed by theoretical deductions, inductions, and recommendations. Subsequently, avenues for future research will be proposed for advancing the findings of this study. The contribution of this study is believed to enrich both theoretical and empirical findings on the decision-making of senior civilian and military decision-makers on the use of military means.

9.2 Why and How: Inescapable Entrapments?

In order to understand *why* the United Kingdom and the Netherlands engaged their military forces for the stabilisation of Afghanistan, both the foreign policy problem and the opportunity for a decision on the matter were scrutinised. The pressing nature of the deployment that took root in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom featured prominently in both cases. It strongly suggests the power of a dominant idea instigated by a shared belief in the possibilities the deployment to South Afghanistan could offer to both politicians and the military.

In fact, a window of opportunity occurred in which the dynamics of a military initiative came to steer the course of events. In both nations, the militaries needed redemption from their poor reputation (acquired in Iraq and Srebrenica) and, moreover, the fear of further cut backs very likely figured their calculations as well. This seemed to be a perfect match with the rhetoric exercised by NATO and the international community that a reinforcement of troops in Afghanistan was ‘the right thing to do’ for Western nations. In fact, the iteration of the moral obligation came to underpin NATO’s expansion to the South of Afghanistan.

In order to understand *how* it was decided to commit troops for the stabilisation of South Afghanistan, the interpretation of the matter and the subsequent actions of the senior civil military decision-makers were investigated. Firstly, as showcased, whilst trying to establish a common definition of the task at hand, the senior civil and military decision-makers were dealing with various accounts of information of how best to do this.

Whilst doing so, the main focus was on how to launch the military campaign which involved the selection of provinces and the force levels. In fact, these strategic issues were dealt with quite quickly even before political approval was sought. The military initiative that came to drive the course of events was only much later followed by the political process that was needed to provide the political legitimacy and subsequent public support required for the deployment.

The interplay between the senior civil and military decision-makers during the decision-making process was very much nurtured by bottom up initiatives. Within this interplay, the actors at times computed costs and benefits but also habitually followed their respective political strategies along the lines of traditional pillars of foreign policy. All this was compounded with the earlier mentioned normative demands put upon the senior civil and military decision-makers instigated by rhetoric exercised within the international arena about collective values such as the responsibility to take the Afghan society forward.

The emergent bottom up plans that materialised in both nations were never truly signed off as the official strategy for the military operations, nor were they 'owned' at the strategic level. This actually engendered the difficulties both governments subsequently faced in trying to communicate the purpose of the mission. A strategic narrative about the stabilisation and reconstruction of these provinces was not apprehended by their national audiences. Most possibly, this was because the primary purpose of the need to stabilise these provinces, had in fact never been at the heart of the initial decisions taken to engage to start with.

In conclusion, the senior civil and military decision-makers applied inescapable entrapments, prompted by the utter virtue of seeing no way out. Both their actions and decisions resulted in a *deadly embrace*: a deployment of forces was imminent without having asked or answered the most pressing question to the degree it deserved to be analysed and answered: what is the purpose of this engagement? Instead, the primary activities of the senior civil and military decision-makers were directed to catering for the deployment and as such the questions that surfaced predominantly addressed the *how*.

9.3 Theoretical Deductions, Inductions and Recommendations

The emergence of agency has been prevalent throughout this study. Instead of assuming agency of senior civil actors at the strategic level instigating the use of military means, this study has brought to light a more complex understanding of agency. Thus, one of the recommendations would be altering current approaches to investigating the use of military means that often assume agency on the abstract state level instead of unravelling the events

through the actor approach and the actions taken during the decision-making process. The approach taken in this study allowed for distinguishing the creation of agency throughout the process. By doing so, it downgraded the notion that agency can be identified prior to the instigation of events and makes it person and context dependent.

The study demonstrated the pronounced role of the military in the instigation of the engagement to South Afghanistan. Military involvement in, or even as a driving force of, policy has long been an anathema in both academic and practitioner circles. It is the theoretical prescriptions in Western societies that have nurtured the closely guarded line circumscribing military involvement in policy making. The question remains if this approach is in fact still beneficial for modern day operations in which the blurring of these lines might imply that the boundaries are more artificial than supposed, and are in fact in need of addressing in order to advance civil military relations.

Deducing from theoretical prescriptions on civil military relations and strategy making, the appropriate courses of action for the senior civilian decision-makers would have been to first of all to answer the question of what the political objective of a possible engagement would be, and secondly to answer the question of whether the use of military means was indeed required, and lastly, in what way the necessary means were to be assigned. Even though the prescriptions carried weight in the sense that they were constitutive to their formal approach on the matter, in practice a combination of the shared interest and a window of opportunity surfaced in which the traditional roles assigned to the senior civil and military decision-makers were not adhered to.

If the line of analysis that has been followed in this study is correct, scholars and senior civil and military decision-makers who seek keys to understanding, possibly even wanting to improve the process of deciding if and how military means are to be used, could very well be helped by the outcome. The prescriptive vigour about civil military relations and strategy have proven to be less (if at all) foundational to the roles acquired and actions initiated by the senior civil and military decision-makers.

These arguments challenge traditional prescriptive arguments about civil military relations and the use of strategy. Most of all, the analysis as presented in this study gives rise to a more realistic approach to upholding practices in the field. These practices go beyond an invented theoretical world in which the dynamics of the logics at play in the minds of agents are often downplayed, ignored, or denied. While doing so, the normative undertaking within this discipline remains dominant - all the more reason to call for a shift of attention to the entrapment that seems to occur between the senior civil and military decision-makers and the path dependency that seems to evolve out of their decisions and consequent actions. Furthermore, as this study indicates, nowadays – if it were in fact ever the case - military operations are not an outcome of a linear process in which political objectives are set and

subsequently means are selected. A complex interplay in which the military acts as an agent of the state, anticipating demands put upon the states, and in which they can profile themselves, adheres to the dictum of an emergent circular process of strategy making.

The dynamics that surfaced during the advancement of the intended military deployment in fact featured the working of what is known as ‘argumentative self-entrapment’, a phenomenon advanced by Thomas Risse.¹ The process of argumentative ‘self-entrapment’ commences as rhetorical action and strategic adaptation of governments to external pressures. Governments are not seen as entering the process of arguing on a voluntary basis, but are in fact forced into a dialogue by the pressures of fully mobilised domestic and/or transnational networks. They might also face economic or political sanctions by the international community. The initial ‘forced dialogue’ ultimately culminates into argumentative behaviour. Within this process, argumentative exchange takes place by which both sides accept each other as valid interlocutors, try to establish some common definition of the situation, and agree on the norms guiding the situation. That is, they behave as if they were engaged in a true moral discourse.²

9.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This study outlined why and how British and Dutch senior civil and military decision-makers have employed their military means. It illustrated the emergence of a powerful, hardly contested idea that engendered a path dependent reasoning which senior civil and military decision-makers joined hands. Furthermore, the findings bring to light the emergence of agency at a level which is believed to be unlikely. It would be of interest to enrich the findings of this study by investigating the Canadian case as well. As mentioned earlier, due to reasons of time, money and feasibility, examining the decisions made by the senior civil and military decision-makers in Canada was not possible. However, the dynamic of the trilateral military initiative that acquired such a prominent role in the course of events would be scrutinised even more comprehensively by including the Canadian case.

In addition, investigating the case of Denmark: a nation which – when it comes to the use of its military means – is very similar to the Netherlands and investigating the case of the United States: a nation that more often than not seems to employ its military means, would further enrich this study. Would the presence of agency be as prevalent as was showcased in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands?



¹ Risse, “‘Let’s Argue!’”, 7, 34

² Risse, “‘Let’s Argue!’”, 32

It would be of further interest to, in terms of broadening the scope of the findings, to include the decision-making process of a NATO member state that decides not to engage (not limited to the intervention in Afghanistan) but did initially show an interest to do so. Why did they decide not to engage, was the absence of a military working initiative or a strong political leader with a prominent view on the use of military means the most dependent variable? Expanding the research with such a case would test the findings of this study, especially with regard to the emergence of agency.

Decision-Making Framework

Decision-making approaches are well suited to contribute to further advance international relations theory especially with regard to better understanding of the black box of decision-making dynamics with regard to using military means. Traditionally, the field of foreign policy analysis aims to do so. In fact, the concept of decision units and their decision paths heavily builds upon the insights as provided by FPA. It would therefore be logical to further test the propositions of the model of Hermann. The testing of this model was not the objective of this study, rather the intention was to use the model as a vehicle to reconstruct the activities of the group under study. However, it will be valuable to enrich the usefulness of this study by deducting theoretical inferences from it and by doing so further advance the efficacy of the model.

A subsequent line of inquiry advancing the findings of this study would be testing the premises of the decision unit framework as developed by Margaret Hermann. The most prominent premise of the framework is that the configuration of the decision unit will shape the nature of that decision. As has been showcased in this study, despite the fact that the configuration of the civil and military decision unit in both nations and the process differed, ultimately the foreign policy action was very similar, if not identical: a deployment was eminent. The objective of this study was not to test the propositions of Hermann's model, but to use it as a vehicle to structure the decision-making process and to conceptualise the group of senior civil and military decision-makers. It would be of great value, though, to use the gathered data for this study and test whether the proposed accounts, as put forward by Hermann on the effects of the decision units, does in fact provide an adequate explanation for the course of events. Indirectly, some parts of the propositions as laid down in the model are tested, but a more comprehensive account would provide greater insight.

Furthermore, the outcome of this study challenges the belief that formal codes and procedures and decision-making processes improve the ultimate decision. In fact, recommendations have been made to develop a decision-making process on the use of force

in the United Kingdom subject to a formal code, approved by Parliament³, similar to the Dutch assessment framework. Ultimately, this code ought to define the process through which decisions are taken, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved. Supposedly, it would facilitate the political impartiality of the armed forces, underscoring that their advice must be based on their professional military assessment. It would also aid accountability by showing who gave what advice, when and why. Further more, the code would improve the quality of decisions by providing a firm framework upon which policy-makers can rely when under pressure.⁴

These recommendations assume that the use of formal codes, regulations and decision-making tools would ensure objective, coherent qualified advice when deciding on the use of military means. This assumption can be questioned based on the evidence as put forward by the Dutch case. The use of these kinds of tools and regulations does not ensure an enhanced decision-making process, or civil military dialogue for that matter. Moreover, the findings of this study, illustrate the limited deviance, particularly with regard to the outcome, that is likely to occur.

Logics of Social Action

One of the shortcomings of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) still needs to be advanced in a more comprehensive and rigorous manner, namely the fact that it often fails to properly include the structures that shape the behaviour of the actors in its actor - oriented approach. In fact, it hardly attends to how agents potentially influence structures. The application of the logic of action within the field FPA could possibly fill this void.

Employing an analytical framework that largely builds on the theory of social action allows switching between two levels of analysis since it accounts for both individual and group behaviour. Within the theory of social action⁵, several logics of human behaviour are identified. Each mode of action/logic can be thought of as an ideal type that rarely occurs in pure form in real life. The controversies mainly focus on how far one can push one particular logic of action to account for observable practices and further explain which logic dominates a given situation.⁶

According to the four most prominent logics, individuals act on calculating costs and benefits (consequences), abiding by identity-constituting rules (appropriateness), generating

3 De Waal, *Depending on the right people*.

4 De Waal, *Depending on the right people*.

5 Giddens, *Central problems in Social Theory*; Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*; Jessop, 'Interpretive Sociology and the Dialectic of Structure And Agency'.

6 Risse, "'Let's Argue!'", 1- 3.

a convincing argument (argumentation), or following tacit common-sense (practice).⁷ The use of these logics in the field of FPA is to interpret the actions and practices of the senior civil military decision-makers. Potentially this could be done in an integrated fashion instead of separating them, since drawing from all four logics of action allows a more dynamic analysis of the actions of civil military decision-makers. Thus the human element of decision-making processes cannot be grasped into orderly scholarly boxes since this element is very much instigated by the creativity of the actors themselves. They use their imagination to compose views of the world that make it comprehensible to them. In addition, it could very well be that during the different phases of the decision-making process actors come to make up their minds using different logics.⁸ It would therefore be of interest to study the logics at play in the minds of the agents by trying to identify not only when what logic comes into play during the decision-making process, but also how these logics intermediate with one another.

Underlying Uncontested Assumptions

Within the interpretation phase of the decision process, actors are faced with the challenging task of 'asking the right questions'. Many respondents commented that in hindsight one can wonder if in fact the right questions were asked. This particularly included the underlying assumptions of the concepts that were driving their interpretation and possible solution of the problem.

The British and Dutch experience in both the planning and the execution of operations in the Southern provinces of Afghanistan did vary in terms of their assessments, views, and activities. Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions of their respective stabilisation strategies did not differ. Both countries believed the mix of defense, diplomacy and development aimed at strengthening the fragile government of Afghanistan could bring about stability.

The evaluations and debates about the Dutch and British mission to the South of Afghanistan primarily centered on the decision-making, and closely analysed the (in) sufficiency of the provided capacity and resources. Hardly ever were the assumptions of the applied concepts questioned. Consequently, difficulties in stabilising South Afghanistan seemed to be mainly addressed in terms of implementation difficulties.

As was stressed more than two decades ago by Michael Shafer, one needs to understand the environment in which one is to operate, and consequently the nature and sources of the



⁷ Kornprobst, 'The Agent's Logics of Action', 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 74-76

conflict.⁹ Both countries were convinced about the possibilities of advancing the expansion of the credibility of the Afghan government and viewed this as a realistic aim to pursue in the first place. As proclaimed agents of change, the British and Dutch governments and their forces were committed to the cause, advocating to ‘put an Afghan face’ on their activities in support of the (local) government. The willingness to ‘Afghanise’ their efforts does illustrate their awareness with regard to sustainability through local ownership, but it disregards the fact that ‘the face’ of the (local) authorities whose legitimacy they were to enhance was disputed by the populace in the first place. Hence, acting in the name of the central and local government, whilst trying to install a democracy founded in the neo-liberal peace-building ideology, may have complicated matters even more.

Leaving this aside, the cases of the British and Dutch experiences with regard to the design of their respective stabilisation efforts in South Afghanistan have shown hearts and minds prescriptions, which were challenged and criticised by Michael Shafer, to still dictate contemporary operations. Thus, the citation used in the concluding chapter of his book, continues to capture the experiences of Western nations today.

One is bound by one’s commitments; one is committed even by one’s mistakes. The¹⁰ (...) may be free to avoid new and mistaken entanglements in the future. It is not free to tear out of its scrapbook the political misjudgments of the past. Nor is it free to avoid entanglements altogether.¹¹

This citation alludes to what seems to be the inescapable – especially when put in the context of current stabilisation operations – persistence of familiar ideas that remain despite their deficiencies. The experiences of the British and Dutch illustrate the uncontested ideas of how outsiders could support and potentially even stabilise an insurgent threatened state. It seems to be indicative of a Western perseverance in ‘asking the wrong questions, turning to the wrong analysis, and, thus in end provoking the wrong results’.¹² This seems to be a hard habit to break, resulting in inescapable entrapments that may time and time again result in a central focus on *how* to intervene before sufficiently addressing *why* to intervene.

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9 Michael. D. Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton 1989); Michael. D. Shafer, ‘The Unlearned Lessons of Counterinsurgency’, *Political Science Quarterly* 103(1) (1988) 57–80; Grandia Mantas, ‘The Three Great Oughts’.

10 In this case the United States, but it could be applied to many states

11 Stanley Hoffmann, ‘Restraints and Choices in American Foreign Policy’, *Daedalus* 91(4) (1962) 668–704, 678.

12 Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver’s Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York 1968) 165.

