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The crucible of war: Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

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Chapter 4

Chapter 4: Uruzgan, the Dutch experience

4.1: Introduction

From 2002 to 2014, the Dutch armed forces were part of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. During the mission 25 service members lost their lives. The focal point of the Dutch contribution to the campaign in Afghanistan was its mission to Uruzgan province (2006-2010). From the outset, the deployment of the Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) was perceived to be the most intense mission since the Dutch participation in the Korean War.[487] In retrospect, Dutch service members indeed regard the TFU-mission as a formative experience for the Dutch military.[488]

This chapter examines the impact of the Uruzgan mission on the Dutch armed forces regarding learning processes and knowledge retention, analyzing both formal and informal processes of adaptation during the mission. Furthermore, the chapter scrutinizes the extent to which this knowledge has been institutionalized in the Dutch military afterwards. Throughout the chapter, the influence on the learning processes of the factors identified in chapter 2 will be examined, with observation of the additional aspects identified in chapter 3.

To describe the impact of the Uruzgan mission on the Dutch military, this chapter consists of three sections. In the first section the run-up to the mission in Uruzgan is outlined. It offers an overview of the Dutch strategic and organizational culture, recent military operations prior to Uruzgan, conceptual foundations, the political decision-making process, and the preparation for the mission. The second section focuses on the Dutch experiences in Uruzgan itself. This part offers an analysis of the campaign planning, execution, and evaluation from a perspective of learning. Furthermore, it examines several vignettes of manifestations of learning during the campaign such as: the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Counter-IED, intelligence and information operations. Finally, the third section examines how the Dutch armed forces tried to institutionalize the lessons from Uruzgan and the extent to which they succeeded in this endeavor.

487 George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21(3), p. 429.

488 Almost without exception, the Dutch service members interviewed for this dissertation stressed the impact of the mission, for better or worse, on the Dutch armed forces. By design, the military personnel interviewed were selected because of their experience in Uruzgan.

4.2: The run-up to Uruzgan

4.2.1: Strategic and organizational cultures

After the end of the Cold War, the Dutch strategic outlook for the use of its armed forces can be defined by two main considerations: exporting stability and being relevant to its allies.[489] The emphasis on the projection of international stability has its historical roots in the Dutch orientation on maritime commerce. Peace and general adherence to international institutions and regulations foster international trade. As such, international stability is beneficial to the Netherlands and a prime consideration for the use of its military. Yet, the Dutch focus on international order and stability entails more than just its own interests, it has a profound moral, or even idealist component to it.[490] As such the Netherlands has been willing to deploy its military to uphold the international rule of law. This is enshrined in article 97 of the Dutch constitution that states that the armed forces are "to defend and protect the interests of the kingdom and to support and promote the international rule of law".[491]

A key way the two aims above are expressed, beyond national defence, is that the Dutch armed forces are considered an instrument that can be utilized for enhancing its value to the international partners. By participating in international missions, the Netherlands wants to show itself as a reliable partner and aims to acquire additional political capital. In this calculation, the more risk (or responsibility) the Netherlands is willing to take on corresponds with more international clout.

These tenets are not mutually exclusive but require a balancing act for Dutch foreign policy. Although the weight distribution to the tenets can differ from case to case, both are given attention in the political decision-making process before (and during) military deployments. Habitually, the benevolent aspects of the missions for the local population or international stability are advertised. The 'realistic' approach to expeditionary operations is also discernible in the political discourse, albeit often in more couched words.[492] Moreover, while the Netherlands is willing to contribute to international missions, it requires a mandate that is sanctioned by international law to do so.

489 Rem Korteweg (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press. p. 233.

490 Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga (2010). Military Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in the Netherlands. In T. Terriff, F. Osinga, & T. Farrell (Eds.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press p. 112.

491 Dutch constitution, article 97

492 In official documents, the rationale to contributing to international missions is referred to as being a "reliable ally" and taking one's responsibility.

Additionally, these elements have been equated with the tension between the orientation to either its European continental neighbors (stability) or its Atlantic partners in the form of the United States and the United Kingdom.[493] Evidently, this tension does not represent a dichotomy either but reflects the Netherlands (cultivated) self-image as a link between continental Europe and the Anglo-Saxon countries.

These strategic considerations are both reflected and reinforced by the Dutch political structure. Governments in the Netherlands are invariably formed by coalitions of two, but often more, political parties. Consequently, the deployment of troops to international missions is a result of consensus building. The specific make-up of the government can shape the type of missions the Netherlands is willing to participate in. At face value, a center-left coalition will emphasize humanitarian objectives, while a center-right combination will be more prone to follow allied exhortations to contribute to missions. However, both considerations of stability projection and being a good ally are always present in the justifications for the deployments, regardless of the incumbent government.[494]

A further salient aspect of this strategic culture is the apparent lack of martial spirit of Dutch society. To be sure, history is replete with examples of Dutch willingness to employ military force to attain foreign policy objectives, especially in colonial contexts. Moreover, this label does not necessarily extend to the self-image of Dutch military.[495] However, in Dutch public and political discourse the use of military force in an instrumental fashion is either absent or discussed with negative connotations. Hence, military aspects of missions are often couched in euphemistic terms for public and political consumption.[496] This underpins the reality that pursuing foreign policy objectives by employing the military to prove itself a relevant ally is carefully laced with the idiom of promoting international order and adherence to humanitarian law.

These specific traits of Dutch strategic culture naturally shaped the employment of the Dutch armed forces in the early 21st century. The balancing act between idealistic and realistic motives for participation in expeditionary missions is a recurring theme in contemporary

493 See Alfred Pijpers (1996). The Netherlands: The weakening pull of atlanticism. In C. Hill (Ed.), *The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy* (pp. 247-267). London: Routledge, p. 259; Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press. p. 249-251

494 Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga (2010). Military Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in the Netherlands. In T. Terriff, F. Osinga, & T. Farrell (Eds.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 112. Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press., p 253-257.

495 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2013). The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counterinsurgency. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 36(3), p. 870-872.

496 Wim Klinkert (2008). *Van Waterloo tot Uruzgan: De Nederlandse militaire identiteit*. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA p. 19-20; Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 240-241.

Dutch military history. How these aspects have affected the learning processes by the Dutch military in relation to the missions will be explored in the next chapters.

Beyond these structural influences, it is hard to overstate the impact of the Srebrenica-massacre on contemporary Dutch strategic and, to a lesser extent, organizational culture. When the lightly-armed Dutch troops were unable to protect the "safe-area" and prevent the subsequent killing of approximately eight thousand people, the Dutch political caste was rudely awakened to the realities and limitations of expeditionary operations by its armed forces. To prevent new debacles as Srebrenica, an "Evaluation Framework" was implemented to assist political deliberations on international missions.[497] This amounted to a frame of reference that the government must explicate to parliament before participation to an expeditionary mission. Crucial aspects of the framework are the availability of a clear and robust mandate, escalation dominance, cooperation with allies and broad political support. Although it should not be considered a formal checklist, the points enumerated in the framework has enabled the parliament to thoroughly influence the scope and guidelines of the mission.[498] This influence can range from political aspects as national mandate, caveats and personnel caps to technical characteristics as deploying certain capabilities and equipment.[499]

Like most militaries, the Dutch armed forces do not have a strong singular organizational culture. In works describing the Dutch military culture, the level of analysis comprises the services: the Royal Netherlands Navy, Royal Netherlands Army, Royal Netherlands Air Force, and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (gendarmerie).[500] Still, an important generic cultural trait of the Dutch armed forces is the deference by senior officers to civilian leadership in strategic thinking. Consequently, the military input in strategy formulation is limited. Instead, domestic political considerations, such as the support of party constituencies for military endeavors and coalition cohesion, often have more impact on strategic plans than military feasibility.[501] That this emphasis can infringe on military operations in the field has been documented by both evaluators and scholars.[502]

497 Kathleen McInnis (2020). *How and Why States Defect from Contemporary Military Coalitions*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 176-178.

498 Rem Korteweg, (2011). *The Superpower, The Bridge-Builder and The Hestitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.p. 259-262.

499 Christ Klep and Richard van Gils (2005). *Van Korea tot Kabul: De Nederlandse militaire deelname aan vredesoperaties sinds 1945*. Den Haag: Sdu uitgevers, p. 432.

500 Jan van der Meulen, Axel Rosendahl Huber and Joseph Soeters (2000). The Netherlands'Armed Forces: An Organization Preparing for the Next Century. In J. Kuhlmann, & J. Callaghan (Eds.), *Military and Society in 21st Century Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, p. 286-287; Roy de Ruiter(2018). *Breuklijn 1989: Continuiteit en verandering in het Nederlandse defensiebeleid 1989-1993*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, 80-87.

501 Lars Deijkers (2020). *Politieke zuinigheid en militaire volgzaamheid: De militaire strategie van Nederland in de periode 2000-2014*. Culemborg: Armex Special, p. 54-57.

502 Ministerie van Defensie. (2006). *Eindevaluatie Stabilisation Force Iraq (SFIR), 2003-2005*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p. 20-21; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2019). *Op zoek naar draagvlak: De geintegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan*. Den Haag: Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie, p. 36; Arthur ten Cate and Thijs Brocades

For the Dutch armed forces, the 1990's were marked by the conversion from preparing for the eventuality of a war with the Warsaw-pact towards an expeditionary stabilization mission in intrastate conflicts. The Royal Netherlands Army most intensely felt this development. Originally a force based on conscription with a small professional cadre, the army had to restructure and professionalize to ready itself for operations abroad.[503] The formative experience for the Dutch armed forces were undoubtedly the Balkan Wars that dominated the European security landscape in this decade. From 1992 to the early new millennium, Dutch military personnel participated in various roles: monitoring, humanitarian assistance, peace keeping, peace enforcement, stabilization and as part of the air campaign over Yugoslavia. For the Dutch armed forces, this period was defined most profoundly by its inability to prevent the Srebrenica massacre in 1995.[504]

As this research mainly examines land operations and the bulk of the Task Force Uruzgan was provided by the Dutch Army, its organizational culture is the most relevant for the current study. Yet, the army's culture is not monolithic, as it consists of various arms and branches. As such it emphasizes the orchestration of these elements for combined arms operations in conventional warfare. During the Cold War, the Dutch Army was focused on maintaining a deterrent posture against the Warsaw Pact.[505] In the last three decades, it has been extensively deployed to expeditionary stabilization missions that require different skill sets. Still, this effort has had to balance with readiness for conventional warfare and this has been challenging as the army's ability to conduct combined arms operations was diminished over time by successive budget cuts. Although the army culturally maintained a predilection for conventional warfare in training, it valued the stabilization missions to show its value to the political leadership and retain capabilities.[506] As such, the shrinking Dutch army had to seek a balance between the requirements of conventional warfare and stabilization operations.

4.2.2: Preambles in Iraq and Afghanistan

The 9/11-attacks of 2001 heralded a new era for the Dutch military in which it participated in the conflicts that followed from the American response. In several [theoretically] discrete

Zaalberg (2014). *A Gentle Occupation*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 68-70; Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Army Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p. 194-195.

503 See for an in-depth analysis of this period: Roy de Ruiter, (2018). *Breuklijn 1989: Continuiteit en verandering in het Nederlandse defensiebeleid 1989-1993*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy.

504 Jan van der Meulen, Axel Rosendahl Huber and Joseph Soeters (2000). The Netherlands'Armed Forces: An Organization Preparing for the Next Century. In J. Kuhlmann, & J. Callaghan (Eds.), *Military and Society in 21st Century Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, p. 287-289

505 De Ruiter, *Breuklijn 1989*, p. 93-99.

506 De Wijk and Osinga, *Innovating on a Shrinking Playing Field*, p. 128-129.

missions, the Netherlands contributed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[507] The subsequent subsections will examine these missions leading up to the deployment to Uruzgan.[508]

4.2.2.1: ISAF Kabul

A day after the 9/11 attacks, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), adopted resolution 1368 that sanctioned operations against the perpetrators of the attacks. At the same day, NATO's North Atlantic Council invoked the alliance's Article 5 by which the terrorist act was considered an attack on the allies as well.[509] As a result, there was a clear international mandate to provide military support. Shortly after the start of the American military response in October 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the Netherlands initiated military support to the operation. This support consisted mainly of naval and air force units. At this stage however, the Dutch troops and equipment were emphatically excluded from engaging in combat operations in (or over) Afghanistan. Rather, they served as a backfill, enabling American units to conduct counterterrorism operations.[510]

The Dutch involvement in Afghanistan started in January 2002 with a deployment to the capital Kabul under the auspices of the International Security Assistance Force. Sanctioned by the UN (Resolution 1386), the ISAF was to assist the fledgling Afghan government in securing Kabul and its surroundings and to help building Afghan security forces. As such, ISAF was a discrete but closely related mission to OEF which conducted combat operations across Afghanistan.

The Dutch contingent was primarily made up of an augmented infantry company and a special forces platoon. Its tasks amounted to reconnaissance missions, social patrols, and training recruits of the Afghan army. While the security situation in Kabul in 2002 and 2003 was quite permissive, the Dutch troops did experience that the calm was fragile. Although the contingent did not engage in combat, the presence of militias and the threat posed by IEDs contributed to the tension in the Afghan capital. The mission was concluded in the summer of 2003.

In addition to the augmented infantry company, the Netherlands and Germany provided the staffing for ISAF's headquarters from February to August 2003. Under the guidance of this

507 Of course, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were essentially part of the American led campaign against terror following the 9/11 attacks. The Netherlands contributed to these conflicts in distinct missions with different mandates and force configurations based on the interplay between domestic political will and pressure exerted by allies. As such, there was little strategic coherence between these missions during continuous conflicts.

508 The Dutch armed forces contributed to more missions than just these.

509 At the time, political support largely sufficed for the United States. Instead of direct military support, the US preferred to have a free hand to deal with Al Qaeda and associated entities.

510 Klep and Van Gils. *Van Korea tot Kabul*, p. 442-451.

joint headquarters, ISAF took on a more active role. It increased the number of patrols in the city to enhance its situational awareness. Moreover, it helped restructure the Afghan ministries of Interior and Defense (responsible for the Afghan security forces), initiated a demobilization program and helped in the preparations for the constitutional *Loyah Jirga* (grand assembly).[511] Consequently, a campaign plan was drafted with the support of operational analysts that were attached to the staff from the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO). This resulted in a plan that incorporated the mission objectives, lines of effort, influencing factors and effects to be achieved. A further benefit of adding the operational analysts to the staff was that they could assess the results of the operations by, for example, surveys among the population of Kabul on their support for ISAF. This allowed the headquarters to process these metrics and adjust its plans based on this data.[512]

The mission in Kabul in 2002-2003 marked the first experiences by Dutch forces in Afghanistan. Due to the relatively benign security situation, the deployment was regarded as a stabilization effort. Nevertheless, it gave Dutch service members a first feel of operations in the Afghan context.

4.2.2.2: PRT Baghlan

After the mission in Kabul, the Dutch armed forces extended their presence in Afghanistan to the northern province Baghlan. This was part of the gradual expansion of ISAF over the whole of Afghanistan. Between October 2004 and September 2006, The Netherlands deployed six rotations of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The PRT-concept was established by the United States in 2002 to assist Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In 2003 ISAF adopted the concept. By participating to this specific mission, the Netherlands emphasized its more principled outlook, as it was envisioned as a stabilization mission with concurrent development aspects.

Thus, the objectives of the PRT in Baghlan included monitoring local and regional developments, assisting the Afghan government with expanding and consolidating its authority, facilitating cooperation between the various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations (IOs). Additionally, it supported the local population with initiating development projects that were not supported by NGOs.[513]

511 Klep and Van Gils. *Van Korea tot Kabul*, p. 548.

512 Freek-Jan Toevank and Rudi Gouweleeuw (2004). Operationeel analisten bij ISAF-III. *Militaire Spectator*, 173(10), p. 475-480.

513 Klep en Van Gils, *Korea tot Kabul*, p. 461.

Based in the provincial capital Pol-e-Khomri, the Dutch PRT consisted of three mission teams under military leadership, a political advisor (POLAD) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a force protection element, and a logistical support element with a total of 150 personnel. Initially, the mission was led by service members from the Dutch Air Force. From September 2005, the Dutch Navy assumed a leading position in the PRT.

Although aspects such as Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Civilian-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) echoed the experiences of the Balkans-missions, the PRT-concept was new for both ISAF and the Dutch armed forces. Moreover, central guidance from the department level was sparse. As a result, the PRT-commanders, and their staffs (including the POLAD) had to formulate their own mission plan. This "Master Plan" incorporated a comprehensive approach of "Defence, Diplomacy and Development". The PRT-commanders appreciated the leeway, but nevertheless the lack of national guidance was identified as a point for evaluation for future missions.[514]

The PRT in Baghlan could operate in a benign environment. Local militias were generally cooperative when they had to be disbanded. Furthermore, the PRT had good relationships with the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan National Army (ANA). It also succeeded in improving the collaboration between the Afghan security forces in the province by establishing a "Provincial Coordination Centre". During the mission, the security situation in the province did deteriorate, as was manifested by attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These attacks led to several individuals being wounded and warranted an increased focus on force protection.[515]

This first Dutch experience with the PRT-concept led to several other observations that were incorporated in the mission design for Uruzgan. First, the official evaluation acknowledged that the PRT needed discretionary funds to help facilitate development projects. A second observation was that the PRT should have more civilian representation from other departments with specific skills in its organization. For Uruzgan, this meant including additional political advisors for development and a cultural specialist. With this enhanced civilian presence, the military personnel of the PRT could focus on CIMIC, SSR and other specific military tasks. A third observation was that the effects of the efforts by the PRT in Baghlan could not be assessed. To determine the efficacy of projects, the PRT in Uruzgan should report on its results to guide plans.[516]

514 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Eindevaluatie Provincial Reconstruction Team Baghlan*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p. 8.

515 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Eindevaluatie Provincial Reconstruction Team Baghlan.* Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p. 24-26.

516 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Eindevaluatie Provincial Reconstruction Team Baghlan*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, p, 20-22.

Thus, the PRT in Baghlan provided a trial run for the PRT in Uruzgan. Of course, the environment in Afghanistan's northern provinces was at the time far more permissive than in the volatile south. It did result in several generic observations that could potentially benefit the PRT in Uruzgan. How this knowledge affected the efforts in Uruzgan will be discussed below.

4.2.2.3: Stabilization Force Iraq

When the United States and its small "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq in March 2003, the Netherlands remained in the background, providing only political support. In this instance, adherence to international law and humanitarian considerations prevailed over being a good ally.[517] Undoubtedly, the dubious American and British justifications for the invasion and the related adverse public opinion in the Netherlands contributed to the government's reluctance to offer practical assistance rather than a token endorsement.[518]

Yet, this calculus changed shortly after the initial conventional campaign. While the American and coalition forces occupied Iraq, the Dutch government felt it could contribute a troop contingent for a stabilization mission, preferably sanctioned by a UN mandate. In the event, the UN mandate was issued a few months after the Netherlands had deployed a battle group (augmented battalion of Marines) to the southern province Al Muthanna in the summer of 2003. Although the Dutch battle group became an integral part of the command structure of the occupying forces, the Netherlands sought to frame the mission as separate from the American and British allies. This posturing was translated into two caveats: the Dutch would not take on administrative tasks nor would they take the lead in law enforcement. Although this distinction made political sense, the caveats proved to be impractical from a military perspective as the Dutch troops were the primary foreign military presence in the province. Moreover, and understandably so, these nuances in the national mandate were lost on the local population and embryonic Iraqi authorities in the area.[519]

When the Dutch battle group deployed to Al Muthanna, it was called upon to provide security by the local population. The main problem proved to be criminal activities, rather than an insurgency. Given the ineptitude of the local police forces, the Dutch troops quickly had to assume a leading role, thereby contradicting the imposed caveats by The Hague. This led to instances where Dutch troops had to confront looters, disperse rioters, and even conduct arrest operations. In the meanwhile, the battle group strove to increase the

517 Ten Cate and Brocades Zaalberg. *A Gentle Occupation*, p. 30-34.

518 Regardless, the political support to mission later led to a political crisis after an independent investigative committee concluded that the Dutch government had been too uncritical towards the American and British rationales for initiating the war.

519 Ten Cate and Brocades Zaalberg. *A Gentle Occupation*, p. 252-258.

numbers of security forces and enhance their quality. As for the administrative tasks, the battle group commanders and the POLAD's found that they could not shun a leading role in the province. Al Muthanna was plagued by unemployment and governance vacuum. The Dutch helped establish a provincial council that subsequently elected a provincial governor, again circumventing the national caveats. Furthermore, the Dutch battle group engaged in reconstruction tasks such as repairing the cement factory, refurbishing schools, and road construction. The vast majority of costs were covered by the American occupational administration, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). While this enabled the Dutch to "buy consent" in Al Muthanna, this meant closer association with the occupation powers.[520]

Over the spring and summer of 2004, the security situation in the province deteriorated as it came under the influence of the Shi'ite revolt that was instigated by Moqtada al Sadr. This was exacerbated when the CPA transferred authority to Iraqi administrations and ceased to exist, meaning that the reconstruction funds largely dried up. Furthermore, the Dutch had to reconfigure their relationship to the provincial authorities.[521] Attacks on the local security forces and international troops intensified during this period. Two Dutch service members were killed by enemy action in May and August 2004. Although the Dutch battle group's hold on the province was ultimately not challenged by insurgents, the decreasing security added to the sense that the mission entailed far more than a peace operation.[522] The Dutch concluded their mission in early 2005.

The ostensible success of the Dutch contingent in Al Muthanna contrasted with the general deteriorating situation in Iraq. Eventually, this even gave rise to touting a distinct "Dutch Approach" in which Dutch forces proved more culturally adept in managing the stabilization challenges than their more heavy-handed American allies.[523] In reality, this success could be partly ascribed to the distinct contemporary dynamics of Al Muthanna in which insurgent groups held little sway over the province. The relatively low level of violence in the Dutch sector was certainly not the result of a carefully designed campaign plan at the outset of the mission. This is not to say that the rotations of Dutch Marine and Army battalions had not acquitted themselves commendably. Ironically, the relative successes by the commanders and their troops on the ground were possible because they operated at, and even beyond, the constraints imposed on them by the national mandate.

520 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate (2012). A Gentle Occupation: unravelling the Dutch approach in Iraq, 2003-2005. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *23*(1), p. 124-126.

521 Ibidem, p. 130-131

522 Ten Cate and Brocades Zaalberg (2014). *A Gentle Occupation*, p. 171-195.

523 See Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2013). The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach' to Counterinsurgency. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *36*(3), 867-897. The success was also noted by the Americans that sought to use Al Muthanna as a model to transfer authority to local governance across Iraq.

The mission in Al Muthanna thus formed an experience in assuming a leading role in an under-governed province. It showed that, despite various national caveats, the ability to opt out of certain tasks was proven impractical by events on the ground. Governance, reconstruction, and law enforcement fell to the battle group, regardless of whether it was mandated or designed to do so. One of the main findings in subsequent evaluations was that a battalion-staff was inadequate level to coordinate all these aspects of the mission. Furthermore, the militaries capabilities related to intelligence and civil-military cooperation were underdeveloped, yet critical in a stabilization or counterinsurgency mission.[524]

4.2.2.4: Task Group Orange in Kandahar

A final preamble to Uruzgan was formed by the deployment of the Dutch Special Forces Task Group-Afghanistan (SFTG-A, later rechristened to Task Group Orange) to Kandahar from May 2005 to March 2006. Its area of operations were two sparsely populated districts of Kandahar province bordering on Pakistan. As opposed to the PRT in Baghlan, the deployment of SFTG-A was in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The mission of the SFTG-A was to dismantle the infrastructure of "Opposing Militant Forces", interdicting logistical lines and support the establishment of local Afghan government. To this end, the special forces were to conduct combat operations and special reconnaissance missions.[525]

For this mission, a Special Forces Task Group was thus organized around a company of army Commando's, reinforced by teams of the Dutch Marine Corps. In addition to various enabling and logistical elements, these operators were supported by a detachment of Chinook helicopters that allowed them to extend their operational range in the desert of southern Kandahar. A further notable aspect of this deployment was that the Dutch government declared that the Task Group would operate under the legal provisions for wartime operations. The purpose of this announcement was to take away any confusion regarding the rules of engagement within the robust - to Dutch standards - mandate of SFTG-A.[526] In this regard the deployment to Kandahar can be considered as an atypical mission for the Dutch armed forces. Uncharacteristically, the mission was engendered for the more 'realistic' objective of proving to be a dependable ally.[527]

While its organization, command structure and mandate indicated a mission with high probability of confronting adversaries, SFTG-A encountered no resistance in its area of

524 Defensie. *Eindevaluatie SFIR*, p. 20-26.

525 Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Army Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, p, 171-174.

526 Ibidem, p. 174.

527 This aspect was emphasized in the official evaluation, see: Ministerie van Defensie. (2006). *Evaluatie Nederlandse Special Forces Taakgroep in Operation Enduring Freedom, April 2005 - April 2006*. Den Haag, p, 16.

operations. Instead, the special forces chose to change tack and actively engage with the population to acquire better understanding about the local dynamics. The lack of contact with opposing forces did allow the special forces to familiarize themselves further with multiple team operations, long range reconnaissance in arid terrain, and air support procedures. In this regard, the mission by SFTG-A proved to be a fertile testing ground.[528]

Apart from the core task in Kandahar, the SFTG-A assisted the decision-making process of the Netherlands to deploy troops for ISAF *Stage 3* in southern Afghanistan. In May 2005, an intelligence detachment from the task group visited the American PRT in Tarin Kowt, the capital of Uruzgan. The intelligence personnel reported a "worsening security situation" in the province.[529] In October, several teams accompanied Dutch planners in an extensive reconnaissance of the province. The present American and Australian special forces impressed on their Dutch guests that Uruzgan was "rife with insurgents".[530] Somewhat ironically, this impressed the Dutch special forces with the notion that Uruzgan was a far more challenging area than southern Kandahar.

In contrast, the relative calm in Kandahar persisted until January 2006 when SFTG-A could expand its area of operations towards the border area with the province of Helmand. Almost immediately, the teams ran into various groups of smugglers, criminals, and insurgents. This led to several engagements in which multiple adversaries were detained.[531] In March 2006, the mission in Kandahar was concluded when the new Canadian task force deployed. This allowed SFTG-A to support the preparations for the Uruzgan mission by consolidating relations with their American and Australian colleagues in Uruzgan, conducting additional reconnaissance operations and logistical support at Kandahar airfield. In retrospect, the mission by SFTG-A was primarily notable in that it allowed the Dutch special forces to hone existing and acquire new skills. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to gain some preliminary information on the situation in Uruzgan and establish a foothold in the province.

4.2.3: Doctrine on counterinsurgency

Although the Dutch armed forces had no recent experience in counterinsurgency operations after the War of Decolonization in Indonesia, the Royal Netherlands Army published "Land Doctrine Publication II-C" (LDP II-C) in 2003 on combat operations against "adversaries that

528 George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman and Martijn van der Vorm (2016). Formative Years: Military Adaptation of Dutch Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan . *Special Operations Journal*, 2(2), p. 151-155.

529 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, p. 190.

530 Interview Dutch commanding officer 7

531 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, p. 187-190.

employ irregular methods".[532] Notable in this regard is that the Royal Netherlands Army distinguished between combat operations, peace operations and national operations. By this categorization, these operations against irregular adversaries are classified as distinct from peace (support) operations as the military contribution to such conflicts are primarily combat operations.[533] However, it acknowledges that irregular warfare and peace operations are often related and can evolve in one another. Although the premise of this publication was broad, the content is primarily geared towards counterinsurgency warfare. The general term for irregular activities in this document is "armed resistance".[534] Despite this generic description, LDP II-C recognizes that the adversaries in counterinsurgency operations can be diverse regarding objectives (political, religious, criminal, ethnical or a combination), organization and employment of methods.[535]

While the doctrine focuses on the military contribution to counterinsurgency operations, it acknowledges the primacy of political considerations. Furthermore, the perception of the local population is regarded as a crucial concern in these conflicts.[536] The population's support is considered the center of gravity of the insurgents, so this should be denied to them. Military force is therefore considered an "essential, but often temporary addition to the sum of other activities".[537] According to the doctrine, counterinsurgency requires a comprehensive political operation with activities in the diplomatic, governmental, judicial, social, cultural, psychological, economic, and military dimensions. Evidently, beyond the use of military force these activities require the cooperation, if not leadership, by other organizations and agencies.

In practice, the main military contribution to counterinsurgency should be geared towards intelligence. Without accurate and timely intelligence, successful operations are impossible. According to the doctrine, intelligence operations in counterinsurgency require more effort than in conventional combat operations. It posits that gathering intelligence is a core task for the troops. Other operational tasks for the military are offensive operations against the insurgents and interdicting their supply lines, separating the population and the insurgents, targeting eternal support to the insurgents, influencing the moral considerations of the population and the adversaries, protection of the force and other actors.[538]

532 This is an imperfect translation from the Dutch phrase "Gevechtsoperaties tegen een irregulier optredende tegenstander", but it conveys the central message that the doctrine encompasses all adversaries that fight in an irregular way, not just non-state actors.

533 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2003). *Gevechtsoperaties, LDP II-C: Gevechtsoperaties tegen een irregulier optredende tegenstander.* Den Haag, p. 429.

534 Landmacht, *LDP II-C*, p. 431.

535 Ibidem, p. 435-436.

536 Ibidem, p. 430.

537 Ibidem, p, 437.

538 Ibidem, p. 438-439.

For its inspiration, the doctrine drew on a broad array of sources. Its bibliography lists books and articles describing American, British, French, Portuguese, Rhodesian, Russian and Dutch experiences in the 20th century. Furthermore, it included works on insurgencies, resistance movements, terrorism, civil wars, guerrilla tactics and special environments (urban and jungle).[539]

However, the impact of LDP II-C was limited. Although its existence was known to most officers, it was not widely read or actively taught beyond the Royal Military Academy as other types of conflict were more prominent in curricula.[540] Instead, planners for the first rotation in Uruzgan read a large volume of classical counterinsurgency prescriptions as they assessed that this would be relevant for their deployment.[541] Still, this uneven distribution of counterinsurgency knowledge bode ill for a unity of thought among the army regarding this type of conflicts.

4.2.4: Political decision to deploy to Uruzgan

The potential deployment of Dutch troops to southern Afghanistan as part of ISAF *stage III* was first explored in the autumn of 2004. These explorations were initiated by informal talks between general officers from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Canada.[542] Through these deliberations the intention by the three countries, who had collaborated in Bosnia earlier, to deploy to southern Afghanistan was formed.[543] Each partner would be responsible for a province. As such, the explorations by Dutch military planners predated any official political guidance in the Netherlands.

This military vanguard for a new mission to Afghanistan found support among high level officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Taking a lead role in one of Afghanistan's southern provinces served the interests of both groups, and by extension, departments. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognized the value of participating with the UK and Canada to improve the international posture of the Netherlands. Moreover, the mission was a natural follow-up from the previous contributions to Afghanistan and Iraq.[544] For the armed forces, the prospective mission provided the potential to prove their mettle in combat operations

539 Ibidem, p. 707-712.

540 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch army staff officer 23.

541 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 12.

542 See for a reconstruction of the decision-making processes of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands: Mirjam Grandia (2015). *Deadly Embrace? The Decision Paths to Helmand and Uruzgan.* Leiden: Doctoral Dissertation Leiden University.

543 Matthew Willis (2012). An unexpected war, a not unexpected mission: the origins of Kandahar. *International Journal*(Autumn), p. 991.

544 Lenny Hazelbag (2009). *Politieke besluitvorming van de missie in Uruzgan: een reconstructie.* Breda: Faculty of Military Sciences, p. 11-13; Kathleen McInnis (2020). *How and Why States Defect from Contemporary Military Coalitions.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 189.

and even exorcise the demons from Srebrenica. Furthermore, the military wanted to demonstrate its utility to its political masters to ward off new budget cuts.[545] To be sure, there were dissenting voices within the Ministry of Defence on whether the mission was realistic for the Dutch armed forces.[546]

With these considerations, and eventual backing at the governmental level, the preparations for the mission continued apace. Despite not having settled on a specific province to deploy to nor having received guidance on the objectives for such a mission, the military planners capped the number of troops at 1,000.[547] The rationale for this number was that this was the maximum that was politically feasible.[548] After a NATO-meeting in June 2008, the Netherlands sent a reconnaissance party to Afghanistan in order to assess which province was most suitable for a mission with the knowledge that Canada would deploy to Kandahar and the UK to Helmand.[549] After this fact-finding mission, the Netherlands resolved to opt for Uruzgan province.[550]

Simultaneously, Dutch Parliament was informed about the government's intention to deploy troops to Southern Afghanistan in June 2005. This prospect proved to be highly contentious as both opposition and coalition parties raised doubts over the military feasibility and the political desirability of the mission. As a result, the decision about the mission within the coalition government was delayed. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence formulated a list of points that had to be addressed before the government would agree to the mission. Their main concerns were the continuous presence of US forces in the north of Uruzgan (who operated under the OEF-mission), American military presence in the adjacent province Zabul, funds for reconstruction, the process for handling detainees and the relationship between ISAF and OEF.[551] With regard to the latter concern, the Dutch government sought to distance the ISAF mission to Uruzgan from the continuing American-led OEF that was perceived as being too enemy-centric.[552]

Despite the enduring misgivings among political parties, the government officially notified parliament in December 2005 of its resolve to deploy troops to Uruzgan in the summer of 2006. The notification letter was drafted along the lines of the "assessment framework" and

545 Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 119. However, these considerations were by no means universal within the ministry of defence, see p. 120.

546 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 15, Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 120.

547 Later these numbers were increased to between 1200 and 1400, depending on the staff complement for Regional Command South.

548 Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 121-122.

549 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 14

550 Grandia Mantas, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 123-125.

551 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 17.

552 Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 290-291.

stated that in principle the Netherlands would deploy a task force to Uruzgan to contribute to the ISAF-mission. The task force's objective would be "to promote stability and security by enhancing the local population's support for the Afghan authorities, and decreasing the support for the Taliban and associated groups."[553] This Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) would be operational for two years, after which tangible results would be attained and NATO would ensure continuation by searching for relief forces. As reasoning for the mission, the government stated that: "The stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan, particularly in the South where the Taliban's roots lie, is of great importance to improving the international rule of law and combating international terrorism which also threatens Europe."[554] Within the TFU, a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was designated as the lead element for stability and reconstruction. By implication, the other elements of the TFU were to support the efforts of the PRT.

While the government's letter emphasized stability projection, reconstruction, and governance, it also recognized the potential need for offensive operations.[555] However, this latter aspect of the mission was understated in the letter. As opposed to the earlier Special Forces-mission to Kandahar, the Dutch military would not formally operate under war-time conditions, thereby directing focus to the reconstruction and stability aspects of the mission.[556]Still, it was candid about the "significant" risks involved with the mission.[557] To mitigate these risks and for potential offensive operations. To this end, infantry, Apache attack helicopters and F-16 fighter jets would assist the PRT.

In addition to the troops destined for Uruzgan, the Netherlands would contribute to the staff of the new regional headquarters of ISAF (Regional Command South) at Kandahar Airfield. Responsibility for Regional Command South (RC-S) would alternate between the principal allies in the southern provinces: Canada, the UK, and the Netherlands. This arrangement would ensure sufficient Dutch influence over the direction of the ISAF campaign.[558]

In the reasoning for the Dutch participation in southern Afghanistan, the letter to parliament was largely silent about the Dutch responsibility towards its allies as a rationale for the deployment. Far more attention was awarded to the needs of the Afghan population and the ability of the Dutch armed forces to help them. However, in the subsequent political and public discourse, proponents of the mission emphasized Dutch responsibility towards the

553 Kamerstuk 27 925, nr 193, p, 1-3.

554 Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 298.

555 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2005, December 22). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme nr. 193. Den Haag, p, 3.

556 George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *21*(3), p.431.

557 Tweede kamer, Dossier 27925, nr. 193, p. 11-12.

558 Ibidem, p. 22-23.

allies and NATO as the institution.[559] Of course, assuming responsibility for a province in Afghanistan's volatile south was a high-profile mission that would reflect positively on the Netherlands' position in NATO.

Nevertheless, and as was clear to the government at the time, the mission would evoke intense discussions in parliament. This led to further postponement of a political decision.[560] A recurring theme in the debate about the ISAF-mission to Uruzgan was its relationship with the counterterrorism efforts under OEF. While the government emphatically stated that the two operations were separated, critics in parliament questioned the practicality of this bifurcation of two military missions in the same theatre.[561] Although Dutch critique towards American-led efforts under OEF held water due to its focus on counterterrorism, the presence of OEF-units in the north of the province was crucial to the feasibility of the Dutch deployment because the Netherlands recognized that it could not cover the whole province with the intended task force configuration. In addition to this cooperation with the Americans in the province, "a solid, military relevant partner [nation]" was identified that would cooperate with the Dutch troops under ISAF.[562]

Another aspect that fueled the debate was whether the Dutch troops would be involved in either combat operations or reconstruction. Critics of the mission argued that these activities were incompatible and argued that in any case, the situation in Uruzgan precluded reconstruction. Advocates of the mission did not deny the adverse security situation but contended that military operations (euphemistically called "stabilization") and reconstruction had to go hand in glove.[563] Moreover, these supporters were sure that Dutch experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that the Dutch military had a knack for this type of missions. Hopefully, the so-called "Dutch Approach" would mean that the Dutch troops could indeed show themselves different from their American counterparts in OEF.[564]

In the end, sufficient political support for deploying Dutch troops to Uruzgan was secured. The deployment of troops to southern Afghanistan struck a balance between stability projection and burden sharing among allies, with an emphasis on the former. Although the security challenges were not discounted, the discourse by the government focused on reconstruction, development, and governance, instead of an enemy-centric approach.

559 See for example the minutes of the parliamentary debate held on 2 February 2006: Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. (2006, February 2). Handelingen TK: Uitzending Nederlandse militairen. Den Haag, p. 45-3030; the answers on parliamentary questions; Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, January 31). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 201. Den Haag, p. 18; McInnis, *How and Why States Defect*, p 189; Rem Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 286-290.

560 Hazelbag, *Politieke besluitvorming*, p. 20-21.

561 Tweede Kamer, Handelingen, p. 45-3017.

562 This partner was of course Australia.

563 Tweede Kamer, Handelingen, p. 45-3024

564 Korteweg, *The Superpower*, p. 292-294.

Thereby, the differentiation from the American counterterrorism efforts was ensured, while at the same time the Netherlands could deploy troops to placate the Americans and other allies.

4.2.5: Sub conclusion

From the outset, the proposed deployment to Uruzgan was recognized to be a (potential) formative mission for the Dutch armed forces. Although the Dutch military had acquired relevant experience in recent missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the operational risks and demands were understood to be much higher this time. The general, but not universal, sentiment in the armed forces was that the Uruzgan mission would be a challenging but valuable experience. Still, the military was under no delusions about the risks involved with the mission or the necessity to fight during the deployment. With the previous experience of recent missions and the availability of a viable counterinsurgency doctrine, the military ostensibly had an adequate starting point for the mission.

However, the decision to deploy Dutch troops to southern Afghanistan had proven to be highly contentious at the political level. The resulting protracted debate in parliament led to an almost dichotomous (and artificial) distinction being made between the reconstruction and combat aspects of the mission. In this sense, two competing tenets of Dutch strategic culture, being a relevant ally and employing the military to project international stability had to be reconciled. This was achieved by emphasizing the reconstruction tasks in the mission and professing the centrality of the PRT in the task force. Moreover, in the political discourse, the Dutch operational approach was distanced from the American counter-terrorist efforts in the OEF-mission. As a result, the anticipated intensity of the TFU-mission led to the military preparing for the worst while political observers had been won over by the government's assertion that the troops would generally avoid combat.

4.3: The mission: Task Force Uruzgan, 2006-2010

As established in chapter 2, military strategy, campaign plans and commitment of resources such as the number of troops, are manifestations of military learning processes. With regard to the recurring themes in counterinsurgency operations as enumerated in chapter 3, the existence of an integral campaign plan and the ability to learn and adapt are considered crucial. To understand the Dutch learning processes at the campaign level, the following subsections provide a general overview of the Uruzgan campaign and developments at the campaign level such as predeployment training and troop levels. Furthermore, the efforts to adapt the campaign based on operational assessment and the formal learning processes

by the Dutch military are examined. The developments at the campaign level are analyzed through the lens of organizational learning as provided in chapter 2 to identify the underlying dynamics, stages in the learning process and factors of influence.

4.3.1: Deployment and the Task Force Uruzgan

While the political deliberations dragged on, the personnel (military and civilian) that were to deploy to Afghanistan could in the meantime ill-afford to sit on their hands. Regardless of the contentious decision-making process a task force staff was assigned to start operations in August 2006. The most prominent units under this Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) were the PRT and the Battle Group. Although the PRT was designated as the mainstay of the mission, it was a small unit of approximately 50 individuals. The first rotation was formed around the staff of a tank battalion and was augmented by service members from other units and civilians. Its tasks were to support local Afghan authorities provide governance and assisting in development. Small mission teams of four individuals were to engage district leaders and tribal elders to link them to the central government in Kabul. For force protection, the PRT had to rely on the Battle Group.[565]

The Battle Group was a composite battalion-sized combat formation. Its first rotation was built around an airmobile infantry battalion, augmented by a company of mechanized infantry. Other elements of the TFU included an engineer company, a mechanized howitzer platoon, an ISTAR-module and medical support. The air assets, such as F-16's, attack and transport helicopters were organized in an Air Task Force (ATF) and were outside the command structure of the TFU. A novel but important part of the Dutch contribution was the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT). Comprised of officers and non-commissioned officers, the OMLT was to train the ANA and accompany its units on operation in a mentoring role. Small as the OMLT was, it had a vital role in the Dutch plans for Uruzgan as it was supposed to bring the ANA units in the province up to the level that they could take over responsibility for military operations.[566] Finally, the TFU-staff itself was to coordinate the activities of its constituent parts. This extra command-level was added on the basis of experiences in Iraq where managing the disparate elements had proven to be a burden for the Battle Group-staff.[567]

565 Kitzen, Osinga and Rietjens, Soft Power, p. 172-174; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 7.

566 Tweede Kamer, Dossier 27925, nr. 193, p. 14-15.

567 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 10

The rotation schedule was initially based on six-month tours for the TFU-staff and 4,5 months for the other units. In this way, as many units as possible could acquire experience in Uruzgan.[568] However, evaluations at the time indicated that the rotations of four to five months for the Battle Group and PRT were considered as too short. Not only was this period insufficient to acquire situational understanding, but the short rotations also took a heavy toll of the organization in the preparation phase. One of the reasons for these short rotations was that the Dutch Army wanted to let as many units as possible acquire experience in Uruzgan during the initial two-year mandate. However, the extension did not lead to a revision of this policy; the six-month tours of the TFU staff and later the PRT were considered as barely sufficient. Moreover, these longer rotations were impeded by mandatory leaves. Further extending tours would potentially invite pushback from military trade unions and was consequently not implemented. As a result, these elements were in constant flux and almost never up to assigned strength.[569]

Getting the task force to Uruzgan was however the primary consideration for the military planners in early 2006. Within days of the political assent to the mission, the first elements of the Deployment Task Force (DTF) under Colonel Henk Morsink left for southern Afghanistan. From the regional headquarters and logistical hub Kandahar Airfield, the Dutch troops went on to build a base on the outskirts of the Uruzgan capital of Tarin Kowt. The Americans had established Forward Operating Base (FOB) Ripley next to a dirt runway. At the time, FOB Ripley housed the American PRT and a Special Forces-detachments from the U.S.[570] Although the DTF's main task was limited to logistical preparations, Morsink inevitably liaised with the allies both in Kandahar and Tarin Kowt as well in Kabul. During these talks, allies stressed the need for offensive operations against the Taliban.[571]

A salient element of the early Dutch presence in Uruzgan was the Special Forces Task Group "Viper" from the Army Special Forces Regiment. Deployed in April 2006, it more-or-less continued the work from SFTG-A in Kandahar, albeit under the ISAF-mission and based at FOB Ripley. Its task was to conduct reconnaissance missions to establish situational awareness for the DTF and the subsequent Task Force Uruzgan. To establish themselves in the province, "Viper" collaborated closely with their American and Australian counterparts that operated under the OEF-mandate. As such, the Dutch SF could not only tap into the intelligence from the allies, but also hitch onto the "jammers" from their counterparts (electronic countermeasures against radio-controlled IEDs), which the Dutch lacked at that point. While this cooperation meant that Viper could establish itself quickly, it had the

568 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 23; Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 11

569 Interview Dutch commanding officer 10, Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 6

570 The Australian Special Air Service-detachment was based in the adjacent FOB Russell.

571 Interview Dutch commanding officer 11

drawback that it could not determine its own courses of action due to this dependence on the allies.[572]

The first operations by Viper underscored the intelligence assessments and previous reconnaissance missions regarding the grim security situation in Uruzgan. From the outset, the combined patrols became engaged in firefights and ambushes in the Deh Rafshan-area and the Baluchi valley north of Tarin Kowt (see map on pages 126-127). This culminated in intense battles around the Baluchi-valley and Chora-district in June and July of 2006. During these operations, the coalition troops managed to wrest control of the Chora district from the opposing forces and inflict many casualties among the adversaries throughout the region. According to the American and Australian allies, this was a testament to the Taliban's grip on the province.

Looking back, Dutch operators questioned who they had been fighting during this period. Had they been confronted by hard-core Taliban or by so-called "accidental guerrillas"?[573] Yet another option was that they had become embroiled in a conflict between government- and coalition-backed Popolzai and disenfranchised other tribes (predominantly Ghilzai). These nuances were initially lost on the coalition forces in Uruzgan. At the same time, the intense combat fitted the trend across Regional Command South in which insurgents contested the influx of new troops.[574] Ironically however, the Dutch special forces had become associated with the OEF-mission that Dutch politicians were so keen to distance themselves from. On the other hand, Viper had little alternative courses of action available to them to execute their mission. Of course, the salient question was how these first experiences affected the subsequent deployment of the TFU, as they presented misgivings about the feasibility of reconstruction efforts in the province.

4.3.1.1: Predeployment training

As the TFU consisted of various units that had no organic command relationship, the preparation for each rotation proceeded among multiple tracks. Each unit or detachment trained for its specific task. The main subordinate units of the Task Force, the PRT and the Battle Group thus initially had separate preparations. Once the units had acquired a sufficient proficiency for their designated tasks, the various elements of the TFU would be integrated in a three-week exercise called *"Uruzgan Integration"*. This section analyzes the pre-deployment

572 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, Callsign *Nassau*, p. 203-205.

573 Ibidem, p. 237-238.

574 Martijn Kitzen (2016). *The Course of Co-option: Co-option of local power-holders as a tool for obtaining control over the population in counterinsurgency campaigns in weblike societies*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, p. 379-382.

training of the Battle Group and the TFU-staff. Other elements' preparations, such as the PRT will feature in separate sections.

Preparing for its deployment to Uruzgan, the first Battle Group commanded by lieutenant-colonel Piet van der Sar was under no false impression that the mission would be anything other than a counterinsurgency operation. Van der Sar and his battalion's intelligence officer (S2) captain Ralph Coenen had joined the reconnaissance to Uruzgan in November 2005. As a result, they had an impression of the local dynamics and the security situation.[575] Prior to the reconnaissance, captain Coenen had scoured classical counterinsurgency works by, among others, Galula, Thompson and Kitson. The more contemporary work by David Kilcullen, his *Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency*, also featured in the reading list drafted by the officer.[576]

When the Battle Group arrived in Uruzgan, the officers and NCOs were briefed by the Viper-detachment about their experiences in the province.[577] The special forces had compiled a list of best practices and observations that they had either acquired in the previous months or emulated from the Australian and American colleagues. This list included patrol techniques, reaction to ambushes, procedures to mitigate the threat of IEDs, instructions for equipment and observations about the enemy's modus operandi.[578] A majority of the lessons were incorporated and disseminated throughout the Battle Group by informal briefings. Early on, the Battle Group came to a different appreciation of the security situation as they were approached by the local population around the village of Sorkh Murghab. Where the Dutch and Australian special forces had been engaged in intense firefights in this area, tribal leaders assured the Dutch infantry soldiers that they were not affiliated with the Taliban and had no quarrel with ISAF or the Afghan government per se. Instead, they pointed out, an intertribal conflict between the local Ghilzai militias and the private forces of former governor Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan, both from the Popolzai tribe, was the cause of the violence in the area.[579]

The Battle Group's predeployment training consisted mainly of infantry skills and integration with the various supporting elements. The Combat Training School (Gevechts Training School) trained infantry units up to the company-level. Infantry platoons were considered the foundational unit for operations. For operations, the platoons were augmented by 'enablers' such as engineers, mortar crews, forward observers, logistics and potentially a PRT-mission team or detachment for psychological operations. To the extent these enablers

575 Kitzen, *Course of Co-option*, p. 381

576 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7, Dutch army staff officer 12

577 Interview Dutch commanding officer 7

578 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 12; Dutch commanding officer 7

579 Kitzen, *The Course of Co-option*, p. 382-383.

were available to the prospective Battle Group for training, the units trained together to familiarize with each other's procedures and collectively prepare for combat drills. The substance of this preparation phase emphasized aspects such as reacting to ambushes, counter-IED procedures, convoy operations and familiarization with new weapons and mission specific equipment.[580]

Beyond training regular infantry combat skills, the Battle Group also invested in cultural awareness for the mission in Afghanistan. Of course, a modicum of cultural training was offered to all troops destined for Uruzgan, but the first Battle Group rotation took this further by employing a cultural expert. Elements from this expanded cultural training, such as a visit to a Dutch mosque to learn about the Islamic faith and traditions.[581] Furthermore, instruction was provided in Pashtun culture. Underpinning this emphasis on culture was the counterinsurgency principle that the perception of the population was the main prize in the Afghan conflict. After the preparation of the first rotation, the Dutch Army directed that all successive rotations would participate in an extended cultural training.[582] Despite this increased effort, the effects of cultural training were limited.

The predeployment training for the Battle Group rotations was not without its challenges. These arose from the decision to limit the tours of the Battle Group to four months. A primary reason for this decision was the wish to have as many units as possible to serve a tour in Uruzgan in order to gain experience there.[583] Because of this short time span, multiple units were simultaneously preparing for a deployment. This put a significant strain on the instruction capacity of the Army.[584] Furthermore, other resources were also limited such as a mission specific training set including non-organic vehicles and communication equipment. This meant that these assets were available relatively late in the preparation phase.[585] Moreover, the training equipment was worn down due to the intensive use, thereby further limiting its availability. Finally, the emphasis on Uruzgan in terms of personnel, instruction capacity and equipment had the side effect that training for other types of mission was generally (and consciously) neglected.[586]

580 Piet van der Sar (2007). Kick the enemy where it hurts the most: de steun van de bevolking, daar gaat het om. *Carre, 30*(1), p. 15.

581 Bas Ooink (2008) *The Cultural Backpack: Training soldiers to operate in unfamiliar environments.* Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, p. 93-96.

582 Ibidem, p. 97-100.

583 This was informed by the assumption that the Dutch mission was mandated for two years at the beginning of the mission.

584 Interview Dutch army staff officer 23

585 Battle Group 3. (2007). *Evaluatieverslag Commandant 42 (NLD) BG LJ TFE 3, missie Uruzgan 1 apr 2007 t/m 1 aug 2007.* Tarin Kowt, p. 2; Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified ISAF: Eindrapportage over de Nederlandse inzet bij de ISAF missie 2006 - 2010.* Den Haag.

586 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 23

Another central element of the preparation phase was the operational reconnaissance by commanders and their staffs to Uruzgan. These visits enabled new rotations to become acquainted with the environment and dynamic of the TFU. Through conversations with their counterparts and looking over their shoulders, service members on reconnaissance could potentially obtain useful insights.[587] Furthermore, instructors regularly visited Uruzgan to stay abreast of the developments there and evaluate predeployment training with the current rotation.[588] In addition to the visits, officers and NCOs tasked with training opted for deployments themselves to gain first-hand experience with the objective to implement this in the predeployment training.[589]

For each rotation, an Army brigade was designated to form and prepare a TFU-staff. The assigned brigade provided a nucleus of staff officers and NCOs that was to be reinforced by other parts of the Army and the other services. While a specific brigade was responsible for this process, the substance of preparing the TFU-staff was supervised by the OTCOpn.[590] For the TFU-staff, the main training event was a command post exercise (CPX). As the TFU-staffs were composite formations, this training aspect was crucial to iron out tasks and internal staff procedures. Led by OTCOpn, the TFU-staff was immersed in a Uruzgan-specific scenario. These scenarios were based on visits to Uruzgan to include the latest developments in the mission. Service members from previous rotations were used to script specific aspects of the scenario, such as intelligence or civil-military cooperation.[591] Interestingly, assistance from the DTF or individually deployed staff officers to Afghanistan was not sought.[592] Furthermore, the instructors of OTCOpn had no formal link with the Army evaluations.[593]

While the scenarios were constantly updated according to developments in Uruzgan, the CPX had a fixed dynamic. The staff had to notice intelligence reports that insurgents were mounting an attack in a certain area to which the TFU then should respond. This would culminate in a large operation planned by the TFU-staff, employing all assets available. Although such scenarios by default emphasized security aspects of the mission, the themes of governance and development were integrated. By this deliberate method, the staff had to go through all aspects of the planning process under simulated pressure.[594]

587 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 6

588 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 9.

589 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 9.

590 The battalion-level staffs of the Battle Group and PRT were also supervised by the OTCOpn.

591 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 9.

592 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 20; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 11.

593 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18

594 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch army staff officer 18

The capstone of the pre-deployment training was the *Uruzgan Integration* exercise. In this three-week exercise all subunits would be trained according to scenarios based on experience from theatre. The first iteration had to be built up from scratch. Experiences from the DTF or from SFIR in Iraq were not used by the developers of the exercise. The first two weeks were still reserved for training the subunits while the third week evaluated the TFU in its entirety.[595] Although spectacular, with over a 1,000 participating troops, a multitude of military vehicles and a large amount of role players (posing as both population and adversary), questions were raised about the effectiveness of this integration exercise for the levels of the Battle Group and TFU-staffs. In a field training exercise of this scale, combined with the intensity of the scenario, the staffs were hard-pressed to stay abreast of the developments. As a result, the intensity of the exercise did little to improve the proficiency of the staff.[596] Another point of critique was the continuous emphasis of kinetic activities such contact drills during the exercise. TFU-commanders argued that interagency aspects should have received more attention as this was the core of the mission.[597] However, during the first rotations, crucial personnel such as the political advisors did not always participate in the exercises.[598] Over time, the attendance of civil servants to the predeployment training improved, which had a positive impact on the collaboration in theatre.[599]

In general, the predeployment training of the Battle Group and the TFU-staff saw no substantial changes over the course of the years. Small adjustments were mostly made based on theatre visits by instructors of the Combat Training School and the OTCOpn. Additionally, experience was incorporated into the training by using personnel from previous deployments to observe and coach new rotations. However, there was no direct link between the training organizations and the evaluation processes. Learning mechanisms were thus arranged in a semi-formal way at lower organizational levels. This meant that these provisions had little connection with the formal evaluation process. Furthermore, efforts to diffuse experiences and best practices received limited institutional support. Dissemination mechanisms such as information bulletins, road shows and mentored training saw limited central coordination ensuring comprehensive implementation. Overall, this lack of organizational influence hamstrung a formal learning process in the force preparation for Uruzgan.

595 Interview Dutch army staff officer 20.

596 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18.

597 Kitzen, et al., *Soft Power*, p. 177-178; interview Dutch army staff officer 15.

598 Interview Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 2

599 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 23.

4.3.2: Operational analysis and lessons learned processes

From the start of the mission, the Dutch military had two formal processes through which it could gauge the impact of the mission. This subsection will focus primarily on the processes themselves, rather than the substance of the assessment and evaluations. The findings and impact of these processes will feature in the subsequent parts of this chapter. The first process was dedicated to the assessment of the mission's progress itself. As such, it was aimed at the effects the mission had on the operational environment and could be used for adjusting operations and plans. The second process pertained to what the Dutch military as an institution could learn from the mission. Although these lessons could potentially benefit the campaign in Uruzgan, this process was also directed at the armed forces in general and future missions.

4.3.2.1: Campaign assessment

For the campaign assessment, operational analysts from the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) were seconded to the planning section (G5) of the TFU-staff. The key challenge for the analysts was how to measure the mission's effectiveness and acquire the relevant data to inform the metrics. Purely military effects such as killed enemy combatants and confiscated weapons are straightforward to tally. However, the Master Plan was built on the premise that the support of the local population would be the main effort of the operation. Apart from providing security, this called for activities that would influence the population's perception. These activities were consolidated under the themes "governance and justice" and "development". Beyond the fact that these activities were not military competencies, their effects were difficult to measure. According to the analysts, perceptions cannot be measured so they had to rely on the population's behavior.[600] However, the analysts found that the presence of the TFU's units affected the behavior of the Afghans, thereby skewing the veracity of the acquired data. A further complication, as the analysts were aware of, was that the population of Uruzgan was by no means a monolithic entity. Hence, surveys among certain parts of the population had little generalizable value if these differences could not be considered. Understanding these nuances was therefore crucial. A final complicating factor to the assessment was that the effects could not always be attributed to the activities of the TFU. For instance, activities by the Taliban also affected the behavior of the population.[601] As a result, collecting sufficient data to produce forecasts on which operations could be based was inherently difficult.

600 Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleeuw and Han van der Have (2007). Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan: Van het schaakbord naar een bord spaghetti. *Militaire Spectator, 176*(12), p. 552.

601 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 3; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch army reservist 4; Dutch army reservist 2.

Moreover, the analysts were unable to go "beyond the wire" to gain a firsthand understanding of Uruzgan and the effects of the mission. Patrol reports by infantry platoons and PRT mission teams were not always available to the analysts. In addition, these documents did not necessarily capture the data that the analysts were after.[602] To enhance their understanding of Uruzgan's dynamics and thereby the mission's progress, the analysts from TNO regularly conducted interviews with commanders and staff officers from the Battle Group and PRT throughout the mission. Additionally, the civilian personnel of the task force were often consulted for their view of the mission. An extra perspective was added by talking to Afghans in the so-called PRT-house within Camp Holland and the increasingly present representatives of NGOs and IOs in the province.[603]

A potential other source of data was the intelligence section of the TFU-staff (G2). For a variety of reasons, this proved to be no panacea. First, the task for the intelligence complement of the TFU was to provide the commander with an understanding of the environment on which he could make his decisions and issue his orders. Furnishing inorganic operational analysts with data was decidedly a lower priority. According to some of the analysts, the intelligence process was overly focused on the enemy.[604] A second and related problem was that the analysts held little sway over the intelligence collection plan that guided the queries of the various intelligence sensors. Instead, the analysts could only submit a "request for information" (RFI) when they needed specific data.[605] Lastly, most of the intelligence was classified and was often unavailable for the analysts, especially in the preparation phases for rotations. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, information was in practice shared with the operational analysts, but there was no formal mechanism for this.[606]

The efforts to acquire meaningful data to assess the campaign resulted in biweekly assessments for general activities and "intermediate assessments" that covered three months. Normally, these intermediate assessments would gauge the effect of an operation of the same length that was (sometimes) centered around a specific area or theme. Assessments with a larger temporal scope were not provisioned at the task force level. This seemed a logical consequence of the rotation schedule for the TFU-staff of six months in which at best two full cycles of operations and assessments could be completed. In practice however, the task force staffs made an operational planning that would cover the rotation with the successors. Through communications with the Netherlands and the pre-deployment reconnaissance, the new commander and his staff were kept abreast of the planning process and could exert some influence. This approach had inherent trade-offs. The main rationale for these

602 Smeenk et al. Effect gebaseerde aanpak, p. 559.

603 Interviews Dutch civil-servant 1; Dutch army reservist 2; Dutch army reservist 3.

604 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 2; Dutch civil servant 1

605 Interview Dutch civil servant 1

606 Ingrid van Bemmel, Aletta Eikelboom and Paul Hoefsloot (2010). 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan. *Militaire Spectator*, 179(4), p. 209.

staggered plans was of course to assist the new task force with an active operation which it could continue so as to prevent an operational hiatus in Uruzgan.[607]

Operational analysis (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Data-collection	Efforts to acquire relevant information for analysis	Various informal initiatives, no conclusive adaptation	Distinct organizational cultures
Integration in TFU	Central element in TFU-staff	Informal adaptation from first rotation	Leadership, organizational culture
Reporting	Adjustment of reporting to operational cycle	Informal adaptation	Organizational culture

Table 4.1: Learning processes in operational analysis

4.3.2.2: Lessons learned processes

The second formal evaluation process was directed from the level of the Defence Staff. Guided by a directive of the Chief of Defence, deployed units and their commanders were required to draft an assessment with observations on best practices and deficiencies. This process had two main objectives. The first aim was to provide political accountability towards parliament. Naturally, the second goal of the directive was that the armed forces in general would learn from these observations by analyzing them, remedy shortfalls and implement best practices or solutions to improve its performance in new missions. Although all participants in a mission could mention general observations, commanders, staff sections and units were expected to focus on their areas of expertise. [608]

However, in a 2005 report by the Inspector-General of the Armed Forces, the state of the lessons learned process in relation to missions was criticized. First, there was no central oversight of the collection and implementation of lessons learned, either at the Defence Staff or the individual services. Secondly, the services had devolved their learning elements to lower echelons of their organizations. A third problem was that the organizations responsible for the learning process were often inadequately staffed and as a result had no capacity to enact change based on the lessons. Finally, the report found that the services and Defence Staff was focusing on preparing for missions rather than the execution. Consequently, the

607 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 6.

608 Inspecteur-Generaal der Krijgsmacht. (2006). *Jaarverslag 2005*. Den Haag : Ministerie van Defensie, p.108.

effectiveness of a mission was left to the commander on the ground. This evidently restricted the longer-term view of the mission and the learning ability of the organization. [609]

The products of these evaluations were collected by the evaluation department at the Defence Staff. In the case of Uruzgan, this institutional process yielded so many observations that a portion had to be culled, for instance because of duplications or when potential remedies were within the competency of the TFU or single units.[610] Somewhat curiously, this department's primary task was and remains to report the effects of missions for parliamentary oversight and accountability. In addition to this task, the evaluation department investigated and reported on specific incidents such as the battle of Chora in 2007 and a fatal friendly-fire accident in 2008. Regarding this role, the department restricted itself to reconstructing factual accounts; drawing conclusions was left to other actors.[611] Occupied with this set of tasks, directing the implementation was beyond the competency of the evaluation department.

In addition to the formal process at the Defence Staff, yet another procedure existed at the level of the army in which observations from Uruzgan were captured. This constituted interviews and plenary sessions in which commanders at every level from a rotation could share their knowledge. Furthermore, there were assemblies for specific fields of expertise in which service members from across a rotation discussed their experiences to identify pertinent lessons for their areas.[612] These evaluation sessions were initiated by the Dutch Army's division headquarters in cooperation with the Education and Training Center for Operations (OTCOpn). At that time, the divisional headquarters was in the process of being abolished as part of larger reorganizations within the Dutch armed forces. Officers tasked with standing-down the headquarters consequently had the time to support this process.[613]

The topics discerned by these evaluation sessions would not have differed from the written evaluations at the Defence staff level. Indeed, there was a significant duplication of effort between the two evaluations processes. A marked difference was the attendance of officers from the OTCOpn at the army sessions. This allowed the quick turnaround of observations into adjustments in training and mission rehearsal exercises. Furthermore, the information collected was used to write doctrinal bulletins with the most salient knowledge acquired in the previous rotations. Unfortunately, the observations that were collected over time

609 IGK, *Jaarverslag 2005*, p. 115-116.

610 Interview Dutch army staff officer 8.

611 Interview Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch Navy staff officer 1

612 interviews Dutch staff officer 4; Dutch army staff officer 23; Dutch army staff officer 7.

613 Interview Dutch army staff officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch army staff officer 4.

by the Dutch army were not processed and stored in a database and were consequently not accessible for institutionalizing this knowledge.[614]

Participation in the army's evaluation was not the only way in which members of the OTCOpn gathered observations about the mission in Uruzgan. Officers and NCOs actively sought positions within the TFU to gain firsthand experience in Afghanistan with the aim of enhancing the mission preparation for subsequent rotations.[615] Furthermore, there were frequent staff visits from the OTCOpn to gather the latest insights from the field.[616] Thus, the Dutch army had a semi-formal process for collecting observations from Afghanistan. While the several ways in which information was gathered were supported by the army as an institution, the efforts were not part of a centralized and structured endeavor. As such information gathering remained highly dependent on individual service members for its continuation.

Still, other initiatives to disseminate the lessons were employed. For instance, the Army organized a 'road tour' in which service members visited units to share their experiences from Uruzgan.[617] Another initiative consisted of officers who compiled observations from both the first TFU-rotations and Dutch officers who held positions at Regional Command South. This resulted in two "information bulletins" that enumerated early lessons from Afghanistan. Ranging from technical to the operational level of military activities, the bulletins focused on the necessity of adopting a population-centric counterinsurgency approach.[618] While not discounting the requirement for the use of military force, the Dutch Army had to become more proficient in integrating non-kinetic activities. By writing these documents, the authors aimed to disseminate the observations for the benefit of subsequent rotations. While not meant as prescriptions, the authors thought of the bulletins as supplements to LDP II-C.[619] Ultimately, these observations could be incorporated into a new doctrine for land operations. Although the bulletins were included in the read-ahead materiel for TFU-staffs, they were not distributed across the Army.[620] Later on in 2009, the bulletins were redacted and published as articles in the journal Militaire Spectator.[621]

While there were multiple evaluation mechanisms for the Uruzgan campaign, they were largely disconnected (see table 4.2). To a certain extent, this is understandable as they

614 Interview Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch army staff officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 8.

615 Interview Dutch army staff officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 8.

616 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 9

617 Interview Dutch army staff officer 23

618 See: OTC Operatien. (2007/2008). *Informatiebulletin 07/02 and Informatiebulletin 08/01*. Amersfoort.

619 OTC Operatien, *Informatiebulletin 08/01*, p. 2.

620 Kitzen et al., Soft Power, p.181-182; Interview Dutch army staff officer 10

621 See Pieter Soldaat (2009). Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (I). *Militaire Spectator, 178*(5), pp. 252-266; (2009). Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (II). *Militaire Spectator, 178*(6), pp. 340-349.

served different purposes. Obviously, the campaign assessment itself was meant to track the progress of the mission across a variety of effects and to inform adjustments to the campaign plan. Indeed, the continuous assessment of the campaign was the inspiration for the larger changes to these plans as the campaign progressed in time. A striking aspect of this process was the leeway these analysts were granted in drafting the successive campaign plans. Moreover, the analysts were often the initiators of extensive changes in the campaign plan. At the same time, the formal (at the defence staff level) and semi-formal evaluation mechanisms (at the army level and below) were mostly concerned with technical, procedural, and organizational aspects of the mission and the organization.

During the TFU operations, the aforementioned processes were unwieldy for swift remedial action to resolve identified deficiencies. This deficiency in the learning process was recognized by the officers tasked with the evaluation at the Defence Staff. [622] Therefore, the evaluation process was inherently more attuned for institutionalization of lessons without the pressure of current operational demands. Of course, TFU commanders, and through them the rest of the task force, had other means to raise pressing issues to the Netherlands such as weekly situation reports ("sitreps" in military parlance).[623] Yet, the uncoordinated parallel existence of multiple avenues to share identified deficiencies had the potentially negative consequence of that problems were reported but not addressed.[624] Whether the formal process was better-endowed for institutionalizing knowledge beyond the Uruzgan mission shall be explored in the section that deals with the impact of the TFU on the Dutch military.

Learning processes (themes)	**Manifestation**	**Stage of learning**	**Influencing factors**
Learning process	Perceived to be insufficient across armed forces	Recognized deficiency	Organizational politics, resource allocation
Disconnect between department and service (Army)	Additional evaluation by the army	(semi-)formal adaptation	Organizational politics
Implementation of lessons at joint level	Most identified lessons were in the purview of services	Recognized deficiency	Organizational politics, resource allocation

Table 4.2: Developments in lessons learned processes

622 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified en best practices van de voortrekkers.* Den Haag, 06/126

623 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

624 Nationaal Lucht- en Ruimtevaart Laboratorium. (2011). *Systematisch Borgen Lessons Learned.* Amsterdam, p. 86-87

4.3.3: Planning and executing the campaign

4.3.3.1 The Master Plan (2006-2008)

Lacking practical guidance on how to conduct the campaign, the first TFU rotation drafted a plan on its own initiative, called the TFU Master Plan. The plan was intended to provide guiding principles on how to attain the stated objectives. It was initiated by the operational analysts who were detached from TNO to augment the plans section (G5) of the TFU-staff. Although their primary task was to collect data and gauge the effects of the mission in order to guide the planning process, they took on a leading role for drafting the plan.[625]

Before the deployment, the operational analysts drafted a first plan that was inspired by the Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBOA). It found its origin in the campaign plan that was drafted for the ISAF-mission in Kabul in 2003. The reason for this relationship was straightforward: the authors of the plan had been deployed to Kabul as well. Furthermore, experiences from the PRT in Baghlan informed the drafting process.[626] To identify the relevant effects in what they assessed to be a counterinsurgency mission, the analysts used the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine (the aforementioned LDP II-C). Consequently, the plan included effects beyond security, such as development, governance, and the perception of the local population. Despite their vital role in the preparations and their considerable leeway, the analysts had no access to intelligence reports, however. Naturally, this stymied their ability to understand Uruzgan's dynamics. Instead, the information from the Civil Assessment was used.[627]

In accordance with the objectives and discourse set out by the Dutch political leadership, both the military planners and the operational analysts acknowledged that the TFU must seek to generate effects beyond defeating the adversary. Rather, the TFU was to achieve effects in the political, informational, and economical domains, as well as providing security. For the deployed units, this required additional capabilities such as psychological operations-detachments (PsyOps) and Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) experts. Moreover, other actors such as interagency partner and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were to provide complementary competencies and expertise.

After the TFU became operational on August 1, 2006, the draft of the campaign plan was adjusted according to local conditions. A substantial amount of the input for these adjustments was provided by the civilians of the staff who felt that they were being ignored

625 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 4

626 Smeenk et al., Effect gebaseerde benadering, p. 554-557.

627 Interviews Dutch army reservist 3; Dutch army reservist 1.

by the staff, the Battle Group and the PRT.[628] Eventually, the Master Plan was finalized in October 2006. It formulated the TFU's mission as: "assist[ing]the local government in building its capacity, authority and influence and prioritising and synchronising reconstruction and development programs with assisting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in order to set the conditions for a secure and stable Uruzgan Province."[629] Recognizing that a secure and stable Uruzgan would not be reached within the Dutch timeframe of two years for the mission, intermediate objectives were set. After two years, the TFU must leave behind: "A relative secure and stable environment in the vicinity of the district centres and along the routes connecting them". Additionally, "a functioning provincial governance structure, [...] accepted by the majority of the population "must be present.[630]

The objective for the Master Plan itself was to serve as a guidance for operations and ensure that every part of the Task Force shared a common understanding of the mission and the situation within Uruzgan. To achieve the desired end state by ISAF and TFU, the Master Plan identified four operational objectives that were designated: governance and justice, development, security, and a credible task force. The first three objectives were in accordance with the lines of operation as espoused by ISAF-command in Kabul and ISAF RC-South in Kandahar. Adding the fourth objective of a "credible task force" indicated the recognition that the TFU needed the support of the local population, other actors in the province and the domestic public for its operations.[631] In order to work towards these four goals, the plan listed a set of 23 interdependent effects. For all these effects, the plan registered indicators to mark the progress (or lack thereof) towards the effect. Accordingly, operations could be adjusted based on the effects of the mission.

According to the plan, the TFU would focus its operations on the largest population centers in Uruzgan: Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawud. Designated as Afghan Development Zones (ADZs), these areas could potentially benefit the most from improvements in security, governance, and development. The ADZs would have a permanent ISAF presence and receive the bulk of development projects. The district of Chora would be a supporting effort. The main objective for this district was to reduce negative influences on the Tarin Kowt-ADZ. Over time, the ADZs would be expanded and eventually linked. Moreover, the TFU assessed that this approach would be feasible given the resources available.

Although ambitious, the Master Plan was candid about the limitations of what the TFU could achieve and how the effects of the mission could be measured. First, the mission's success depended on the ability to enhance the Afghan authorities' governance and its security

628 Interviews Dutch army reservist 3; Dutch army reservist 1

629 Task Force Uruzgan. (2006). *1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force Uruzgan Master Plan.* Tarin Kowt, p. 5.

630 TFU. *Master Plan*, p. 5.

631 Smeenk et al., Effect gebaseerde benadering, p. 553.

forces. The TFU was aware that the provincial authorities were plagued by understaffing, poor levels of education and corruption. Moreover, the newly appointed provincial governor Munib was entirely dependent on the Dutch support as he had no local power base. As for security, the Master Plan envisioned that the Afghan security forces would bear most of the responsibility for this aspect. However, the presence of the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the province was limited to an under-strength battalion (*kandak*). In terms of personnel, the TFU had little influence to increase the ANA's numbers in Uruzgan. Due to its low quality and corruption, the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Uruzgan was a liability rather than an asset.[632] This meant that the TFU would have to be far more engaged in security than initially planned.

At the time of its publication, the Master Plan did not inform the actions of the first Battle Group and PRT. As these subunits had become operational before the TFU-staff, the commanders had understandably moved forward instead of waiting on directives from a yet non-existent higher echelon. This is not to say that the activities employed by the Battle Group and PRT were inherently incompatible to the overall mission, however they indicated a lack in unity of effort.[633]

Essentially, the Master Plan was too late for the first TFU-elements to adopt.[634] An additional problem was that the friction between the commanders of the Battle Group (lieutenant-colonel Van der Sar) and the PRT (lieutenant-colonel Tak). To a certain extent, the Battle Group operated on the turf of the PRT by engaging local leaders and tribal elders.[635] In the meantime, Tak and the PRT mostly engaged the official provincial authorities. In particular, the newly appointed provincial governor, Munib, required assistance in finding his feet in Uruzgan; lacking an informal power base in the province, he had to rely on the international forces in the province to assert his authority.

The disconnect between the TFU's two main elements of the first rotation were eventually resolved by integrating the PRT's mission teams in the infantry companies. However, due to the separation of the two commands the issue of which unit had primacy within the TFU remained. Colonel Vleugels adopted the view that the PRT should be in the lead and advised to integrate the units, in order to preempt these discussions in subsequent rotations. However, his suggestion fell on fallow ground in the Netherlands as it was deemed impractical by the Defence staff.[636] Follow-on rotations had already been assigned and preparing for deployment, so to adjust the parameters midcourse would upset this process too much.

632 TFU. *Master Plan*, p. 12.

633 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8

634 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 7

635 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 389-390.

636 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch army reservist 1

While the internal arrangements were partially settled, the force configuration proved to present a more daunting problem. This was particularly felt by the Battle Group. Infantry platoons, invariably augmented with non-organic specialists and supporting capabilities, were judged to be the "smallest unit of action" for operations.[637] The Battle Group had twelve infantry platoons (eleven rifle platoons and one reconnaissance platoon) to ensure presence within the area of operations. Before the mission, Army leadership even sought to limit the number of platoons to nine to conform to the cap in personnel. Only after forceful protests from the TFU and Battle Group did the Army-staff relent.[638]

It is a military truism that a commander normally would like to have more assets than are assigned, but the required number of infantry platoons continued to be a bone of contention throughout the first years of the mission.[639] Moreover, beyond rest and maintenance the infantry platoons had to guard the FOB's in Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawud and were used for convoy operations along the supply routes. Consequently, the number of infantry platoons present within the ADZs at any given time was limited. Furthermore, due to these restraints it was not possible to assign the infantry platoons to specific areas to foster familiarity as had been the plan by the Battle Group.[640] In essence, the TFU's presence in the ADZs had a transient character. For SFTG Viper this meant that they had to function as a fire brigade in the province.

This dearth of infantry capacity was exacerbated by the situation in southern Afghanistan in the summer of 2006. Across the southern provinces, insurgents heavily contested the deployment of ISAF Stage III, particularly in Helmand and Kandahar (see the subsequent chapters for more details). When RC-South initiated operation Medusa to reduce the insurgents' pressure in two districts in Kandahar, Dutch forces were used in support. A company from the Dutch Battle Group took over FOB Martello from Canadian forces and another company was kept in reserve.[641]

Crucially, the TFU also deployed a semi-permanent presence to Chora at the outset of the mission. After the earlier clearing operations in that area, the Australians expected the TFU to conduct regular patrols to show presence. Although the TFU recognized the potential benefits of securing parts of the Chora district and winning over its population, it proved to

637 See Olof van Joolen and Silvan Schoonhoven (2021). *Schaduwoorlog Uruzgan: De rauwe werkelijkheid van de Nederlandse missie in Afghanistan*. Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam.

638 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 7.

639 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

640 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 12; Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 8.

641 Piet van der Sar (2007). Kick the enemy where it hurts the most: de steun van de bevolking, daar gaat het om. *Carre, 30*(1), p, 12.

be a further drain on the task force's capacity.[642] Officers within the TFU voiced concerns that presence in Chora diverted resources that were intended to the ADZs.[643]

Looking back at the first rotation of the TFU, key officers acknowledged that the establishment of the task force in the province had been the prime effort. Shortage of infantry capacity, intelligence, and the initial inadequate synergy within the TFU proved to be detrimental to realizing the ambitions as set out in the Master Plan. Furthermore, the security situation in Uruzgan hampered the efforts in development. The same applied to the local provincial governance. Newly minted governor Munib had the backing of the Dutch but held no power beyond his compound at that stage.[644] Evidently, the TFU had some early accomplishments of which the cooperation with some tribal elders in the Deh Rafshan area had been the most conspicuous. Engagement with the local population contributed to the relative calm in the TFU's area of responsibility. Although the Dutch saw their fair share of fighting during this period, their presence was not challenged to the extent that the British and Canadian task forces experienced in Helmand and Kandahar. While this difference cannot be ascribed solely to the TFU's activities, as Uruzgan's dynamics had a crucial role as well, the discrepancy with the other provinces was noted in Afghanistan.

The consecutive rotations under command of colonels Hans van Griensven (January to July 2007) and Nico Geerts (August 2007 to January 2008) were to build upon the foundations laid by the first rotation. From the outset of the second rotation, colonel Van Griensven declared that the Uruzgan mission was a typical counterinsurgency campaign. According to him, the TFU's task was to make the Taliban irrelevant by winning the local population's support. The second rotation adopted the Master Plan as guideline for its operations and did not make significant adjustments to it.[645] However, there was skepticism within the TFU-staff regarding the feasibility of measuring progress of the campaign.[646]

The main themes for the second rotation were providing security and establishing a credible force. Governance and development were less pronounced as the threat posed by insurgents continued to hamper the efforts in these areas. Van Griensven's initial plan was to expand the Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawud ADZs and ultimately to link them. During the first half of 2007, the TFU would concentrate its activities in the Deh Rafshan-area. As Dutch troops were engaged by insurgents in this northern part of the Tarin Kowt-ADZ, substantial reconstruction activities could not be conducted. Van Griensven recognized that he did not have sufficient

642 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 4

643 Interview Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 12.

644 Interview Dutch commanding officer 4.

645 interview Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch Air Force officer 1.

646 Interview Dutch army staff officer 9.

forces to his disposal for permanent presence within the ADZs. Consequently, the TFU could not move beyond clear-operations and exploit tactical successes against the insurgents.[647]

Crucially, the lack of TFU-troops could not be balanced by Afghan security forces. The ANA-kandak in Uruzgan continued to be understaffed. Furthermore, the Dutch Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) had to vie with the American Special Forces for this scarce capacity. As a result, the ANA-troops were used as a flying brigade and at least provided an Afghan aspect to the ISAF-operations in the province. Unfortunately, the ANP in Uruzgan remained a problem child. According to TFU-reports from this period the ANP actually deteriorated in quality.[648]

An additional drain on the capacity of the TFU was its presence in the Chora district. Although this district was (still) not explicitly marked as an ADZ, the TFU-staff understood its symbolic importance. If the TFU would withdraw from the district, it was presumed that the Taliban would retake control of the area. Furthermore, tribal elders and the population of Chora were generally well disposed towards the TFU.[649] Nevertheless, throughout the spring of 2007 it became increasingly clear that the Taliban were planning an attack on the district center. Skirmishes around police posts near the northern fringe of the Baluchi-valley ensued. Losing control of a friendly district center was understandably an anathema to ISAF in general and to the Dutch military in particular. Moreover, withdrawal from the area would subvert the objective of being a credible force within the province. Hence, the Battle Group established a permanent presence to Chora.[650]

Consequently, Chora became the overriding focus for the second rotation of the TFU. Indications of problems in Deh Rawud were for example recognized but less pronounced. In the Deh Rafshan, skirmishes and IED-attacks continued. As a result, the population's perception of security deteriorated, although the level of violence was lower than in 2006.[651] Accordingly, reconstruction efforts in the ADZs were hampered by the security situation and the inability of the PRT to operate without the overstretched battle group.[652] Simultaneously, the governance aspect of the mission showed a reversal as well increasingly erratic behavior by provincial governor Munib who displayed large spells of absence from the province. This negatively impacted the populations trust in the provincial authorities.[653] All this led members of the TFU-staff to question whether the means were sufficient for accomplishing the TFU's ambitions.

647 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 6; Dutch Air Force officer 1.

648 Interview Dutch commanding officer 2.

649 Interview Dutch commanding officer 9.

650 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*. p. 405-407.

651 Interviews Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch army reservist 4.

652 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch Air Force officer 1.

653 Interview Dutch commanding officer 9.

The situation around Chora culminated in June 2007 in a Taliban attack on the police posts and even the Chora district center. While the company from the Battle Group in Chora held fast to repel the attacks, a counterattack was organized by the TFU and ANA with substantial support by local militias. Ultimately, the combined ISAF and Afghan operation was successful in thwarting the Taliban designs on Chora, albeit with prodigious and later controversial amounts of fire and air support.[654] Although a reconstruction of this episode is beyond the scope of this research, the operation around Chora had a profound effect on the mission and on the Dutch perception of it.[655] The decision to stand and fight in Chora seemingly had a positive effect on the population's perception of the TFU. Although there was critique on how the operation was conducted from both ISAF's headquarters and Afghanistan's central government, locals valued fighting together with the TFU against a common foe.[656] As such, the Chora-operation was a significant boost towards attaining the Master Plan's objective of a "credible taskforce". For the Dutch public and political discourse, "Chora" drove home the difficult conditions in which the TFU had to operate. It further dispelled the oversimplification of a reconstruction mission.

Colonel Nico Geerts succeeded Van Griensven. He and his staff had focused during the preparation on planning a large clearance operation in the Baluchi-valley. The operation, named *Spin Ghar* was to be focused on dismantling the insurgents' logistical infrastructure in the valley rather than detaining or killing the insurgents themselves. Spin Ghar aimed to reduce the influence the insurgents had on the Deh Rafshan and Chora areas.[657] However, it was clear from the outset that the TFU could not establish a permanent presence in the Baluchi-valley as there were simply too few troops to do so. With significant additional resources from RC-South, Spin Ghar was executed in October and November 2007. In the event, the combined force met little resistance in the valley. In the aftermath of Spin Ghar outposts, staffed by Afghan forces, were established at the southern and northern entrances of the valley. As for the long-term effects of the mission, most observers were skeptical as insurgents returned unhindered to the Baluchi-valley in the next months.[658] Whether the subsequent relative calm in the Deh Rafshan and Chora areas was a consequence of the operation and the new outposts is hard to assess.

Despite this lull in parts of the province, the TFU sorely felt the lack of personnel. At the end of 2007, the Deh Rawud district became increasingly restive and thus required more attention

654 See for a comprehensive analysis of the Battle of Chora: Ivor Wiltenburg and Lysanne Leeuwenburg (2021). *The Battle of Chora: A Military Operational Analysis of the 2007 Defence of the Chora District Centre in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan.* Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy

655 Kitzen. *The Course of Cooption*, p. 402-419.

656 Interview Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch Air Force officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 6; Dutch army staff officer 17

657 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3

658 George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf (2010). The Dutch Coin approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21(3), p.440-441.

from the TFU. In communication with the Dutch Defence Staff and army headquarters, Geerts requested additional resources such as infantry platoons and civilian personnel. With regard to the infantry platoons a solution was found by deploying platoons that were specifically meant for guard duty on the FOB's in Deh Rawud and Tarin Kowt, thereby freeing up infantry platoons from the Battle Group for operations.[659] The civilian contribution increased from three to eventually nine individuals at the end of 2007.[660] Still, this increase in manpower did not mean that the battle group could maintain a permanent presence in the areas beyond Tarin Kowt, Deh Rawud and Chora. Expanding and linking the ink-spots as intended was not possible at the time.

In sum, the ambitious objectives as stated by the TFU were still a long way off at the end of 2007. This was caused by a combination of the resilience by the insurgency and the lack of troops within the province to move to the "hold" and "build" phases in line with the (informal) counterinsurgency approach of the TFU. While the Dutch troops acknowledged the need for perseverance in its operations, there remained a discrepancy between the ambitions set out in the Master Plan and the initial allotted two years for Dutch operations in Uruzgan. Nevertheless, the security situation in the Deh Rafshan and Chora improved gradually over the course of 2007, in part due to the operations by the TFU and the OEF-forces in the province. This was augmented by the continuous engagement of the local authorities and tribal leaders by the PRT. Over time, the rotations could build on each other's understanding of the province's dynamics, although this was by no means a flawless process.[661]

The TFU's mission was further significantly influenced by events at the end of 2007 that were beyond the control of the task force. First, Munib was replaced by Hamdam as provincial governor. Like Munib, Hamdam lacked an informal power base in the province and was therefore also dependent on TFU support. For the time being, the Dutch influence on the provincial government increased.[662] A second development was the deployment of the 4th ANA-brigade to Uruzgan in November 2007. Ultimately, 1,700 Afghan soldiers were stationed in Uruzgan. As a result, clearance operations could increasingly follow by establishing permanent presence and development activities. Moreover, the establishment of a brigade headquarters improved the quality of the administration of the now available *kandaks* (battalions).[663] Crucially, the Dutch armed forces matched this deployment by augmenting their OMLT-contingent. Finally, the Dutch government decided in December 2007 to extend the mission for another two years. As a result, the Dutch campaign was given more time to

659 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3

660 Ministerie van Defensie. (2009). *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF: 2008*. Den Haag, p. 7.

661 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 416.

662 Interviews Dutch Staff officer 33; Dutch commanding officer 5: additionally, the provincial chief of police was replaced

663 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 434; Dutch commanding officer 19.

accomplish its objectives. However, the task force itself did start to question the ambitions set out in the Master Plan going into 2008.

In the winter of 2007-2008, the Deh Rawud district came under increasing pressure by the insurgents. TFU-units on patrol were constantly harassed and the Dutch writ in the area contracted to the perimeter of Camp Hadrian. In an attempt to dislodge the insurgents' hold on the district, the battle group initiated operation *Kapcha As*.[664] The operation ended in a fiasco as in the darkness elements of the combined force opened fire on each other. As a result, two Dutch troops were killed and a third was severely wounded. Two Afghan soldiers were killed in another incident that was probably the result of friendly fire as well.[665]

Recognizing the lack of perceptible progress, Geerts requested additional guidance from the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs as a foundation on which he could base a new plan. The main issue with the original campaign plan was that its ambitions were both too vague and too grandiloquent.[666] The eventual result of this request was several documents that still offered little practical guidance and lacked a unitary vision. Consequently, the staff of the third rotation set out to work on a new plan on its own.[667]

4.3.3.2: The Focal Paper (2008-2009)

TFU-4, under the command of colonel Richard van Harskamp continued this work when it took over in January 2008. Although the staff of this fourth rotation were kept informed about the developments in Uruzgan, the plans section started working on a new plan when it arrived in theatre.[668] Again, the attached operational analysts from TNO took on a vital role in the drafting. The new plan, called the "Focal Paper", was finally published in July 2008. It made clear that the ISAF-campaign was essentially a counterinsurgency mission and explicitly stated that the TFU would conduct counterinsurgency operations.[669] As such, it reflected the increased attention towards counterinsurgency principles throughout the task force.

For the next two years the plan envisioned that the TFU would contribute an improved security situation in which the improved provincial authorities (with external assistance) could work towards the longer-term stabilization goals. Arguably the most interesting aspect

664 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 19; Dutch commanding officer 3.

665 Tweede Kamer Der Staten-Generaal. (2008, February 19). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme: Nr. 296. Den Haag

666 Interview Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 19.

667 Interview Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch commanding officer 3.

668 Interview Dutch army staff officer 11; Dutch army reservist 5, Dutch commanding officer 1.

669 Task Force Uruzgan/G5. (2008). *Focal Paper: Foundations for the Future.* Tarin Kowt, p.4

of the Focal Paper was that it stated that the objective of building Uruzgan into a developed province with a functioning government could realistically be attained by the year 2050.[670] In any scenario, Dutch troops would be long-gone by then.

These objectives, or "end states" as they were called in the document, pertained to "Governance", Socio/Economic Development and "A Safe and Secure Environment". In contrast to the Master Plan, the objective of a credible task force was omitted. The formulation of these three end states was concise and were divided into several lines of effort. To achieve the stated objectives, practical "desired effects", such as the number of literate adults, the construction of a bridge and the transfer of security responsibility to Afghan forces were formulated and planned for the remainder of the TFU-mission.[671] Another significant change from the Master Plan was that the TFU focused exclusively on the ADZs instead of trying to expand over the whole province. Furthermore, Chora was now included as an ADZ, thereby acknowledging the factual situation. The three ADZs were divided in smaller "Focal Areas". By distinguishing between these areas, the TFU could tailor its operations to the local conditions.[672]

Tellingly, the Focal Paper did not receive formal approval by the ministries of Defence and Foreign affairs when Van Harskamp sought this.[673] Although this lack of sanctioning at the department level did not affect the implementation of the new campaign plan, it showed that the interest in conduct of the campaign was limited at the ministerial levels. Furthermore, as the Focal Paper was not formal policy, it was not subject to political debate in parliament. This constrained the role of parliament to question the government's strategy formulation. As such, the formulation of campaign objectives remained an informal endeavor, initiated and implemented by the TFU's staff.

These changes in the campaign plan in mid-2008 were accompanied by significant adjustments in the TFU's configuration. The most prominent of these was that from the fifth rotation onwards, the TFU was to be led jointly by a military commander and the senior civilian representative.[674] By elevating the civilian component to the command level, the Dutch ensured that the contribution of civilian experts became an integral part of the military plans.[675] Concurrently, the number of civilians in the TFU was increased to twelve. These included new cultural advisors and an expert on narcotics. Furthermore, the intention of placing the PRT under civilian leadership was expressed. These adjustments were both a

670 Task Force Uruzgan/G5. (2008). *Focal Paper: Foundations for the Future.* Tarin Kowt, p. 7

671 TFU. *Focal paper*, p. 21-33.

672 Interview Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 11; Dutch commanding officer 17.

673 Interview Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch army staff officer 24.

674 The military commander of the TFU's fifth rotation was colonel Kees Matthijssen who had previously commanded a battlegroup in Iraq. The senior civilian representative was Peter Mollema.

675 Ministerie van Defensie. *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF*, p. 11.

reflection of the improved security situation within the ADZs by 2008 as well as a change in approach that increasingly favored non-kinetic activities.[676]

In contrast to the conceptual changes in the campaign plan, the increased emphasis on the civilian contribution was a formal adaptation. While successive TFU and PRT commanders had observed that additional civilian expertise capacity was needed, reinforcing the civilian component required the assent of the various departments.[677] Of course, the political and development advisors offered their observations and recommendations to their own organizations.[678] The developments regarding the PRT, non-kinetic effects and information operations will be discussed in more depth in subsequent sections. However, by the summer of 2008, the TFU and its environment had notably altered.

In the latter half of 2008, TFU-5 focused on strengthening a nascent program on Key Leader Engagement. By augmenting the TFU's intelligence component and improving the cooperation between the various subunits, the Dutch were able to engage tribal elders throughout the focal areas and exploit the relative calm around the population centers. This was aided by the increased presence of NGOs in the province.[679] A new large-scale operation in the Baluchi-valley, *Tura Ghar* (January 2009), was not opposed by insurgents. With the availability of sufficient troops from the ANA, this operation could now be followed by establishing a permanent presence in the erstwhile insurgent staging area. As such, it became feasible to enlarge the area in which the TFU could initiate development projects and facilitate linking the population with the provincial authorities. It seemed that the TFU's ink-spot had expanded.[680] Still, insurgents retained the ability to move into the ADZs and initiate suicide attacks and plant IEDs.[681] Beyond the ADZs, the Taliban enjoyed a freedom of movement that was intermittently contested by American and Australian (and from May 2009, Dutch) special forces.

676 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 432-433; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 21; Dutch commanding officer 17.

677 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 9.

678 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch civil servant 5.

679 Interview Dutch commanding officer 10; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 21.

680 Dimitriu and de Graaf. The Dutch Coin approach, p. 442-444.

681 Ibidem, p. 445.

4.3.3.3: The Uruzgan Campaign Plan (2009-2010)

While TFU-5 could exploit the improved security situation at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, the incoming rotation was working on a new campaign plan. Again, operational analysts from TNO initiated this process. Two analysts who had been deployed to earlier rotations of the TFU felt that the Focal Paper was too focused on the short term and needed to include more attainable objectives for the transfer of responsibility towards the Afghans. At the same time, the Focal Paper had certain qualities such as a more bespoke approach to the focal areas and clearer short-term and intermediate objectives. The main weakness of the Focal Paper, according to the analysts was that it was too military in outlook and did not inform the activities of other parties within the TFU and the province. Furthermore, the Focal Paper was focused on the activities by the (Dutch part of) the TFU.[682] Instead, the campaign plan should be more comprehensive to include the variety of actors in Uruzgan.

Primarily, the Afghan authorities were to be included in the plan, especially as the Dutch were presumably leaving in 2010. Far from being a unitary actor, the Afghans had to align their efforts among themselves. The provincial government, the national police, the national army and the intelligence and security service (National Directorate of Security, NDS) were constantly engaged in bickering over authorities. Thus, one of the preconditions of the TFU's success was to foster unity among the Afghan governmental organizations. Secondly, the countries contributing to the TFU had expanded to seven by 2009. For example, France had deployed an OMLT, while Slovakia provided guards for Camp Holland.

A third development that warranted consideration in the plan was the influx of NGOs in Uruzgan. By early 2009, 30 NGOs were present in the province, a marked increase from the handful in 2006. While the TFU could not control their activities, close coordination could potentially benefit the development of the province. An additional boon for the TFU was that the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan opened an office in Tarin Kowt in 2008. These developments reflected the improved security situation in the province and at the same time contributed to the ability to enhance its development and governmental structures.[683]

This multitude of actors in Uruzgan required a collaborative decision-making process. The objective of the new plan was not to control all the various actors' activities but to incorporate their goals and perspectives to align (or deconflict) the efforts in the province. With this plan, military and civil activities were integrated and identified common short-, mid-, and long-term goals. Furthermore, the analysts envisaged that the plan should be iterative in the sense that it could be adjusted according to conditions on the ground. These conditions and the effects of the operations had to be assessed through operational analysis

682 Interviews Dutch army reservist 4; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch Army reservist 2.

683 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch civil servant 2.

which then could inform changes to the plan. After each rotation, the plan and the situation in the province had to be reviewed.[684]

By itself, the rough draft of a new campaign plan needed a sponsor to be implemented in Uruzgan. The prospective TFU-commander, brigadier-general Tom Middendorp, invited the analysts to brief the outlines of the plan.[685] Middendorp embraced the plan and asked the analysts to continue working on it during the preparation for the deployment. Crucially, this acceptance was matched by the designated civilian representative of the sixth rotation, Joep Wijnands. This ensured that both the military staff and the variety of civilian experts could align their plans. Of course, some cultural differences had to be overcome, but this collaboration led to increased understanding between the service members and civil servants.[686] At the level of the Defence Staff, the nascent plan was regarded as an internal planning document. As such, the planners received little guidance or interference from The Hague.[687]

Based on prior experience in theatre, intelligence reports and advice from previous rotations, the relevant factors influencing the campaign were identified. This translated into nine development themes. These were similar to the objectives set out in the Master Plan and the Focal Paper. A primary distinguishing feature of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan was that it explicitly identified and incorporated the effects that were caused by other actors outside of the control of the TFU, such as Afghan authorities, NGOs, and local leaders. Recognizing the limits of the TFU's control, the plan sought to either mitigate, exploit, or influence the effects generated by other parties in the province.[688]

When the sixth rotation eventually deployed in early 2009, the staff set out to finalize the plan based on the conditions as they encountered them. The new campaign plan needed to include an outline on how to measure the performance of the TFU and the developments within Uruzgan. To this end the various actors in the TFU and beyond were consulted to identify metrics and how the data informing these metrics could be acquired.[689] Furthermore, the experts offered insight on how these metrics could be utilized to adjust the TFU's activities. The analysts acknowledged that most meaningful data would be qualitative in nature rather than quantitative. As such, neat charts depicting (preferably) positive trends were largely impossible to produce. Moreover, such data would be meaningless without the

684 Aletta Eikelboom, Rudi Gouweleeuw, Geert Roseboom and Jeffrey Schwerzel (2019). The Dutch Approach in OPSA: Lessons Learned from a Decade of OPSA in Afghanistan. In A. Shilling (Ed.), *Operations Assessment in Complex Environments: Theory and Practice*. NATO Science and Technology Organization., p. 254-257.

685 Interviews Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch Army reservist 2.

686 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4.

687 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4.

688 Kitzen, Rietjens and Osinga, Soft Power, the Hard Way, p. 171 - 172.

689 Interviews Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch Army reservist 5.

proper understanding of the context. Rather, the metrics were used to make sense of the environment and understand the effects the campaign had on it.[690]

An overriding concern for the Uruzgan Campaign Plan was that the Dutch involvement in Uruzgan was nearing its proposed end in august 2010. Although it was unclear at that moment how the ISAF-mission would continue in the province and whether this would include a residual Dutch presence, it was apparent that the Afghan authorities and security services would be called upon to take increased responsibility for Uruzgan.[691] This echoed the premise of the Focal Paper that envisaged that a stable and secure Uruzgan would be a long-term effort. The TFU would focus its efforts to supporting the Afghan authorities in assuming the responsibility for security, governance, and development. To this end, the TFU initiated the drafting of the "Uruzgan Security Plan" by the provincial Afghan governmental and security institutions. This Afghan-owned plan would both serve as a vehicle to foster cooperation among the various Afghan organizations and to provide a foundation for the final Uruzgan Campaign Plan.[692]

The analysis leading up to the UCP thus acknowledged the limitations of the TFU, both in time and influence, to steer the developments in the province. Accordingly, the end-state of the mission was kept 'fuzzy'.[693] In the definitive version of the UCP, the TFU's objective:

> *"[...], as part of ISAF, in partnership with ANSF and in coordination with GIRoA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the International Community, is to contribute to a reliable and effective government that can bring the government and the people closer together, and is able to provide a stable and secure environment and development progress in Uruzgan, in due course without ISAF support."*[694]

This formulation did not diverge significantly from the objectives as stated in the Master Plan and the Focal Paper. The defining element of the UCP was the explicit statement that the process towards this end state was iterative, based on conditions on the ground, instead of sequential. Compared to the Focal Paper, the UCP differed on two points. First, the boundaries of the focal areas were adjusted to represent the tribal dispositions in Uruzgan rather than geographical features. Based on the input of among others the tribal advisor, this adjustment better reflected the local dynamics and should improve the planning process towards the focal areas. A second change in the UCP was that it replaced the USECT methodology with the

690 Eikelboom, et al. Dutch approach in OPSA, p. 257-258.

691 Ingrid van Bemmel, Aletta Eikelboom and Paul Hoefsloot (2010). 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan. *Militaire Spectator*, 179(4), p. 198-199

692 Interview Dutch commanding officer 23

693 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch Army reservist 5

694 Sebastiaan Rietjens (2012). Between expectations and reality: the Dutch engagement in Uruzgan. In N. Hynek, & P. Marton (Eds.), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational contributions to reconstruction*. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 74.

classical "Shape, Clear, Hold, Build" framework for counterinsurgency.[695] Largely, this was a change in semantics. However, by employing this idiom the TFU aligned itself with that of ISAF RC-South.[696]

The eventual implementation of the UCP yielded mixed results. A positive development was that Middendorp and Wijnands succeeded in bringing the various Afghan actors in the province to the table with the aim of enhancing their collaboration. The provincial governor, the provincial chief of police, the brigade commander of the ANA and the provincial director of the NDS met periodically with the civil-military command team of the TFU. In what became known as the "Big Six" meetings, the TFU could consult the primary Afghan authorities collectively and facilitate aligning their perspectives.[697] Increasingly, the Afghan authorities were able to assume responsibility over the ADZs. In particular, the 4th ANA-brigade, assisted by the OMLTs, shouldered a substantial portion of the burden of providing security.[698]

Despite the profound analysis underpinning the UCP, the practical implementation was hampered by several problems. First, the UCP was classified and could consequently not be shared with civilian organizations, thereby hampering the ability to achieve a mutual understanding. Furthermore, the Dutch PRT saw a concurrent reorganization in which the CIVREP would become the PRT-commander and additional civilians would augment the mission teams. In practice, this led to confusion about the command responsibilities.[699] To make matters worse, the funding for PRT-projects was slashed by the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation.[700]As a result of these problems pertaining to the PRT, valuable time was lost in putting the new plan into action. Compounding these difficulties was the lack of adherence to the plan by Australian and American special forces. Of course, these allies had no command relationship with the TFU. Where the TFU strove to improve the delicate tribal relations in Uruzgan, the Australians and Americans believed that the security concerns warranted close collaboration with Matiullah Khan and his militia, who were still regarded by the Dutch as a negative influence in the province. Regardless of the merits of both perspectives, the lack of alignment between the TFU and its partners precluded a uniform implementation of the UCP.[701]
The litmus-test of the progress made in Uruzgan was to be provided by the presidential elections in August 2009. The ANSF would be primarily responsible for securing the polling

695 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 459-460

696 Interview Dutch civil servant 2.

697 Interview Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch commanding officer 23.

698 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 464-465.

699 Ibidem, p. 461.

700 Jair van de Lijn (2011). *3D "The Next Generation": Lessons Learned From Uruzgan for Future Operations*. Den Haag: Clingendael Institute, p. 34.

701 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 461-463.

stations in the province while the TFU-units would offer assistance when necessary.[702] During the "Big Six" meetings, the plans for the election day were drawn up. One of the most important aspects was the establishment of an Operational Coordination Centre-Provincial (OCC-P), in which the Afghan security forces could coordinate their activities for the elections and beyond.[703] Overseeing this important day was the seventh rotation of the TFU, led by brigadier Marc van Uhm and the civilian representative Michel Rentenaar.

From a security perspective, the elections were a success. No large incidents were reported in the province and TFU-units were not called to assist.[704] However, presidential election was marred by rumors of widespread fraud across Afghanistan. Moreover, the voter turnout was extremely limited. The numbers for Uruzgan reflected this with approximately one in five eligible voters casting their ballot.[705] Consequently, while the preparation and the execution of the plan for election day and the role of the ANSF could be heralded as a success, the overall result of the elections was sobering. A reason given for the low turnout in Uruzgan was that particularly members of the Ghilzai tribe had little confidence in the fairness of the elections.[706]

Despite the disappointment of the election, the seventh TFU-rotation saw some progress along the lines of security, governance, and development. Although the ANP remained a point of concern, the ANA proved a dependable partner for holding patrol bases, thereby increasing the presence of ANSF across the ADZs. In an operation in the Mirabad area (east of Tarin Kowt), ANA-units assisted by Australian forces established a new patrol base, expanding the writ of the provincial authorities.[707] Efforts to enhance provincial and district governments were increased as well. Regarding development efforts, the influx of organizations into the province continued. Dozens of organizations were now active in Uruzgan, and CIMIC-projects were adjusted to more long-term development.[708]

After the elections, the focus shifted towards continuing to build the ADZs and if possible, expand the TFU's footprint. An additional consideration was the large deployment of American troops to Afghanistan. Uruzgan saw the deployment of a large American helicopter detachment. Another effect of the "Afghan Surge" was that ISAF, now commanded by general Stanley McChrystal, officially embraced population-centric counterinsurgency. This approach was not dissimilar to the successive campaign plans of the TFU, especially from 2008 onwards. However, in an effort to align the multitude of national contingents, ISAF

702 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 23

703 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2009). *Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 366*. Den Haag, p. 89-10.

704 Interview Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 14.

705 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 469

706 The Liaison Office. (2010). *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*. Kabul: The Liaison Office, p. viii.

707 Interviews Dutch Marine staff officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 14.

708 Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*, p. 466-467.

headquarters in Kabul issued many stringent guidances on how the international troops were to adhere to the new operating concept. To mark progress, ISAF was adamant on the metrics for every province, such as the number of IED-attacks, schools opened, and police officers trained. This emphasis on quantifiable metrics by ISAF revealed a discrepancy with the UCP where the latter relied more on qualitative data to adjust the campaign.[709]

The UCP provided guidance for the first three months of the seventh rotation. After that, the UCP was to be reviewed.[710] The staff section for plans (G5) and the attached operational analysts adjusted the UCP on three points. A first adjustment was that the UCP was considered to be too linear in its phasing (shape, clear, hold, build). The staff contended that the phasing could be reversed based on conditions on the ground. For instance, an area that was designated to be in the "hold" phase could be overrun by insurgents and subsequently would have to be "cleared" again. A second modification was that the description of the effects should be distinguished according to the levels that were to attain them. In this way, the constituent parts of the TFU would be better informed of their objectives and how these could be assessed. A third point that required revision was that the effects by the various actors should be synchronized during operations. This particularly applied to non-kinetic effects by civilians such as the political advisors and cultural advisors. Despite the comprehensive character of the UCP, the civilian contribution was often not an integral part of operation planning.[711] With these adjustments, TFU-7 was confident that the UCP was fit to set up the eighth rotation for success.

By the time, the eighth rotation deployed to Uruzgan at the beginning of 2010, the question of whether the Dutch would retain a presence in Uruzgan beyond the summer of that year came to a head. Within the Dutch military, it was widely recognized that the mission had exhausted the organization. Any residual presence would therefore be significantly smaller to be sustainable.[712] At the political level, it was clear that the Netherlands would in any circumstance transfer its leading role to an ally, who had not been identified at the time. However, the governing coalition was heavily at odds over continuing the mission in Uruzgan. The Christian Democrats (CDA) were increasingly susceptible to the overtures by the allies to remain in the province. Withdrawal from Uruzgan would draw the ire from the United States who had reinforced the international effort and asked their European allies to match the investment. The CDA reasoned that a smaller mission, with a more civilian

709 Interview Dutch civil servant 1.

710 Interviews Dutch Marine staff officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 13.

711 Interview Dutch Marine staff office 2r; Dutch civil-servant 1.

712 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 13; Dutch commanding officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 12; Dutch army staff officer 23.

character would be a reasonable compromise between what was politically (and militarily) feasible and what was desirable from the standpoint of alliance politics.[713]

Conversely, the Social Democratic party (PvdA) was adamantly opposed to prolonging the mission to Afghanistan in any configuration. The Social Democrats found further ammunition for their opposition when an inquiry into the Dutch political support for Operation Iraqi Freedom concluded in January 2010 that the invasion in 2003 lacked a basis in international law. Thus, the coalition government of that time, headed by the CDA, had been wrong to offer its support. From the perspective of the PvdA, this lack of judgment by the Christian Democrats extended to the Afghanistan-mission. When the coalition government subsequently received an official request in February 2010 by NATO to prolong the mission, this was regarded by the PvdA as an attempt to force an extension. In a heated debate, the Social Democrats resigned from the coalition government that collapsed as a result. This sealed the fate of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan, as the political mandate ended in August 2010 and the decommissioned government could not extend it.[714]

Consequently, the Dutch campaign fizzled out over the spring of 2010 as the TFU started to plan for the withdrawal and handing over the responsibilities to the successors.[715] In the four years of the Dutch efforts in Uruzgan some progress had been made regarding security and development. The districts of Deh Rawud and Tarin Kowt were assessed to be under government control. Within the ADZs, insurgent activities were now mainly subversion and IED-attacks However, the security situation remained fragile.[716] Socio-economic development showed a marked improvement, albeit from penurious beginnings. More than a hundred schools had been opened and access to healthcare had proliferated. Economic activity in the ADZs had increased as well during the four years. Nevertheless, Uruzgan still performed at a lower level than other Afghan provinces.[717] With regard to governance, the assessment was bleaker. Government institutions remained understaffed, and the capacity of the judicial system was still limited.[718]

Perhaps the clearest accolade for the TFU-mission from an Afghan perspective was a letter by tribal leaders in March 2010 in which they appealed to the Dutch to retain a presence in Uruzgan. According to them, the Dutch attempts to balance the various interests of the tribes had worked well and led to tangible progress in socio-economic development. The signatories were apprehensive that this delicate balance would be disturbed by the successor

713 Kathleen McInnis (2020). *How and Why States Defect from Contemporary Military Coalitions.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 204-207.

714 Ibidem. p 207-209.

715 A redeployment task force was established to execute the withdrawal.

716 The Liaison Office. (2010). *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010.* Kabul: The Liaison Office, p. IX

717 Ibidem, p. 7-22.

718 Ibidem, p. 27-39.

of the TFU, the American-Australian led Combined Team Uruzgan (CTU).[719] Over the years, the Americans and Australians had continued to collaborate with Popolzai strongmen Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan. While their militias had proved effective against Taliban, they also used their relations with Western forces to pursue private vendettas. The petitioners were worried about Uruzgan reverting to the situation before the TFU had deployed. As the letter was to no avail, the tribal leaders were subsequently vindicated in their fears. Governor Hamdam was replaced later that month with an affiliate of the Popolzai power brokers. Over 2010, individuals who had cooperated with the Dutch were sidelined or even killed, thereby strengthening the hold that the Popolzai held over the province. Eventually, Matiullah Khan became the provincial Chief of Police. The modest progress made under TFU proved to be fragile.

Furthermore, it is important to note that despite the improving security situation between 2006 and 2010 violence and subversion persisted in Uruzgan. Although the presence of the TFU and the Afghan security forces in the ADZs was no longer contested by the beginning of 2008, IED-attacks, assassinations, and other subversive activities continued. Beyond the ADZs, groups of insurgents had far more freedom of action. To ensure that the security of Uruzgan's population centers could be consolidated, special forces (Dutch, Australian and American) conducted operations around the periphery of the province to disrupt the insurgents' activities.[720]

The Dutch campaign in Uruzgan was formulated in an informal way (see table 4.3). Throughout the TFU's existence, it was the staffs that initiated and applied the iterations of the campaign plans. An interesting aspect was the role of the operational analysts in the planning process. As staff augmentees, they had a larger role in drafting and adjusting the campaign plans than their formal task of campaign assessment would suggest. The analysts had the support of the TFU-commanders and the wider staff and sought advice of the TFU's subunits and other actors within Uruzgan province. A small group of individuals, the analysts ensured a rather informal learning process as they were the main drafters of the plans' objectives and the arbiters on their effectiveness.

Moreover, the informal aspect of the campaign's planning process was driven home by the lack of interest into the plans at the ministerial levels and beyond. Official sanctioning of the Focal Paper was withheld in 2008, while in the case of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan in 2009 it was not even sought. Regardless, this aloofness in The Hague had no adverse effects on the implementation of the conceptual aspects of the plans. Conversely, individual operations were to be briefed for approval to the Defence staff. This meant that tactical (and technical)

719 Letter to the elected representatives of the Dutch people, translated by Bette Dam; Interview Dutch civil servant 2; Kitzen. *The Course of Co-option*. p. 472-473

720 See Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 241-280.

activities were formally controlled from the Dutch capital while the planning and conduct of the long-term campaign was largely a bottom-up process without much interference.

Learning at the campaign level	Manifestations	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Campaign plans	Plans were adjusted by the TFU based on experiences	Informal adaptation	Organizational culture
Strategic guidance	Disconnect between strategic level and theater	Recognized deficiency	Organizational culture
Troop levels	Small reinforcements, continuous issues with troop cap	Limited formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, domestic politics, organizational culture
Configuration	Increase in civilian representation and dual command (2008) after evaluations by TFU	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, domestic politics
Rotation schedule	Short tours to spread broad experience, but detrimental to depth of knowledge	Recognized deficiency	Organizational politics, culture

Table 4.3: Learning processes at the campaign level

4.3.4: Vignettes of learning in Uruzgan

Beyond the largely informal learning processes at the campaign level, the Dutch forces adapted to more specific challenges in Uruzgan. In the following subsections, these learning processes are presented in vignettes that mirror the other recurring themes in counterinsurgency prescriptions. The first vignette examines the interagency cooperation through the experience of the Dutch Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). In the second vignette, developments within the Dutch intelligence process are studied. The third vignette looks at the adaptations in non-kinetic activities. Finally, the fourth vignette looks at counter-IED efforts as a manifestation to mitigate adversarial activities. As with the learning processes at the campaign level, the learning processes in each vignette will be analyzed through the theoretical lens of chapter 2, namely on the stage of learning, underlying dynamics and factors of influence.

4.3.4.1: The provincial reconstruction team

When reading the Dutch government's Article 100 letter of December 2005, one could be forgiven for getting the impression that the PRT dwarfed the Battle Group in size. Of course, the converse was true. The PRT initially numbered around 50 personnel, while the Battle Group was an augmented infantry battalion and had approximately 800 troops at its disposal. Despite this lopsided organizational arrangement, the PRT was responsible for two of the lines of operations: development and governance. Combined with the political emphasis on the reconstruction character of the mission, the expectation that the PRT would provide the main effort in Uruzgan was warranted.[721]

Although the Dutch military had acquired experience with the PRT-concept in Baghlan, the deployment of the PRT to Uruzgan marked a first for the Royal Netherlands Army. As there was no equivalent of a PRT in the army's standing organization, the unit's organization was built around a battalion staff or equivalent. For instance, the first two rotations were led by the army's tank battalions.[722] The PRT organization had a small staff with intelligence and operations sections. In the initial structure of the PRT, three civil servants were detached from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: a political advisor, a development advisor and tribal advisor.[723] Specifically trained CIMIC-officers complemented the staff. The field work was conducted by three (later expanded to four) mission teams composed of four service members. Although the mission teams had no fixed organization, they were generally comprised of officers and senior NCOs from the leading battalion, reinforced by additional personnel.[724] Given the novelty of the PRT-concept in the army, most of this personnel had no prior experience in the prospective line of work.

During the predeployment training, the PRTs were largely responsible for their own preparation. There was no established PRT predeployment training, nor would one be developed during the mission. This resulted in a recurring scramble for information and PRTs often found themselves facing similar challenges in their preparation phase.[725] Curiously, the first rotations did not seek out the experiences of the PRTs in Baghlan. Instead, additional knowledge was sought by engaging with previous allied PRTs in Afghanistan on their experiences.[726] A fixture in the PRT's predeployment training was participation in the Uruzgan Integration exercise. However, from the perspective of the PRT, this exercise was

721 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2005, December 22). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme nr. 193. Den Haag

722 Other PRTs were led by for example engineer battalions and field artillery battalions.

723 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2006). *Evaluatie PRT 1 Uruzgan.* Tarin Kowt.

724 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 20

725 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified en best practices van de voortrekkers.* Den Haag, 22/104

726 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9.

too focused on the Battle Group and held little training value for the mission teams and the PRT-staff.[727] A challenging consequence of the PRT's composite organization was that personnel from outside of the battalion staff's nucleus was often assigned on the basis of availability instead of expertise. An additional, related impediment was that a substantial number of positions was filled at a relatively late date, thereby hampering the preparation phase.[728] The combination of a lack of template training and "just-in-time" staffing led to an uneven level of knowledge among the personnel in the PRTs.[729]

While pioneering with the concept, the organization and the preparation, the PRT faced the assignment to foster development and governance in Uruzgan. At the beginning of the mission, this was however impeded by the dismal security situation. Due to the organization of the PRT the mission teams were dependent on force protection by the Battle Group. As described in the previous subsections, the available infantry capacity was stretched thin by the multitude of demands. Generally, the TFU-commanders and the Battle Group explicitly stated that the PRT was indeed the mainstay of the mission. Nonetheless, the infantry platoons required were often simply needed elsewhere. Although the availability of the Battle Group platoons gradually improved with the ANA-reinforcements and the guard platoons, the dependency of the PRT on force protection remained throughout the mission.[730]

After the second PRT-rotation, the tour length was increased from 4 to 6 months. The reason for this was that to allow for the relationships that the mission teams established to come to fruition and retain the knowledge acquired in theater.[731] While the benefits of this change were clear, the tradeoff was that the personnel of the PRTs now had a mandatory leave of 14 days as per Dutch regulations. This meant that during a period of two and a half months in the rotation the PRT was continuously transitioning personnel.

Another early evaluation point concerning the PRT was that it was predominantly composed of military personnel. The service members, particularly in the mission teams, were able to join the infantry on patrols and engage with the local population. Furthermore, when the PRT-staff and personnel in the mission teams hailed from the same unit, the familiarity paid dividends in the execution of the mission due to the developed trust.[732] However, despite

727 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified ISAF: Eindrapportage over de Nederlandse inzet bij de ISAF missie 2006 - 2010*. Den Haag), p. 44; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 20.

728 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2007). *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3: Periode maart t/m september 2007*. Tarin Kowt; interviews Dutch commanding officer 22; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 20.

729 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 22/104.

730 Task Force Uruzgan. (2007). *Assement Commander TFU-2*. Tarin Kowt; Task Force Uruzgan. (2008). *CDS Evaluatie C-1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force Uruzgan-III*.; interviews Dutch commanding officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

731 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2007). *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3: Periode maart t/m september 2007*. Tarin Kowt; interviews Dutch commanding officer 20; Dutch commanding officer 5.

732 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9.

these positive traits, most service members in the PRT had little experience or training in directing reconstruction projects. This was recognized within the TFU as an impediment to the PRT's effectiveness. During the early rotations, commanders of the PRT and TFU acknowledged that many of the activities conducted by the PRT required specific expertise. Moreover, they felt that the military character of the Task Force was at odds with both the political discourse on the 'Comprehensive Approach' and the operational demands of the counterinsurgency mission.[733] Accordingly, commanders requested additional support from civilian specialists from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation.[734]

This analysis drove main adaptation regarding the PRT during the mission, as it took on an increasingly civilian character from 2008 and onwards. The influx of additional civilian personnel was linked with the prolongation of the mission. The official announcement of the extension by the Dutch government explicitly stated that the civilian contribution of the PRT would increase in 2008 and that the PRT would eventually come under civilian leadership.[735] The subsequent parliamentary debate showed broad support for the proposed increased civilian character of the mission. With increased participation by personnel of other departments, the TFU could now adopt the *Comprehensive Approach* in the field.[736] Furthermore, the extension letter stated that the PRT would receive dedicated force protection, "as soon as possible".[737] Despite this tentative political directive, no practical steps were made to implement it in theater.

The civilian participation to the TFU was first augmented at the start of the fifth rotation when the mission came under the joint leadership of colonel Cees Matthijssen and the civilian representative Peter Mollema. At the beginning of the sixth rotation, the PRT came under civilian command. Nominally, the civilian representative would lead the PRT, however his duties as joint TFU-commander precluded him from giving daily guidance to the reconstruction efforts.[738] As a result, the leadership was delegated to both the deputy civilian representative and a lieutenant-colonel from the Dutch army. The former official was responsible for relations with the provincial government and contacts with the Dutch embassy in Kabul. For his part, the military officer led the mission teams and the internal

733 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 9.

734 Ministerie van Defensie. (2009). *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF: 2008*. Den Haag, p. 11; Lenny Hazelbag (2016). *De geïntegreerde benadering in Afghanistan: tussen ambitie en praktijk*. Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, p. 143-144. At the time, the Comprehensive Approach was designated as the 3D-approach (Defense, Diplomacy and Development). For consistency, the Comprehensive Approach is used throughout.

735 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, November 30). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 279. Den Haag, p.5.

736 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, December 17). Handelingen Tweede Kamer: verlenging ISAF. Den Haag

737 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, November 30). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 279. Den Haag, p. 32..

738 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch civil servant 5

processes of the PRT.[739] The efficacy of these complex command arrangements hinged on the personal relationships of the involved officials.[740] Furthermore, it was often unclear how the command responsibilities in the PRT were distributed for its members and for external parties.[741]

Beyond the new command arrangements, the PRT-organization was itself was augmented. It acquired additional personnel from the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation. Furthermore, at the end of 2008 a Dutch Police Mentoring Team, including a staff element was created within the PRT. International contributions included Australian and Slovakian staff officers and representatives from USAID and EUPOL. Further augmentations included a larger pool of functional specialists. Overall, by 2009 the PRT numbered approximately 125 personnel, a striking increase from the 50 individuals in 2006. Despite these reinforcements, the PRT still had no dedicated force protection.[742]

Over the course of 2009 and 2010, the stature of the PRT changed, constituting a second adaptation. With the improved security situation and the increased capabilities, the PRT now became the central element of the TFU.[743] As such the reality in the field came to resemble the public discourse of the mission. Consequently, the PRT became the unit that the other elements of the TFU would support.[744] More emphasis was placed on long term projects and promoting improved governance at the provincial and district levels. A constraining factor for the PRT to take on this leading role was, however, that its staff had not grown and thus was largely unable to coordinate the various efforts or plan larger scale PRT-led operations. A potential solution would be to transfer staff capacity from the TFU or Battle Group towards the PRT. Yet, the general organizational disposition remained in place to the end of the Uruzgan mission.[745]

In Deh Rawud and Chora the various units of the TFU could work in a more integrated fashion, specifically the Battle Group subunits and the PRT-mission teams, as there was less interference from their respective headquarters. By living in smaller bases or outposts, relations with the local population could be established more easily. Therefore, outlying district centers of Deh Rawud and Chora saw a better, continuous presence of the TFU than the surroundings of Tarin Kowt where the sprawling international base was located.[746] For a large part of the denizens of Camp Holland the only interaction with Afghans consisted

739 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 22; Dutch civil servant 5

740 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 22; Dutch civil servant 5

741 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 001/114.

742 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2009). PRT Briefing. Amersfoort.

743 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 002/122.

744 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 22

745 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 002/111.

746 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 22/108; Interview Dutch army staff officer 17; Dutch commanding officer 17.

of haggling with local peddlers over mementos and trinkets at the Bazaar every Sunday. To understand local dynamics, the PRT thus had to engage with the people from Uruzgan where they lived.

A third manifestation of adaptation was the gradual development of knowledge within the PRT about the province. Throughout the mission, the PRT strived to acquire a thorough understanding of Uruzgan's dynamics. This knowledge was necessary to identify the local leaders and how to engage them. From an intelligence perspective, the PRT was both a sensor and the main beneficiary of this information. However, with the small intelligence section and little formal training on this type of intelligence gathering, the PRT was hard-pressed to collect and process this intricate knowledge. To the credit of the respective early rotations, the PRTs grasped that the situation in Uruzgan was more complex than a Manichean conflict between the Taliban and the central government with neatly delineated tribal affiliations. Over the course of the first two rotations, the PRT produced a PowerPoint presentation "*Layers of conflict*" that discerned the various axes through which conflicts developed in Uruzgan. For instance, it identified residual grievances between the former *Mujahideen* and the communist government from the 1980's and the access to (natural) resources as drivers for conflict. These various axes led to shifting alliances between and within tribes with confounding cross-links for foreign interlopers.[747]

The members of the PRTs strove to leverage the gradually improving knowledge on Uruzgan by engaging various local leaders and their followers. Mission teams engaged with the tribes within their area of operations while the PRT-commanders and the POLAD's connected with the provincial governor and other provincial government officials in a bid to mentor them. Yet, this effort was initially makeshift as there was no comprehensive system in the TFU for *key leader engagement* (KLE). This had changed with the fourth rotation of the PRT initiating a program for KLE along with a database in which the information retrieved from the engagements could be stored.[748] This would ensure that subsequent rotations could build on the work of their predecessors.[749] With the addition of two new cultural advisors to the TFU in the summer of 2008 the PRT could further improve its understanding by fusing its intelligence with the knowledge of the civilian specialists.[750]

During the fifth rotation of the TFU, *Key Leader Engagement* was elevated in importance to the level of the Task Force staff. The TFU now integrated KLE in its staff processes and operations. As such, the fine-grained knowledge about Uruzgan's society could be leveraged

747 Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan. (2009). PRT Briefing. Amersfoort; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 9.

748 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 06/121.

749 interviews Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 3; Kitzen, *Course of Cooption* (2016), p. 424.

750 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 448.

for all lines of operations: security, development and governance. The integration of KLE was supported by the intelligence section of the TFU staff.[751] This was in itself a manifestation of how intelligence personnel increasingly collected and analyzed data beyond purely military considerations.[752] In a collaborative effort, the PRT, the intelligence section and the civilian specialists devised a process that synchronized KLE-efforts, consolidated the information that was acquired and identified potential ways to leverage it.[753] While the PRT, with its increased complement of civilians, remained responsible for most interactions with the local leaders, the TFU now increasingly guided these efforts and sought to utilize their results. This novel approach was expanded upon during the sixth rotation when the TFU-commander and the civilian representative initiated the "Big Six-meetings".[754] The later rotations continued this approach.[755] As KLE and the underpinning intelligence became an integral part of the TFU's operations, the PRT's position within the mission became even more salient.

To summarize this subsection, the PRT saw three developments over the course of the Uruzgan mission: the "civilianization" of the organizational structure, the position of the PRT in the TFU, and the accumulation of knowledge on the province and how to leverage it (see table 4.4). The increased civilian character was driven by the analysis of early commanders that the PRT required more civilian expertise. Of course, the deployment of additional civil servants to the province required institutional support and the collaboration of the other ministries. This was assured in the political decision to extend the mission. The changes in the PRT's stature in the TFU and its improved information position in Uruzgan were results of internal TFU learning processes. These adaptations were facilitated by the decrease in violence in the ADZs and the improvements in the intelligence process in the ADZs. Thus, the efficacy of the PRT-concept increased during the mission and was consequently touted by the involved departments as a blueprint for future missions.[756] However, the PRT remained a foreign body within the army as the task fell to different battalions and no central training program was established throughout the mission. As a result, there was no single unit (or 'anchor point') responsible for storing and sharing the acquired experiences.

751 Ibidem, p. 449-451.

752 Interview Dutch army staff officer 13.

753 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 448-449.

754 Interviews Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch commanding officer 23.

755 Interviews Dutch civil servant 1; Dutch Marine staff officer 2; Dutch army reservist 4

756 Ministerie van Defensie. (2011). *Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006 – 2010* . Den Haag, p. 102-113.

Provincial Reconstruction Team	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Civilian contribution	Increase in civilians attached to PRT and civilian command of the PRT (2008)	Formal adaptation	Learning mechanisms, civil-military relations
Status of the PRT in the TFU	Became more pronounced over time, based on conditions, experiences and plans. Yet, this was never formalized in structures	Informal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture
Leveraging knowledge on Uruzgan	Program on Key-leader engagement	Informal adaptation	Informal learning and dissemination mechanisms
Consistency in preparing the PRT	No formal specific training program. PRT was staffed by various battalions with attached personnel	Recognized deficiency	Lack of formal learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture

Table 4.4: Learning processes concerning the PRT

4.3.4.2: Intelligence

Understanding the environment in Uruzgan was a key consideration before the Dutch Task Force deployed. In the letter to parliament announcing the attention to deploy to Afghanistan, the Dutch government emphasized that intelligence was crucial for force protection. To ensure an adequate intelligence picture for the task force, "a broad array of intelligence collection and analysis assets would be deployed".[757] During the Dutch mission in Iraq (2003-2005), the intelligence capacity of the battle groups there had been too small in relation to the complex mission.[758]

Based on these experiences, the intelligence organization in the TFU was expanded. This resulted in a panoply of intelligence elements within the Task Force. For instance, the Battle Group, the PRT and the engineer company each had an intelligence section in their staffs. These intelligence efforts were augmented by a 'module' from the ISTAR-battalion.[759] An ISTAR-module consisted of a reconnaissance platoon, a team tasked with engaging sources

757 Tweede Kamer. *Dossier 279025, nr. 193*, p. 16.

758 Ministerie van Defensie. (2006). *Eindevaluatie Stabilisation Force Iraq (SFIR), 2003-2005*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie.

759 ISTAR : Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance.

for *human intelligence*, an electronic warfare section for intercepting radio transmissions, and later in the mission a remotely piloted vehicle (RPV) for surveillance. These diverse collection capabilities provided intelligence for the All-Sources Intelligence Cell (ASIC), that was tasked with the processing and analysis of the acquired intelligence.[760] An ASIC consisted of various analysts that specialized in geospatial intelligence (an enhanced form of intelligence on terrain), military intelligence on adversarial structures and human factor-intelligence. The latter analyst, generally a sole subaltern with an academic background, focused on ethnographic intelligence and thus sought to understand Uruzgan's society.[761] A further addition to the intelligence effort was a detachment of the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (DISS) whose task was to support the TFU-commander with intelligence reports.[762] Tasking for the coordination of the various intelligence efforts fell to the intelligence section (G2) of the TFU-staff. However, the efficacy of the coordination varied between rotations, especially due to the lack of a hierarchical relationship with the ISTAR-module and the DISS-detachment.[763]

In the preparation towards deployment, the Dutch armed forces had little understanding about Uruzgan and its dynamics. Knowledge that was available about Uruzgan, such as a report detailing the ethnographic makeup of the province by an NGO and a strategic assessment by the DISS, were not disseminated throughout the Task Force.[764] Other intelligence was provided by the American and Australian allies and the *Viper*-detachment. However, this intelligence was focused on the insurgent activities and lacked in nuance. [765] To a considerable extent, the TFU was going in blind.[766]

The various intelligence elements made significant efforts to acquire understanding about the province. Especially the PRT sought to gain a detailed understanding of Uruzgan's population and tribal dynamics. This was a consequence of their specific intelligence needs. The PRT required a fine-grained understanding about the population for their projects and key-leader engagement.[767]

For its part, the ASIC was initially built to analyze insurgency networks. As this focus proved insufficient for the operational demands, the ASIC started to produce long-term intelligence

760 G.P. Krijnsen (2007). 103 ISTAR-bataljon: Onbekend maakt onbemind. *Militaire Spectator*, 176(2), p. 56-59.

761 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch army staff officer 34.

762 Interviews Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 32; Dutch army staff officer 34. Due to the classified nature of this element, its contribution cannot be explored further in this study.

763 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 31.

764 Kitzen, *The Course of Cooption*, p. 380-382.

765 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 237-239.

766 Interviews Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 5

767 Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 4.

that incorporated all relevant influences.[768] To this end, they employed the PMESII (Politics, Military, Economy, Social, Information and Infrastructure)-method that collected and analyzed data on a wide array of factors. This enabled a more comprehensive intelligence picture of Uruzgan and thus could help the decision-making process.[769]

To be sure, the PMESII-method featured in the Master Plan for the list of indicators; however, the operational analysis was a distinct process from intelligence.[770] Accordingly, the intelligence sections of the TFU and the Battle Group continued to focus on classical intelligence that analyzed adversarial activities. To a certain extent, this was understandable as the security situation in 2006 and 2007 was precarious. However, commanders focused too much on this type of intelligence and did not sufficiently include available ethnographic intelligence in their plans.[771] Compounding this problem was that the available Dutch intelligence doctrine, and thus training, prescribed this enemy-centric approach to intelligence.[772] In a complex counterinsurgency environment, this approach was far too narrow.

Another recognized deficiency was the general lack of trained intelligence personnel. This shortage affected the PRTs, Battle Groups and the TFU staff the most. In large part the dearth of intelligence personnel was caused by the fact that the intelligence was not a separate branch within the Dutch army. Personnel in intelligence positions were thus primarily trained for other vocations such as infantry, artillery, or logistics. In theory, a service member could fill successive intelligence positions within the army but there was no mechanism in place that ensured retention of experience and knowledge. Moreover, due to the increased demand for intelligence billets, more inexperienced personnel were deployed to Uruzgan in intelligence positions.[773] An example being the Team Intelligence Cells at the company-level; for Uruzgan, this one-person cell was reinforced by another officer or NCO. At best, such personnel were trained in intelligence techniques and analysis only during the predeployment training. Unfortunately, even this minimal requirement was often not met as personnel were assigned at the last moment. The lack of qualified and experienced intelligence personnel was widely recognized within the TFU and the Defence staff.[774]

Over time, the incorporation of intelligence beyond terrain and threats improved (see table 4.5). This could be ascribed to the increased focus on non-kinetic operations by the TFU

768 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 09/126.

769 Anonymous Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 13. See also Wouter Kuijl (2019). De All-Sources Information Fusion Unit in Mali en de Dutch Approach. *Militaire Spectator*, *188*(1), p. 5.

770 TFU. *Master Plan*, p. 9.

771 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 009/002.

772 See Koninklijke Landmacht. (2006). *Leidraad Inlichtingen LD-5*. Amersfoort, p 69-70.

773 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 009/002.

774 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 3, Dutch commanding officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch civil servant 6.

and the additional integration of civilian experts such as two cultural advisors with deep knowledge about Afghanistan. Although the civilians were not part of the intelligence structures, they could provide crucial input in the process of understanding Uruzgan and its people.[775] Additionally, the number of intelligence personnel in the TFU-staff was increased in 2008. This quantitative reinforcement was made possible by the extension of the mission which provided political leeway to increase the number of troops in Uruzgan.[776]

However, the most important aspect was what the intelligence personnel themselves learned from their experience. The small cadre of experienced intelligence personnel within the army was concentrated in the ISTAR-battalion. Crucially, this battalion was collocated with the Joint Intelligence School. As intelligence personnel acquired experience, they acknowledged the deficiencies in the Dutch intelligence processes. Simultaneously, the officers and NCOs developed best practices that incorporated information on various aspect of Uruzgan, including tribal affiliations and social dynamics.[777] Over time, the PMESII-approach to intelligence was adopted throughout the TFU.

Thus, an improved process for intelligence analysis developed. Several service members rotated and went on to train new personnel with intelligence tasks for Afghanistan at the intelligence school. In this way, the lessons from Uruzgan were integrated into functional doctrine and actively disseminated.[778] In essence, intelligence personnel formed the learning and dissemination mechanisms, 'anchored' by the ISTAR-battalion and intelligence school.

Additionally, the intelligence component was reorganized in 2008 following the reinforcement in numbers. By integrating the various intelligence sections, the cooperation was improved and allowed for more efficiency.[779] Furthermore, the information on local leaders was now consolidated in a program based on intelligence procured by the PRT, which allowed the transfer of this knowledge over rotations.[780] Combined with an enhanced understanding of Uruzgan and its population, the intelligence process showed marked improvements in the later years of the campaign.

Potential ameliorating measures at the institutional level were also identified in the evaluations by the successive rotations, such as improving training courses and establishing career paths for service members who specialized in intelligence to incentivize knowledge retention. Due to the operational demands of the mission, such steps could only be taken

775 Interview Dutch civil servant 2; Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 009/002.

776 See Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2008, June 20). Dossier 27925 Bestriding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 315, p. 15-16; Interviews Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch civil servant 6

777 Interviews Dutch civil servant 2; Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 5; Dutch army staff officer 31.

778 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 31; Dutch army staff officer 34.

779 Interviews Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch army staff officer 34.

780 Kitzen, *Course of Cooption*, p. 450-453.

after the mission.[781] Of course, creating a separate intelligence branch within the army would provide the most profound remedy to this deficiency as this would negate the necessity of temporary assignments. Yet, due to constrained resources, an intelligence branch would inevitably cut into the other army branches. At the time, vested interests and organizational politics stymied the professionalization of army intelligence. Although some informal improvements had been made based on the operational demands of Uruzgan, the formal evaluation process recognized that most identified deficiencies required an institutional response after the mission had ended.

Intelligence	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Population-centric intelligence	Restructuring of intelligence personnel and increased focus on PMESII-factors	Informal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms. Driven by 'anchor point' of intelligence personnel (ISTAR-battalion and intelligence school)
Professionalization of intelligence personnel	Deployment of personnel with limited experience and training	Recognized deficiency	Resource allocation, organizational politics

Table 4.5: Learning processes in intelligence during the Uruzgan campaign

4.3.4.3: Non-kinetic activities

With the professed centrality of the PRT to the TFU-mission, the Dutch armed forces primarily sought to attain non-kinetic effects. In the words of the Dutch government at the end of 2005: "the Dutch activities would be supported by a measured and intensive information campaign".[782] This capability could help influence the population's perception by amplifying messages and exploit certain events such as a new development project or a successful military operation.[783] To a large extent, the PRT would deliver the non-kinetic effects by executing development projects and engaging the local population.[784] Furthermore, a Public Affairs officer in the TFU-staff handled the media contacts. Psychological operations (psyops) were conducted by a detachment by the Army's Air Defence Corps, who had acquired this mission as a secondary task. The psyops detachment contained a target audience analyst,

781 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Lessons Identified ISAF: Eindrapportage over de Nederlandse inzet bij de ISAF missie 2006 - 2010.* Den Haag; interviews Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch army staff officer 34.

782 Tweede Kamer. Dossier 27925, nr. 193, p. 14.

783 TFU. *Masterplan*, p. 71-72.

784 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 5; Dutch commanding officer 9.

a production cell responsible for products such as leaflets and a tactical psyops team that could be attached to an infantry platoon to disseminate the messages.

However, the responsibility to orchestrate these diverse capabilities resided with a single staff officer. A telling example was TFU-2 in which a captain of the plans section (G-5) took up the gauntlet to coordinate information operations in the staff. He had received no formal training, could not hand over his tasks to a successor and was not debriefed on his experiences.[785] While TFU-commanders were increasingly conscious about influencing the populations perception of the Dutch mission, there was no comprehensive effort to combine information effects in operations planning. [786] Information operations were treated as an afterthought, especially at the start of the mission when the security situation was the overriding concern.[787]

The problem with integrating information operations with the TFU's activities stemmed from two institutional causes. A first reason for this deficiency was that the Dutch armed forces had no cadre of personnel that had the necessary training or experience to conduct these types of operations.[788] As a consequence the solitary officer responsible for coordination of information operations in the TFU was selected on the basis of availability rather than ability. In the central evaluation of the Defence Staff, the quantitative and qualitative lack of staff officers charged with information operations was recognized.

The second reason for the lack of integrating information operations was that, in general, Dutch commanders and staff officers had little experience with information operations. Of course, some commanders had prior experience with information operations in previous deployments.[789] Still, without a dedicated branch or unit for information operations in the organization, it was hard to train and prepare the information capability. Moreover, without specifically trained personnel to advise them, commanders lacked the input to integrate information operations in their staff process.[790] Dutch officers were trained to attain kinetic effects.[791] The combination of these factors meant that the efficacy of information operations hinged on the qualities and attention that key personnel in TFU awarded to this capability.

As the mission continued, the attention towards information operations was limited. While the Master Plan included information operations as part of the activities that could produce

785 Interviews Dutch Air Force officer 1; Dutch army staff officer 17.

786 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3.

787 Interviews Dutch army reservist 1; Dutch army reservist 2.

788 Ingrid van Osch (2011). Information Operations: Synchronisatie van actie en informatie. *Militaire Spectator, 180*(5), p. 206-208.

789 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 10; Dutch commanding officer 8.

790 Van Osch. Information Operations, p. 207-208.

791 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 18/101-109.

the desired effects, the subsequent Focal Paper of 2008 did not mention information operations at all.[792] It alluded to the importance of influencing the local population's perceptions, but had little to say on how such influence could be achieved.[793] The Uruzgan Campaign Plan did include an appendix on information operations and aimed to integrate the effects within the campaign.[794] A practical example was that after their "Big Six"-meetings, the provincial authorities were interviewed by the local radio station. This was initiated by the TFU to convey the message to the inhabitants of Uruzgan that the different government institutions were working together for the population.[795]

Beyond the developments in key leader engagement as described in the previous subsection, two developments regarding information operations can be identified. The first was the establishment of an "*InfoOps Coordination Board*" in the TFU-staff. This weekly meeting aimed to synchronize all activities by the various actors within the TFU that could contribute to information operations. While these meetings had the benefit of regular consultations among the various specialties, the practical outcomes were negligible.[796] A second development was the publication of a policy report on information operations. While this report touted the importance of this capability in operations it did not have effects for the training of personnel or the operations in Afghanistan.[797]

Although there was an increasing awareness within the Dutch armed forces on information operations, the practical execution and coordination of non-kinetic activities remained a subservient part of the TFU-mission (see table 4.6). This was caused by a lack of skilled personnel, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Dutch officers had not been trained in employing information activities or integrating them in campaigns. As a result, there was no concerted effort to use information operations in the military staff to exploit and amplify the improved security situation in Uruzgan and the increased emphasis on the PRT. While this deficiency was identified both in Uruzgan and in the Netherlands, the remedy for this situation would require institutional action.

792 TFU. *Masterplan*, p. 68; TFU. *Focal Paper*.

793 TFU. *Focal Paper*.

794 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, p. 28.

795 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch civil servant 4.

796 Van Osch. Information Operations, p. 205-210.

797 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 18/001

Non-kinetic effects	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Integrating non-kinetic effects	Increased attention, lack of capacity and capability	Recognized deficiency, limited informal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms
Specialized personnel for non-kinetic effects	At best associated task for personnel, no specific training or unit	Recognized deficiency	organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.6: Learning processes concerning non-kinetic activities during the Uruzgan campaign

4.3.4.4: Counter-IED

When the first Dutch forces arrived in Uruzgan in early 2006, it became clear that *improvised explosive devices* (IEDs) were a main threat to the coalition forces. Although the Dutch military already had some experience with IEDs in Afghanistan and Iraq, there had been little anticipation towards this threat in the preparation towards the mission.[798] To reduce the threat posed by (radio-controlled) IEDs, the American and Australian forces in Uruzgan employed *electronic counter measures* (ECM, or *jammers*). As the Dutch forces had not brought such equipment to the theatre they had to improvise and scrounge.[799] The special forces task group *Viper* improvised by closely working with the Americans and Australians in order to move within the electronic bubble of the allies.[800] In the meantime, the DTF that conducted large convoy-operations from Kandahar to Tarin Kowt could lend jammers from the Canadian task force.[801] In practice, these acts of allied benevolence meant that the Dutch political prohibition to work with OEF-forces was further eroded. In the case of the special forces, the professed demarcation between the two missions bordered on fiction.

Although the lack of institutional anticipation affected the operations by the DTF and Viper, knowledge about IEDs was present within the army. Several combat engineers, primarily NCOs with prior experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, endeavored to acquire more understanding about the threat. To this end, several engineers enrolled in a British Army course for 'searching' out IEDs. Based on its experiences in Northern Ireland and Iraq, the British Army had accumulated extensive knowledge on this peril. Armed with this knowledge, the engineer NCOs set out to implement search in (predeployment) training.[802] When they applied the British experiences to the Dutch context, the engineers identified deficiencies in equipment and organization. These problems were partially addressed by

798 Interview Dutch army staff officer 21

799 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch army staff officer 21

800 Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 204.

801 Ministerie van Defensie (2007). *Analyse DTF, TFU-1 en ATF.* The Hague, p.8

802 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 26, Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch army staff officer 16.

informal procurement of material such as mine-detectors and mission organizations for engineer squads.[803] The search TTPs were further disseminated to the rest of the army to increase the security of personnel during patrols.[804]

These bottom-up initiatives were quickly matched by an institutional response. In the early reports from Uruzgan, IEDs and their effects on operations were main and recurring features.[805] First of all, the initial search TTPs were incorporated in the predeployment training of all units.[806] A second adaption was the procurement of additional equipment. Through expedited procurement processes, the Ministry of Defence acquired jammers, robots for the Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD)-detachments and new vehicles that offered better protection against IEDs over the summer of 2006. With regard to the vehicles, the troops in Uruzgan could lend Nyala vehicles from the Canadians as an interim solution.[807] In the meantime, Bushmaster vehicles were purchased from Australia.[808] These arrived in theater in September 2006.[809] A third adaptation in 2006 was the establishment of a *Task Force Counter-IED* (TF C-IED) by the army at the OTCOpn. This new organization's objective was to coordinate all efforts about IEDs as it was recognized that this challenge affected all branches in the army (and beyond).[810]

The TF C-IED could draw on wide experiences from allies and NATO. Based on NATO-doctrine, the task force adopted a counter-IED approach that consisted of three pillars. The first pillar emphasized in 'defeating the device' and was defensive in nature. Activities associated with this pillar were: detecting IEDs through search, neutralizing the devices by EOD and mitigation of the effects for instance by employing Bushmasters. The second pillar, 'attack the network' was offensive and aimed to prevent the emplacement of IEDs altogether. Accurate intelligence about the network producing and facilitating the IEDs was central to the offensive activities. This required network analysis and forensic expertise to target the networks. Finally, the third pillar, 'preparing the force' focused on knowledge collection and dissemination. Through doctrine development and training, awareness on IEDs was increased at the various levels in the armed forces.[811]

803 Interview Dutch army staff officer 21.

804 Interview Dutch commanding officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18

805 Interview Dutch commanding officer 11; Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 21.

806 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 21

807 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, July 21). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 221. Den Haag.

808 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, September 1). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 226. Den Haag.

809 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, September 15). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 233. Den Haag.

810 H. Molman (2007). Counter-IED: van reactief naar proactief. *Militaire Spectator, 176*(7), p. 360.

811 H. Molman (2007). Counter-IED: van reactief naar proactief. *Militaire Spectator, 176*(7), p. 361-366.

Despite the best efforts of its personnel, the TF C-IED suffered from inherent organizational weaknesses. As the task force was placed within the army, it lacked the mandate and budget to impose doctrine on the other services or acquire additional equipment.[812] To procure necessary gear in a timely manner, the task force had to coordinate with the Defence Materiel Organization (DMO), a separate entity within the Ministry of Defence. Funding for equipment had to be obtained at the department level. Without a mandate, the TF C-IED had insufficient leverage to produce sufficient results.[813] As the mission progressed, the threat of IEDs increased and led to casualties among the Dutch troops. In 2007, five service members were killed by IEDs in Uruzgan and Helmand. Casualties commanded the attention of the political realm. Therefore, proposed measures for force protection received parliamentary interest.[814] Faced with mounting casualties, the Chief of Defence, Dick Berlijn resolved at the end of 2007 that a new task force was needed. The new Join Task Force Counter-IED (JTF C-IED) was established in early 2008 and was placed under the Chief of Defence. Consequently, it had more influence and budget.[815]
The JTF C-IED continued the work of its less fortunate predecessor as it retained the three pillars. Members of the JTF C-IED deployed to Uruzgan to advise the troops and investigate IEDs. In the course of 2008, a field laboratory was deployed to Afghanistan to conduct forensic research that could be exploited for intelligence on the networks producing the IEDs.[816] Another technological adaptation was the employment of the so-called *recce-lite*, a sensor pod that could be attached to an F-16 fighter jet. This could recognize ground disturbances over large areas which could help detecting emplaced IEDs.[817] To expedite procurement processes, the JTF C-IED often had to wield its organizational clout. With its inception, the JTF C-IED formed an anchor point for knowledge on IEDs and countermeasures. Of course, units such as the combat engineers and the EOD contributed to this with their expertise.

Beyond new equipment, the Dutch forces could benefit from the experiences and knowledge of ISAF coalition members. Among the troops, awareness and improved over the years. Yet, the insurgents responded to this by adjusting their own modus operandi by, for example, changing the method of detonation or increasing the amount of explosives. In general, the Dutch troops emphasized the defensive and training activities in addressing the threat of IEDs. Offensive action against the IED networks proved harder to execute.[818]

812 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21.

813 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21.

814 See for example: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2006, July 20). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 222. Den Haag; Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2007, December 19). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 287. Den Haag.

815 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 26; Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21

816 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2008, October 28). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 325. Den Haag, p. 24; Interview Dutch army reservist 3.

817 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, 09/009

818 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch army reservist 3

Throughout the mission, IEDs remained the scourge of the TFU. In total, 13 Dutch service members lost their lives through IEDs while a multitude of troops were (severely) wounded. The efforts to adapt to this threat were substantial, as reflected by increased training activities, bespoke temporary organizational structures and quick procurement processes (see table 4.7). Both the armed forces and the policy makers understood the gravity of the threat of IEDs towards the troops; this created a common sense of urgency to address this challenge. In this adaptation process, the Dutch troops could tap into the knowledge of allies and emulate their countermeasures. Still, the trade-off with focusing on force protection about IEDs was also apparent. While IEDs severely restricted the freedom of movement of coalition forces, it was a defensive weapon. Search procedures to mitigate the threat of IEDs led to further curtailing of the TFU's activities. [819] In the evaluation after the mission, the counter-IED adaptation was regarded a success that warranted institutionalization within the armed forces.

Counter-IED	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Developing and sharing new TTPs	Immediate adaptation by troops in the field and quick dissemination by training establishment	Informal and formal adaptation	Organizational culture, resource allocation, learning and dissemination mechanisms
Materiel acquisition	Acquisition of Bushmaster vehicles and "jammers"	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, domestic politics, learning and dissemination mechanisms
Comprehensive countermeasures and knowledge sharing	Establishment of C-IED task forces	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 4.7: Learning processes in counter-IED during the Uruzgan campaign

4.2.5: Sub conclusion

Throughout the mission, the Task Force Uruzgan saw various adaptations based on operational experiences. The most salient of these developments were the drafting of the three consecutive campaign plans and the 'civilianization' of the TFU-staff and the PRT. Lacking guidance from The Hague, the writing processes of the plans was done at the task force level. Although these efforts included insights from various elements of the TFU, the operational

819 See S.J. van der Meer, C.E. van den Berg and E. Bakker (2007). Effecten van IEDs op het defensieoptreden. *Militaire Spectator,* 176(9), p. 352-359; Ministerie van Defensie (2007). *Analyse DTF, TFU-1 en ATF.* The Hague

analysts attached to the plans section had a leading role here. A prime consideration for the continuous process of adjusting the campaign plan was the difficulty to assess the mission's progress. Relevant quantifiable metrics were hard to acquire, and their explanatory value was found to be uncertain. Instead, the assessments had to rely on qualitative information such as perceptions and gauging the proficiency of Afghan institutions. Thus, the drafting of the campaign plans was an iterative process in which the acquired experiences from the mission were incorporated.

The increased civilian contribution was requested by commanders (TFU and PRT) from the early rotations as they felt that civilian specialists were better equipped to enable development and diplomacy. In 2006 and 2007, the scarcity of civilian expertise and the volatile security situation stymied the progress at the development and governance fronts. Together with defense, these aspects formed the so-called 3D-approach (later called the Comprehensive Approach). The eventual resolution to deploy additional civilians and institute a dual command arrangement was made possible by the political decision to extend the mission at the end of 2007. Of course, the Dutch military was dependent on the contribution of other parties, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide the personnel. As a result, this adaptation not only required a formal organizational response, but also the cooperation from an external partner. With the modest influx of civilians and the development of the Uruzgan Campaign Plan, the vaunted Comprehensive Approach was given more practical substance and thus followed the political discourse.

Given the professed centrality of non-kinetic activities needed for the mission, the Dutch armed forces had inadequate capabilities and capacity. During the mission, it became clear that the Dutch army lacked sufficient specialized personnel for intelligence, information operations and for staffing the PRTs. A common deficiency that was identified for these aspects of the TFU-mission was that these capabilities had no separate career paths. As a result, officers and NCOs who were deployed in these roles often returned to their parent units after the deployments and could not share their experiences or build on them in next positions Moreover, apart from intelligence, there were no knowledge authorities in the army which could serve as a knowledge repository. Despite efforts to improve the output of these capabilities, the army's evaluators recognized that institutional changes were warranted, such as establishing specialized units, career paths or even branches, to genuinely improve these capabilities.

A more successful adaptation was formed by the effort to counter the menace of IEDs. Through emulating allies, informally sharing experiences, between rotations, incorporating techniques in predeployment training and expedited procurement of equipment, the Dutch armed forces sought to mitigate this threat. In this regard, informal observations and identified deficiencies were recognized and tackled by a formal organizational response.

As IEDs were responsible for most of the Dutch casualties, these efforts were supported by a sense of urgency and political backing. Still, the armed forces deemed it necessary to establish a Joint Task Force Counter-IED to circumvent bureaucratic hurdles to address this threat.

Although less perceptible, continuous adaptations regarding predeployment training were important to prepare the successive rotations. Through visiting staff members and post deployment interviews, the training establishment of the Dutch army strove to stay abreast of the developments in Afghanistan. With this input, the predeployment training was constantly adjusted. Nevertheless, these adjustments primarily pertained to kinetic activities for the battle group and its subunits. While observations for the TFU and PRT were also identified, these proved harder to incorporate in training as these elements had no equivalent in the army's organization.

An important additional aspect that warrants attention is that not all identified challenges during the TFU-mission can be ascribed to deficiencies in the Task Force or in the wider institution of the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Grievances by the local population about corruption, the absence of the rule of law or the lack of economic development by local authorities can at best be only mitigated by foreign efforts, regardless of their innate qualities.

In sum, the Dutch armed forces sought to adapt to the circumstances in Uruzgan. However, the manifestations of learning during the mission pertained to the mission itself. There were no indications that these adaptations would impact the Dutch armed forces, or more specifically the army, beyond the TFU-mission as the changes did not affect the standing organizations. If the observations and adaptations from the TFU were to have a lasting effect on the Dutch military, a deliberate effort for institutionalization was needed.

4.4: Institutionalization?

Following the decision to withdraw, the Dutch armed forces could take stock of the lessons it had identified during the last four years. While some observations had been acted upon by the TFU-rotations, units, or the military as an institution, many of the identified deficiencies needed further action if the Dutch armed forces were to address them. The following section examines how the Dutch military sought to institutionalize the lessons from Afghanistan and the extent of success in this enterprise. To study the impact of the Afghanistan mission on the Dutch military, this section will investigate processes of evaluation and strategic analysis. Additionally, the substance of the observations and the influence of these experience

on various manifestations of learning, such as doctrine, organizational structures, training, and education, will be addressed.

4.4.1: Learning from Uruzgan: mission evaluations and lessons learned

As described in the previous section, the Dutch armed forces had two parallel evaluation processes in place to capture observations from the Uruzgan-mission. The first and primary evaluation mechanism was that by the evaluation department at the Defence staff. A complementary process was established by the army and consisted of debriefings. The latter process was an indication of the army's willingness to incorporate the lessons from Afghanistan.

4.4.1.1: Mission evaluations

Simultaneously, the Defence staff sought to consolidate the observations from the central evaluation process. The written assessments from each TFU-rotation had yielded a deluge of observations, often with considerable overlap. Under guidance of the director of operations, (then) major-general Tom Middendorp, a project team was established that included the evaluation department and personnel from TNO. [820] The objective of this project was to write an internal evaluation report that could function as a starting point to transform the observations into lessons learned.[821] The responsibility to implement the lessons was left to the services. To distribute the workload and prune out duplications, the observations were aggregated under 25 themes. These themes represented a broad array of observations, ranging from strategic decision making to financial considerations. For every theme, a project leader (called forerunner in the document) was made responsible.[822] In addition to the written assessments, workshops and interviews were held with personnel that had experience with the topic at hand.[823]

This effort resulted in a list more than five hundred observations. For each observation that made the list, an analysis of the identified deficiency was provided. This analysis was subsequently boiled down to a succinct "lesson identified". Finally, a recommendation was made on how this deficiency or observation could be addressed.[824] This process resulted in an internal report that summarized the main takeaways for the themes. Although the report

820 Interview s Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch army reservist 5; Dutch commanding officer 23.

821 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch army reservist 5.

822 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified ISAF.*

823 Interview Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 13

824 See: Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*.

was finalized in May 2012, the initial main findings were communicated to the Defence Staff and the services in February 2011 to potentially start implementation of the lessons.

The report focused on the TFU and supporting structures. As a result, it emphasized land operations. Accordingly, most of the lessons pertained to the Army. Observations relevant for the Air Task Force were processed in a separate report by the Air Force. Other associated missions such as the Deployment Task Force and the Special Forces Task Force 55 (TF 55) were also subject to discrete evaluation processes.[825]

Observations by the considerable number of service members who worked at the staffs of Regional Command South in Kabul and ISAF headquarters in Kabul were excluded from the internal report, however. Instead, major-general Mart de Kruif drafted a specific report in the summer of 2010 with the aim of learning from the experiences of working in higher, multinational staffs in Afghanistan.[826] Based on his own experience as commander ISAF RC-South (2008-2009), De Kruif argued that there was room for improvement in how Dutch staff officers and senior NCOs functioned in international staffs. Crucially, the armed forces neglected valuable experiences, as the report recognized that the experiences of individually deployed service members were insufficiently captured by the normal evaluation process.[827]

Although the report was mild in its tone, it found that Dutch service members could improve their grasp of the English language (in particular about the technical military idiom), diplomatic skills and knowledge about (NATO) doctrine. This would potentially enhance the Dutch position in relation to Anglo-Saxon allies in such staffs.[828] Another identified challenge was that the Dutch armed forces lacked sufficient trained personnel to contribute continuously within specific functions as intelligence, counter-IED and operational planning. In still other areas as information operations, psychological operations and strategic communications, the Dutch military had little to no organizational expertise. This often led to unqualified personnel being deployed to such positions with detrimental effect to Dutch standing.[829] To enhance the quality of senior personnel the report specified several potential ameliorating actions; for instance, more attention to language skills in English and French, additional professional education for senior service members and an increased focus on (collective) staff training.[830]

825 For example, a separate evaluation report had been written for the DTF.

826 Ministerie van Defensie. (2010). *'Van Eredivise naar Europees voetbal'*. Den Haag.

827 Ministerie van Defensie. (2010). *'Van Eredivise naar Europees voetbal'*. Den Haag, p. 67-68. Indeed, this point was reinforced by staff officers who had worked in Kandahar and Kabul. Interviews Dutch army staff officer 20; Dutch army staff officer 10; Dutch army staff officer 7.

828 Ibidem p. 80-81.

829 Ibidem, p. 106-107.

830 Ibidem, p. 84-91.

A supplemental effort by the Dutch Army to capture relevant knowledge from the Uruzgan mission was a workshop held in October 2010 to which all TFU commanders were invited. This meeting was organized by the Dutch Army and moderated by a colonel from the Netherlands Defence Academy. The objective of the session was to get the personal perspectives of the TFU commanders that would potentially be lost in the consolidated written evaluation reports. Furthermore, bringing the commanders together would help getting a comprehensive overview of the mission that was widely regarded as a formative experience for the Army.[831] Conspicuously absent from the workshop were the commander of the Deployment Task Force (Henk Morsink) and the two Dutch commanders of ISAF Regional Command South (Ton van Loon and Mart de Kruif).

A common observation by the TFU-commanders was the lack of strategic guidance by the ministry of Defence. While the commanders appreciated the leeway to form their own plans for an individual rotation, they argued that longer-term objectives should be stated at a higher organizational level.[832] Conversely, the TFU-commanders had to procure approval from the Defence Staff for individual operations. The discrepancy between the strategic detachment and effusive attention to tactical and technical details chafed with the TFU-commanders. They felt that interagency coordination and strategic guidance should start at the departmental level. Planning and executing operations on the other hand should be their purview.[833] Beyond these general observations, the TFU-commanders stated that the army should institutionalize knowledge on doctrine, command and control, intelligence campaign planning and capabilities such as Security Sector Reform, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and information operations. Only then would the army be able to capitalize on the experiences from Uruzgan for future missions.

4.4.1.2: Lessons learned processes

Despite the candid evaluations, the collected observations by the army did not lead to a consolidated report or a central plan of action to capitalize on these experiences. Personnel turnover had produced a hiatus in consistency in this process.[834] The judgment that the army made no use of this effort is harsh but fair.[835] In practice, there was a fragmented body of knowledge within the Dutch army regarding the Uruzgan experiences.[836] General best practices such as institutionalizing the comprehensive approach in stabilization operations

831 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 15; Dutch commanding officer 4

832 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 8, Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 1, Dutch commanding officer 23.

833 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 2; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 1.

834 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18

835 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 23; Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch commanding officer 23.

836 Kitzen, et al. Soft Power, p. 182-183.

and integrating non-kinetic effects in operational planning were 'stored' by OTCOpn. Subsequently, these elements were incorporated into doctrinal publications (see subsection 4.4.3).

Regarding how the Dutch armed forces learned, critical internal reflections persisted. At the tactical and technical levels lessons were mostly identified and implemented at either the service level or by specialized units that served as anchor points for knowledge. Conversely, there was no similar process that institutionalized experiences at the strategic and operational levels.[837] The central evaluation process at the Defence Staff was seen as too focused on political accountability rather than on assessing effectiveness of missions and learning from experience. Furthermore, as implementation of lessons learned was the responsibility of the services, this process lacked central guidance and oversight. An additional aspect compounding this problem was that the services, and in particular the army, lacked the organizational structures to implement lessons learned.[838]

Within the army, responsibility for the lessons learned process was further delegated to OTCOpn. Moreover, beyond writing doctrine based on these lessons, the OTCOpn lacked staff to execute this process. As such, there was no organizational clout to enforce compliance and implement change within the army.[839] Ironically, these deficiencies in the formal learning process had been identified prior to the Uruzgan mission in 2005.[840]

As the Dutch military was faced with severe budget cuts after 2010, addressing these deficiencies was no priority. At the army level, the lack of formal learning and dissemination mechanisms continued to be unresolved throughout the years.[841] An effort to improve the lessons learned process was initiated at the Army-staff in 2019 by establishing a council for retaining "experiential lessons". However, lack of resources and attention impeded its effectiveness at the service level. Moreover, identified lessons from the brigade-level and above did not always find their way to the Army-staff.[842]

Thus, although the Dutch armed forces had drawn a wealth of experiences from Afghanistan in the intervening years, the military had neglected to enhance its aptitude to learn (see table 4.8). This impeded the ability to institutionalize lessons. Still, the evaluations yielded insights that could be internalized in doctrine. Potentially, updated doctrinal publications

837 Nationaal Lucht- en Ruimtevaart Laboratorium. (2011). *Systematisch Borgen Lessons Learned*. Amsterdam, p. 86-87; Interviews Dutch civil servant 3; Dutch army staff officer 8; Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch army staff officer 4; Dutch Air Force officer 2.

838 Ministerie van Defensie. *Eredivisie*, p. 76-77. Interview Dutch army staff officer 8.

839 NLR. *Lessons Learned*, p 21-24.

840 IGK. *Jaarverslag 2005*, p. 103-120.

841 Commando Landstrijdkrachten. (2019, July 11). Memo: Raad Ervaringslessen Staf CLAS. Utrecht.

842 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 28; Dutch army staff officer 29; Dutch army staff officer 4.

could be used for knowledge retention and as a starting point for practical organizational changes. The following subsections will examine these efforts.

Learning process	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Disconnect between joint and service-level lessons learned processes	No; recognized deficiency/efforts to respond. Initiatives to address this have yielded insufficient results	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 4.8: Lessons learned process after Uruzgan

4.4.2: Strategic environment and Defence Policy

While the Uruzgan mission wound down in March 2010, a strategic analysis was published by an interdepartmental working group called "Strategic Explorations" (in Dutch: *Strategische Verkenningen*"). The result of an elaborate two-year study, this report had the aim to assess the future strategic environment of The Netherlands and provide options for Defence policy for 2020 to 2030.[843] Given the now-inevitable withdrawal from Uruzgan, the report was timely as it offered a vision towards the future for the Dutch armed forces while armed forces started to take stock of the experiences it had just acquired. The main elements of the report consisted of strategic scenarios and general directions, or profiles, for the Dutch Armed Forces.

The strategic scenarios were not mutually exclusive but sketched potential directions in which the security environment of The Netherlands could develop. In outlining the future scenarios, two axes were used. The first axis depicted the increase or decrease of international cooperation. The second axis indicated the primacy of either state or non-state actors in international affairs. This exercise resulted in scenarios that ranged from a relatively benign global order, a situation of multipolar competition, to a state of fragmentation in which both globalization and nation-states are challenged. [844]

Additionally, the report drafted four potential profiles for the Dutch military. Every profile incorporated the three main tasks of the Dutch armed forces (national and allied territorial defense, promoting international stability and support to civil authorities). The distinction between the profiles was in what task was emphasized. This would have consequences for how the armed forces would organize, equip, and operate. The first profile was focused on national and allied territorial defense. In this option, expeditionary operations such as in

843 Interdepartementale project-Verkenningen. (2010). *Eindrapport Verkenningen: Houvast voor de krijgsmacht van de toekomst*. Den Haag, p. 7.

844 Interdepartementale. *Verkenningen*, p. 127-145.

Iraq and Afghanistan would be less probable. In contrast, the second profile indicated a shift towards participation in interventions to coerce compliance to international law.[845]

The third profile pointed in the direction of participating in stabilization missions and thus would indicate a continuation of recent operations. Naturally, the fourth profile, represented in the report by a Swiss army knife, combined the three previous options. This option envisaged that the armed forces should retain a flexible posture to adapt to strategic challenges when they arise. This would be a continuation of the contemporary policy. With regard to funding, this option was deemed not entirely feasible in the event that the ministry of Defence was confronted with budget cuts. If the funding would remain at current levels, investments could be made in unmanned vehicles, cyber operations and security sector reform-capabilities.[846] Admitting that the future was unclear and could contain elements of every scenario, the authors of the report contended that the Dutch defence policy should clarify which profile the armed forces would adopt so the departments could plan accordingly.[847]

Concurrently with the "Strategic Explorations", the Dutch Ministry of Defence issued a "Military Strategic Vision". This document envisaged the future of the Dutch Armed Forces based on the findings of the "Explorations". Although the document recognized the continued need for conventional military capabilities and deterrence, it was heavily influenced by the Dutch Afghanistan experience. This experience was not explicitly mentioned as a source of inspiration, but the document was laced with photos from Uruzgan. Moreover, numerous observations from the various Afghanistan evaluations featured in the document, whether these were published at the time or not. For instance, capabilities that should be enhanced for future missions included: intelligence, information operations and security sector reform. Other aspects that required attention were the ability to conduct expeditionary operations, an emphasis on interagency cooperation and rotation schedules that were based on military effectiveness and sustainability rather than peace time considerations. Other general aspects that were emphasized were expeditionary operations (including for the defense of allied territory) and interagency cooperation also bore the marks of recent missions. An intriguing proposition touched upon in the text was the establishment of a permanent joint headquarters. Unfortunately, this plan was not elucidated in the document so the rationale behind it remains unclear.[848]

Between the various described evaluation processes and strategic analyses that were conducted at the end of the Uruzgan mission, the Dutch army in particular identified several

845 Ibidem, p 216-250.

846 Ibid, p. 253-283.

847 Ibid, p. 199-207.

848 Ministerie van Defensie. (2010). *Militair Strategische Visie 2010*. The Hague: Ministry of Defence.

lessons that warranted institutionalization. However, by 2010 the Netherlands was being confronted by a severe economic recession, stemming from the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. Faced with looming austerity measures, the Army lobbied to the Defence Staff to retain brigade headquarters, invest in enhancing intelligence support and institutionalize knowledge on PRTs, Information Operations and Security Sector Reform in a specialized unit.[849] This indicated that there was a genuine willingness within the army to retain the lessons from Uruzgan.[850]

Following the collapse of the coalition government over prolongation of the Uruzgan-mission, the new government that was installed in October 2010 took action to redress the budget deficit. The Dutch armed forces would not be spared from budget cuts. To make matters worse, internal funding shortfalls had to be balanced. And yet, the strategic analysis of the "Explorations" was still considered valid. Consequently, the incoming coalition opted for the Swiss army knife-model for the military. This meant that the tasks would essentially remain the same, though smaller in volume and longevity and with a budget reduction of a billion Euros.[851] As a result, the Ministry of Defence had to cut 12,000 personnel positions. Moreover, significant numbers of equipment were scrapped such as patrol vessels, f-16 fighter jets and all the army's main battle tanks.[852]

While engaged in a major downsizing operation and concurrent reorganization, the Dutch armed forces were yet again hit with budget cuts in the fall of 2013. Again, this round of restructuring was driven by financial considerations rather than a strategic analysis.[853] The armed forces retained their tasks and essentially their existing capabilities. To conform to the financial constraints, the capacity of the armed forces was trimmed. This meant that the sustainability of operations was scaled down.[854] At the same time, the armed forces would invest in cyber capabilities, developing the comprehensive approach and professionalizing intelligence.[855] The latter two investment areas reflected a willingness to implement at least some observations from Uruzgan. However, the financial constraints and the concurrent vast reorganizations led to an emphasis on retaining existing capabilities.[856]

The strategic calculus of The Netherlands changed dramatically in 2014. Described as a watershed moment in international security, 2014 saw the both the rise of the Islamic State

849 Koninlijke Landmacht. (2010, December 8). Terugkoppeling Evaluatie TFU-commandanten aan Commmandant der Strijdkrachten. Utrecht; Interviews Dutch commanding officer 16; Dutch army staff officer 15.

850 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 12; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 10.

851 VVD-CDA. (2010). Regeerakkoord: Vrijheid en verantwoordelijkheid. Den Haag, p. 9.

852 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2011, April 8). Beleidsbrief Defensie. Den Haag, p. 14-17

853 Ministerie van Defensie. (2013). *In het belang van Nederland.* Den Haag, p. 6.

854 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2014, January 21). Dossier 33763 Toekomst van de krijgsmacht, nr. 33, p. 132.

855 Ministerie van Defensie. (2013). *In het belang van Nederland.* Den Haag, p. 24-25.

856 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 23; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch commanding officer 10.

and the Russian annexation of the Crimea and its proxy war in Ukraine.[857] The latter strategic challenge became even more poignant for the Dutch public by the shooting down of a Malaysian Airways jet over contested territory by pro-Russian separatists. In this incident, 193 Dutch citizens (out of a total of 298 casualties) were killed. In light of these Russian activities, the Dutch government recognized that deterrence and collective defense, the first constitutional task of the Dutch armed forces, had become more prominent.[858]

However, the emphasis on stabilization missions of the last decades and the consecutive budget cuts had left the Dutch armed forces woefully unprepared for this challenge. The Dutch armed forces lacked both crucial capabilities for escalation dominance as well as sufficient capacity for sustained operations. This situation not only affected the ability to deter or fight a conventional enemy but also to make the contribution to stabilization operations.[859] At the end of 2014, the Dutch government resolved to address the dismal state of the military. Gradually, the budget of the ministry of Defence would be increased. However, this increase initially amounted to 100 million Euros and was thus insufficient to make up for the recent cuts.[860]

The renewed tensions in Eastern Europe marked a new deployment for the Dutch army. In 2016, NATO established an 'Enhanced Forward Presence' (EFP) in Poland and the Baltic States to reassure these member states and deter Russian activities. The Dutch army contributes to this ongoing allied effort by deploying company-sized elements on a rotational basis to the German-led battlegroup in Lithuania.[861] During these rotations, the international units train for conventional operations. The ability to continuously train with allied forces in Lithuania is valued as it helps improving the combat readiness of the Dutch army units.[862] Evidently, the training scenarios in EFP differ significantly from the mission experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Beyond these new training efforts, the Dutch armed forces also required additional investments. In 2017, the Dutch government announced a larger budget increase for the military, amounting to 1,5 billion Euros.[863] This resulted in a new Defence whiter paper in 2018. This policy paper did not contain a vision for the Dutch armed forces or their purpose.

857 Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken. (2015). *Instabiliteit rond Europa: Confrontatie met een nieuwe werkelijkheid.* Den Haag, p. 5.

858 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2014, November 24). Beleidsbrief Internationale Veiligheid: Turbulente Tijden in een Instabiele Omgeving. Den Haag p. 6.

859 AIV (2015) *Instabiliteit rond Europa*, p. 35-38.

860 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2014, November 7). Dossier 33 763 Toekomst van de krijgsmacht, nr. 59. Den Haag.

861 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2016, July 1). Dossier 28 676 NAVO, nr. 249. Den Haag,

862 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2018, Oktober 19). Dossier 25921 Nederlandse deelname aan vredesmissies, nr. 369. Den Haag.

863 Ministerie van Defensie. (2017). *Houvast in een onzekere wereld: Lijnen van ontwikkeling in het meerjarig perspectief voor een duurzaam gerede en snel inzetbare Krijgsmacht*. Den Haag.

Instead, it sketched some investment themes for the near future to increase the military's readiness for the constitutional tasks. Again, this document stated that collective territorial defense had gained in prominence over the last few years. According to the Ministry of Defence, this required more "robust units" and investment in technologies.[864] In accordance with NATO capability goals, the Ministry of Defence identified five investment themes: additional f-35 fighter jets, enhancing combat power on land, enhancing combat power on sea, improved support for special operations forces and investments in the cyber and information domains.[865]

These investment priorities indicate an emphasis on conventional capabilities for collective defense and deterrence. Except for enhancing capabilities in the information domain and arguably special operations forces, the proposed modernization areas are mainly focused on regular warfare. Although the increased budget and resulting plans for the Dutch armed forces are rooted in (new) strategic analyses, they are a marked departure from the missions that the Dutch armed forces have performed over the last decades. This has led to the critique that the armed forces, and mainly the army, are preoccupied with conventional warfare and technology, while neglecting the practical experiences of stabilization missions. As a result, the hard-won lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq, in particular Uruzgan, will be forgotten or even discarded. Moreover, by focusing on conventional war, the Dutch military will be ill-prepared for new stabilization missions as the knowledge from Uruzgan dissipates.[866]

4.4.3: Doctrine

As mentioned in the previous chapters of this dissertation, doctrine forms a clear manifestation of learning. Doctrine reflects an agreed-upon body of knowledge, based on experience and study within a military organization. As such, it can guide military personnel on how to think about conflict. During the TFU-mission, officers from the OTCOpn sought to capture and disseminate observations and best practices through the expedients of semi-formal information bulletins. At the same time, they were drafting a new iteration of a doctrine on land operations. This general doctrinal publication would incorporate many of these observations to the extent that they held relevance for land operations in a general sense. However, in 2009 the writing team was replaced because of administrative regulations. A new team of writers started from scratch on a new draft.[867]

864 Ministerie van Defensie. (2018). *Defensienota 2018: Investeren in onze mensen, slagkracht en zichtbaarheid*. Den Haag, p. 11.

865 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2018, December 14). Dossier 28676 NAVO, nr. 308. Den Haag.

866 Martijn Kitzen and Floor Thonissen (2018). Strategische Vaagheid: Hoe het gebrek aan strategische visie het lerend vermogen van de Koninklijke Landmacht beperkt. *Militaire Spectator, 187*(4), p, 220-223.

867 Interview Dutch army staff officer 7.

The new doctrine on land operations ("*Land Doctrine Publicatie*") was published in 2009. This doctrine has drawn the critique that it had little to say on counterinsurgency operations and "largely neglected" the experiences from Uruzgan.[868] However, it is important to note that this is a general doctrine on land operations and serves a different purpose than thematic counterinsurgency doctrines such as the Dutch LDP II-C[869] or the American FM 3-24. Consequently, it describes all types of conflicts in which land forces can be deployed. It identifies four campaign themes along the spectrum of conflict: peace time military engagement, peace support, counter insurgency (sic.) and major combat.[870] While this publication does not reflect the observations as listed in the information bulletins, the influence from recent operations is nevertheless pervasive. For example, the doctrine focuses on irregular adversaries, operations amongst the people, the centrality of intelligence, the comprehensive approach, information operations and non-kinetic effects. Yet, some critique is warranted. It is sparse on what a counterinsurgency campaign is, and the implications it has for military activities. Furthermore, a conspicuous omission is that it does not mention the *shape, clear, hold, build* phasing in counterinsurgency campaigns as an overarching concept.[871] This was a central observation from operations in Uruzgan, one that had only gradually dawned on the TFU.[872] Instead, the doctrine merely distinguishes between offensive, defensive and stabilization activities. How the latter can fit in a campaign theme is not explained in the text.[873]

In 2014, a new iteration of the doctrine on land operations was published. This new publication ("*Landoperaties*", DP 3.2) did not distinguish between types of operations and superseded thematic doctrines such as LDP II-C on irregular warfare.[874] A recurring central feature in this document was the distinction between campaign themes. In this edition however, "counterinsurgency" was replaced by "security" as the latter encompassed more types of operations.[875] Further on, the necessity of a comprehensive approach to military operations was emphasized.[876] Other observations from Afghanistan were also included in this doctrine. For instance, the document called for campaign plans based on clear objectives, which are subject to continuous and rigorous assessment.[877] Other aspects that

868 Kitzen, et al. Soft Power, p. 182.

869 The thematic doctrine LDP II-C was still considered as valid and could be used in accordance with the new general doctrine on land operations.

870 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2009). *Land Doctrine Publicatie: Militaire Doctrine voor het Landoptreden.* Amersfoort: Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatien, p. 94.

871 To be fair, the information bulletins also did not adopt this framework, yet at the time of writing this concept was not commonplace in Afghanistan or the Netherlands.

872 See Dimitriu and De Graaf. The Dutch Coin approach: Kitzen, et al. Soft Power; Interview Dutch commanding officer 10.

873 Koninklijke Landmacht. *Land Doctrine Publicatie*, p. 144-147.

874 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2014). *Doctrine Publicatie Landoperaties 3.2.* Amersfoort: Land Warfare Centre, p. 1-3

875 Landmacht. *Landoperaties 3.2*, p. 3-3.

876 Ibidem, p 3-18 - 3-21.

877 Ibidem, p. 4-2 - 4-3.

featured in the evaluations were also incorporated in the doctrine. Understanding of all aspect of the operational environment based on intelligence was regarded as a prerequisite of military operations.[878] Another salient element was the attention awarded to influencing behavior, both by physical and psychological activities.[879] This reflected a decreased focus on destroying the enemy in Dutch doctrine. Of course, this continued to be a valid effect albeit within a panoply of other instruments. For planning purposes, the doctrine enumerated various operational frameworks. It distinguished between frameworks based on operational areas (deep-close-rear), core functions (find, fix, strike, exploit) and effects (shape, decisive, sustain). The central counterinsurgency framework of shape, clear, hold, build is mentioned only in passing as a specific framework with the campaign theme "security".[880]

Thus, important observations from Afghanistan were incorporated in Dutch generic doctrine on land operations. Accordingly, service members could recognize these aspects when perusing these publications. Yet, to institutionalize the observations coming out of the several evaluations on Uruzgan, a thematic doctrine on counterinsurgency operations was needed. Arguably, the LDP II-C could have provided a foundation for such a document. A draft doctrine was produced in 2009 by OTCOpn. However, this project was stillborn, and a lack of personnel precluded a new draft for a counterinsurgency doctrine. Instead, the Dutch armed forces adopted the NATO counterinsurgency doctrine, *Allied Joint Publication 3.4.4* (AJP 3.4.4.).[881] Adhering to NATO doctrine has obvious benefits. It fosters a common understanding across allies and thus interoperability. Conversely, the downsides are also apparent. As a collaborative document, the member states must reach a consensus on its contents. Invariably, national nuances will be smoothed over in the consulting process, thereby reducing the applicability. A further, related disadvantage is that updating a NATO-doctrine is an even more protracted process than national doctrine writing.

Ultimately, at the end of the Uruzgan mission, the experiences were unevenly reflected in Dutch (army) doctrine. Germane elements such as campaign planning, the comprehensive approach, the necessity of intelligence beyond terrain and adversaries and non-kinetic effects were elevated to capstone doctrinal documents. This means that the insights are available to Dutch service members for future conflicts. Furthermore, by incorporating these observations in general doctrine shows that they are deemed relevant beyond counterinsurgency operations. Still, doctrinal developments show that counterinsurgency principles are given short shrift in the Dutch army; the omission of the shape, clear, hold, build-framework provides a case in point. In the 2014 doctrine, the campaign theme of counterinsurgency was further diluted to "security". Moreover, the Dutch army lacks a

878 Ibidem, p. 4-2.

879 Ibidem, 4-5 - 4-8.

880 Ibidem, p. 6-40.

881 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 3; Dutch Marine officer 1. The current edition of AJP 3.4.4 was published in 2016.

thematic doctrine on counterinsurgency that can assist service members to think about such operations in-depth and within which the experiences from Afghanistan can be synthesized with foreign and classical perspectives. Without such a document and a clear concept of what counterinsurgency is, the Dutch army (and the armed forces in general) risk that these experiences evaporate as they lack a profound foundation in doctrine. Whether the experiences from Uruzgan have found their way to other manifestations of organizational learning is the subject of the next subsections.

4.4.4: Training

During the mission in Uruzgan, most of the army's training efforts were geared towards the deployment. Yet, many officers recognized that the focus on the Uruzgan-mission and the earlier deployments had degraded the army's proficiency in combined arms tactics in high-intensity conflict scenarios.[882] As such, tactical and technical adaptations from Uruzgan proved resilient among service members, even if these went against standing doctrine and impeded readiness for other missions.

This recognized deficiency was exacerbated by the budget cuts and the scrapping of the tank battalions and other disinvestments in capacity. Furthermore, budget constraints curtailed training activities. Finally, smaller missions such as Kunduz and Mali required predeployment training that was not focused on addressing this shortfall.[883]

The resurgence of conventional threats by Russian activities in 2014 and onwards provided a rationale to conduct large scale training exercises for combat operations. In early 2017, the Dutch army conducted a brigade level exercise (by 43 mechanized brigade) in Poland called *Bison Drawsko*. This was the first brigade-level exercise in more than 15 years. The objective was to train combined arms tactics in a combat scenario.[884] As these skills had received scant attention over the last years, *Bison Drawsko* was considered as a diagnostic through which deficiencies could be identified. Indicative of the subsided familiarity of such exercises, retired officers with experience on large exercises from the Cold War were seconded to *Bison Drawsko* to provide advice.[885]

882 This was a recurring theme during the interviews with Dutch officers: interviews Dutch commanding officer 1 Dutch commanding officer 21; Dutch commanding officer 3; Dutch commanding officer 19; Dutch commanding officer 14; Dutch army staff officer 25; Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch commanding officer 6; Dutch army staff officer 18.

883 Interview Dutch army staff officer 18; Dutch army staff officer 7.

884 Otto van Wiggen and Robert-Jan Aarten (2017). Oefening Bison Drawsko 2017: Een essentiële nulmeting voor de Landmacht. *Militaire Spectator, 186*(12), p. 581-582.

885 R. van den Akerboom (2017). Oude ijzervreters terug om jong garde te leren vechten? *Militaire Spectator, 186*(9), p. 412-413.

According to officers involved with *Bison Drawsko*, the exercise showed that Dutch army officers had some difficulty to adjust to high intensity combat as they had their formative experiences in a stabilization mission such as the TFU. The combat scenario with a simulated opposing force equipped with similar weapon systems, proved to be a less forgiving environment than Uruzgan. Not only was the operational tempo far higher, but the troops also had to employ more force against a capable enemy in order to survive. The central conclusion of this diagnostic exercise was thus that the Dutch troops needed to relearn how to fight. To address this deficiency, high intensity combat operations should become more prominent in officer education and training exercises.[886]

At the end of 2018, Dutch troops participated in an even larger, NATO-led, exercise in Norway called *Trident Juncture*. A behemoth of an exercise, *Trident Juncture* involved more than 40.000 allied troops of which 2250 were Dutch. In this international exercise, all services from the Dutch armed forces participated. The scenario was that of a conventional interstate conflict in which a NATO-member state was attacked and the alliance had to respond. Interspersed throughout the scenario were so-called 'hybrid' elements such as cyber threats, electronic warfare, and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles.[887] Still, the exercise took place in a secluded battle space and was purely military in character. As a result, the lessons identified from the mission pertained to conventional warfare. Observations from the exercise included: the importance of training a large-scale strategic deployment in Europe, integrating all (physical) domains in a joint setting, and interoperability with allies in combat operations. For the Dutch armed forces, *Trident Juncture* was a further step towards refocusing the mindset towards high intensity combat operations.[888]

Another example of an exercise in a conventional combat scenario was *Deep Strike* in 2018, conducted by 43 mechanized brigade. This was a command post exercise (CPX) that simulated a 'realistic' high intensity combat scenario against a capable adversary of division strength.[889] To its credit, 43 brigade incorporated elements such as information operations, cyber capabilities, and civilian engagement in the scenario. Furthermore, it consulted with external (civilian) experts in the preparation phase. In the evaluation of the exercise, the most salient observation was that the current brigade is ill-prepared to conduct combat operations due to deficiencies in doctrine, equipment, organization, and mindset. However, the brigade also recognized that it needed integrated non-kinetic capabilities such as information operations and a cyber-element to be effective in a contemporary operational environment.[890]

886 Van Wiggen and Aarten. Bison Drawsko, p. 585-586.

887 Robert-Jan Aarten (2019). Trident Juncture 2018: Substantiële Nederlandse bijdrage aan Joint High Visibility Exercise. *Militaire Spectator, 188*(9), p. 411.

888 Aarten. Trident Juncture, p. 418-420.

889 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2018). *Evaluation Exercise Deep Strike.* Utrecht, p. 7.

890 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2018). *Evaluation Exercise Deep Strike.* Utrecht, p.14-18.

Training exercises at the brigade level and higher have been conducted to address acknowledged deficiencies in readiness for conventional combat operations. After 2014, these deficiencies have become more significant with the increased potential threat of interstate conflict. However, exercises as *Bison Drawsko* and *Trident Juncture* seem to neglect the non-military aspects of the operational environment. As such, Dutch officers run the risk of forgetting the application of non-kinetic capabilities, such as information operations and the cooperation with non-military actors.

4.4.5: Institutionalization: the vignettes

Although deficiencies at the campaign level in Uruzgan were recognized in the Dutch military after the withdrawal, limited efforts were undertaken to address these. Furthermore, institutionalizing knowledge from the campaign was awarded limited resources due to financial constraints and a shifting strategic environment. Still, the more specific learning processes might offer a more nuanced view of institutionalizing experience from the Uruzgan mission. The following subsections will examine the efforts to remedy deficiencies and retain knowledge in these specific areas.

4.4.5.1: The Comprehensive approach and the PRT

At the end of the mission in Uruzgan, the Dutch armed forces regarded the Comprehensive Approach as a model for future military deployments. Although the Comprehensive Approach was introduced during a counterinsurgency operation, the Dutch Defence Staff contended that it applied to all types of military operations. The primacy of the comprehensive approach was reflected in the National Defence Doctrine (NDD). [891] During the Uruzgan mission, the ministry of Defence had coordinated with the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation. On the ground in Afghanistan, this collaboration was increasingly made manifest by the contribution of civil servants in the TFU-staff and the PRT. Yet, the question was how to institutionalize this collaboration for future missions, both in The Hague as in the areas of operations.[892]

To implement the comprehensive approach in military operations, the Uruzgan Campaign Plan was considered a textbook example on how to conduct an interagency planning that warranted institutionalization. This was a considerable departure from standard military planning processes. Yet, as shown in the previous section, the UCP was devised and regarded

891 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 06/004, 06/006.

892 To be sure, the Comprehensive Approach entails more than just interdepartmental cooperation. Collaboration with international organizations, NGOs and host nation governments are additional important aspects of this approach.

as an internal planning document. For future operations, a strategic plan drafted by the involved ministries should inform the campaign and operations in theater. Such a strategic plan had not been provided for the duration of the Uruzgan mission, which imposed the need to draft a campaign plan at the task force level.[893]

With a new Police Training Mission in the northern province of Kunduz, the Dutch ministry of Defence and other departments had the opportunity to implement the Comprehensive Approach in a campaign plan. In this case, the Ministry of Justice and Security also participated in the mission and thus the preparation.[894] Although an attempt was made to draft a plan along the lines of the UCP, this effort did not come to fruition. This was caused by the political constraints and caveats imposed by Dutch parliament to garner sufficient political support for the mission.[895] An additional factor that impeded the drafting of a campaign plan was the multitude of international actors in Kunduz. Other than in Uruzgan, The Netherlands had no coordinating role, which impeded its ability to influence the international efforts. The combination of the domestic political imperatives and the junior position of the Dutch in Kunduz precluded a viable campaign plan for the mission.[896]

The military component of the mission was understated in the official communication. Although the military contribution, necessary for the protection and sustainment of the mission, dwarfed the civilian contingent, the Dutch government emphasized the civilian character of the mission.[897] This was reflected by the stated objectives for the deployment. The Dutch effort in Kunduz was to enhance the quality and quantity of the Afghan National Police and strengthening the judicial system.[898] To this end, police officers, judges, prosecutors, and human rights experts were deployed.[899] The command arrangements for Kunduz were even more intricate than in Uruzgan. The Dutch contribution was headed by a "coordinating management team". This team consisted of a military commander, a civilian representative responsible for the contacts with Afghan authorities and other organizations and a political representative who coordinated with the EUPOL-mission.[900]

While the Dutch mission in Kunduz has been subject to considerable criticism, the collaboration between the ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs was hailed as a

893 Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 06/008.

894 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2019). *Op zoek naar draagvlak: De geintegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan*. Den Haag: Directie Internationaal Onderzoek en Beleidsevaluatie, p. 24.

895 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 22; Dutch Army reservist 2; Dutch army reservist 5.

896 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Draagvlak*, p 49-50.

897 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2011, January 27). Dossier 27925 Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme, nr. 419. Den Haag.

898 Ministerie van Defensie. (2014). *Eindevaluatie Geintegreerde Politietrainingsmissie.* Den Haag, p. 6

899 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Draagvlak*, p. 27-28.

900 Ministerie van Defensie. (2014). *Eindevaluatie Geintegreerde Politietrainingsmissie.* Den Haag, p. 6.

success.[901] There was a genuine effort to draft a campaign plan at the interdepartmental level before the mission, yet the political situation in the Netherlands derailed the prospect of a viable roadmap. Still, the ministries involved showed that the ability for interdepartmental collaboration during missions had grown since Uruzgan.

An attempt to institutionalize this aspect of the comprehensive approach was conducted in 2014 with the publication of the "Guideline Comprehensive Approach". This document was drafted by the ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation and Justice and Security. Its objective was to provide a common vision for the departments on the Comprehensive Approach in conflicts and conflict prevention. While the departments retained the responsibility for policy and execution of their tasks, the guideline sought to streamline these efforts.[902] To this end, the guideline established a roadmap consisting of six steps that ensured that the participating ministries would pass a common process in response to international security crises or conflicts.[903] Lacking a national strategic authority, the Dutch primary coordination body for international missions is the Steering Group for Missions and Operations in which the relevant ministries participate through senior civil servants.[904] As such, the guideline and its six-step roadmap was to guide the workings of the steering group and thus coordinate the employment of various instruments of the Dutch government. Yet, the guideline acknowledged that cultural differences between the ministries could hinder a comprehensive approach to international crises and missions. To overcome, or at least ameliorate these obstacles, the personnel of the departments had to routinely cooperate in The Hague or in training situations. This would allow for a better understanding of each other's strengths and limitations.[905] Of course, the best way to learn to implement the Comprehensive Approach was in the field, such as in Uruzgan by the PRT and the dual command system of the TFU-staff.

Despite the publication of the guideline, the practical application of the Comprehensive Approach by The Netherlands has been limited. Without the operational demands imposed by a mission such as Uruzgan, the sense of urgency at most ministries to participate in training is largely absent. Even during the TFU-mission, civil servants were not always able to participate in the predeployment training. Beyond the ministry of Defence, ministries have no culture of conducting training exercises as their workload is continuous.[906] As a result, it is hard to align departmental agendas for practicing the Comprehensive Approach in the absence of a mission.

901 See for a thorough examination of the Kunduz mission: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Draagvlak*, p. 45.

902 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (2014). *Leidraad Geintegreerde Benadering: De Nederlandse visie op een samenhangende inzet op veiligheid en stabiliteit in fragiele staten en conflictgebieden.* Den Haag, p. 6.

903 Ibidem, p. 24.

904 Hazelbag, *De geïntegreerde benadering in Afghanistan*, p. 123

905 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Geïntegreerde Benadering*, p. 41.

906 Interviews Dutch civil servant 5; Dutch civil servant 4; Dutch army staff officer 22; Dutch army staff officer 19.

From the military's perspective, the ability to fulfill a vanguard role in training the comprehensive approach was constrained. Although the armed forces had the experience and organizational arrangements to plan and execute training in general, there was no equivalent of the PRT or the TFU-staff in the standing organization. This deficiency, already recognized during the TFU-mission, hindered the implementation of doctrine and the guideline on the Comprehensive approach.[907] Short of establishing a new unit, the mixture of non-kinetic specialties could be incorporated in the army's CIMIC-battalion. This unit was essentially the linchpin between the armed forces and civilian experts. In Uruzgan, it had detached civilian experts from its network of reservists to the PRT who could advise on their areas of expertise. This network included specialists in agriculture, judiciary, hydrology, finance, business, government, and other areas. Furthermore, the staff of the battalion had formed the last PRT in Uruzgan.

Moreover, from 2014 and onwards, the army brigades and battalions increasingly focused on training in conventional warfare to regain the associated capabilities that have been neglected during the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.[908] In a mission like the TFU, these units can be called upon to form task force staffs or PRTs. However, the recalibration of army units towards conventional warfare threatens to drown out attention towards incorporating other organizations in missions; the doctrinal centrality of the Comprehensive Approach in any type of conflict notwithstanding.[909]

Perhaps the most practical effort of institutionalization of the Comprehensive Approach can be found at the 1 German/Netherlands Corps (1GNC). This multinational corps headquarters serves as a deployable high readiness headquarters that can function at the tactical and operational levels.[910] 1GNC has been deployed three times to the ISAF mission. In 2003 it served as the ISAF headquarter in Kabul. During its second deployment it provided the staff for ISAF Joint Command. This deployment was reprised in 2013. Additionally, 1GNC provided staff members for Regional Command-South, in particular during the rotations of the Dutch commanders Ton van Loon (2006-2007) and Mart de Kruif (2008-2009).

When lieutenant-general Ton van Loon assumed command of the combined corps in 2010, he sought to institutionalize the lessons from Afghanistan. The most important lesson identified by him and the staff of 1GNC was that complex challenges, such as the war in Afghanistan, required a more comprehensive response than just military (kinetic) activities. Thus, the

907 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified*, p. 24; interviews Dutch commanding officer 4; Dutch commanding officer 23.

908 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 12; Dutch army staff officer 7; Dutch army staff officer 18.

909 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 19; Dutch army staff officer 22; See also Hazelbag. Geintegreerde benadering, p. 214-215.

910 Besides Germany and The Netherlands, ten other NATO member states participate in the corps. See J. W. Maas, M. Greune and J.E. Livingstone (2017). 1 (GE/NL) Corps, ready for oprations! The road to a Land Centric Joint Task Force Headquarters. *Militaire Spectator, 186*(7/8), pp. 316-326.

comprehensive approach became central to the plans and operations of 1GNC.[911] Although the comprehensive approach was developed in response to a counterinsurgency conflict, 1GNC applied it to all types of military operations. The underpinning argument for this is that all military operations take place in a civilian environment and therefore need collaboration with other, civilian organizations to effective. There are no secluded battlefields.[912] To support integrating other and external capabilities in the panoply of the corps, the staff was reorganized. For instance, a staff division "Communication and Engagement" was established. This division encompasses branches for Civil Military Interaction, public affairs and information operations and targeting. [913] By incorporating these capabilities in a staff division, the efforts concerning communication and engagement, especially with civilian actors could be synchronized and integrated in the staff process. Ultimately, this should facilitate 1GNC's adoption of the comprehensive approach in its plans and operations.

Still, 1GNC acknowledged this staff reorganization was by itself insufficient to institutionalize the comprehensive approach. It recognized that it needed civilian partners such as other department, international organizations and NGOs to implement a genuine comprehensive approach to operations. From 2010, 1GNC initiated a project for an exercise, christened *Common Effort*, which included relevant civilian organizations for training in a scenario implementing the Comprehensive Approach. The main objective was to foster understanding and thus cooperation among the civilian and military participants. An important consideration was that the participants would learn to appreciate the cultural differences between them and understand the practical implications of these differences.[914] By engaging and consulting the civilian organizations before the exercise, these actors could weigh in on the scenarios. This was considered an essential precondition for the participation as the civilian organizations did not want to perform as glorified extras in a military exercise. [915]Crucially, the project was supported by the Dutch and German ministries of foreign affairs. Their support helped to reach out to many of the civilian organizations and to build a network of participants.[916] In 2015, the coterie of participating organizations signed a cooperation statement for the Common Effort Community, thereby formally establishing the yearly exercise.[917]

A recurring challenge for the Common Effort exercise is to ensure participation of the civilian partners. In contrast to the military, the civilian organizations may have no culture or organizational resources for conducting training exercises. Resources that are allocated

911 Interviews Dutch commanding officer 15; Dutch army staff officer 16.

912 Interview Dutch commanding officer 9; Dutch army staff officer 1

913 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 15.

914 Common Effort Fact Sheet, https://commoneffort.org

915 S. Offermans and J. Brosky (2011). Project Common Effort: Een praktische manier van comprehensive trainen? *Militaire Spectator, 180*(10), p. 427-429; Interview Dutch army staff officer 1.

916 Ibidem, p. 426.

917 Maas, *et al.* 1 (GE/NL) Corps, p. 322.

for participation in *Common Effort* cannot be used for normal day-to-day operations.[918] Despite this challenge, *Common Effort* is held on a yearly basis, alternatively in The Hague or Berlin. As such, it is an example of practical institutionalization of lessons derived from Afghanistan. Facilitated by 1GNC's staff structure, the exercise helps to retain knowledge from a previous conflict and develops its applicability for future operations. Additionally, 1GNC can train divisions and brigades from allied states. In any training scenario, whether it represents a stability operation or a large-scale interstate war, the Comprehensive Approach is integrated so that the trained formations learn to plan and collaborate with civilian actors in a complex environment.[919]

Thus, the institutional embedding of the Comprehensive Approach and the practical experiences from the PRT in the Dutch armed forces is uneven (see table 4.9). Although the Comprehensive Approach is touted in doctrine and interdepartmental policy documents, the practical implementation is limited. One reason for this is the renewed focus of the Dutch armed forces towards conventional warfare, thereby limiting the attention for the interagency cooperation. This is compounded by the lack of interest by other ministries as there is no mission that provides the incentive for intense cooperation. Still, the reorganization of the German/Netherlands Corps and the yearly Common Effort-exercise are indications that the Comprehensive Approach as initiated in Afghanistan continues to be relevant in parts of the Dutch armed forces, and that a modicum of experience is being retained and built upon.

Comprehensive approach and PRT	**Institutionalization**	**Influencing factors**
Doctrine	Yes, incorporated in doctrine and policy papers	Political salience, dissemination mechanisms
Organizational structure	Limited to CIMIC-battalion, but no PRT-capability	Organizational culture, learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation
Training	Mainly by 1 GNC in structure and exercise Common Effort	Leadership

Table 4.9: Institutionalization of lessons from the PRT

4.4.5.2: Intelligence

As described in the preceding section, Dutch army intelligence personnel came back from Uruzgan with considerable homework. Deficiencies were identified throughout the mission that pertained to doctrine, training, and professionalization of army intelligence

918 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 9

919 Interview Dutch army staff officer 1; Dutch commanding officer 15

personnel. At the end of the TFU-mission, the army's intelligence assets were concentrated in the ISTAR-battalion. Due to the severe budget cuts of 2011, the intelligence section at the Army Headquarters was all but dismantled.[920] The ISTAR-battalion itself was also subject to reorganization. While it lost a company of ballistic radars, it gained some intelligence elements from the Navy and the Air Force. Consequently, the unit was rebranded as the Joint ISTAR Command (JISTARC). Moreover, in the new JISTARC configuration, the intelligence knowledge center was integrated in the organization.[921] Later on, the Defence Intelligence and Security Institute, responsible for educating and training intelligence personnel was also absorbed by JISTARC.[922] Although these reorganizations were primarily driven by budget constraints, it had the benefit that the aspects of operations, doctrine and training were all concentrated in one unit.

In 2012, a new joint intelligence doctrine was published. Although it was a joint document, it contained many of the lessons that were identified during the land operations in Afghanistan. This led to an adjustment in the intelligence process. Threats would no longer come just from conventional state actors but would generally originate from non-state groups such as insurgents or criminal organizations. This shift in threats warranted a broader frame of analysis in *people centric* intelligence.[923] Instead of focusing on terrain and weather, the intelligence process made an evaluation of the operational environment as a whole. Thus, the population and intangible factors such as history, religion, culture, and economy were to be included in the intelligence preparation for operations.[924] In essence, the new doctrine codified the PMESII-method and prescribed a more comprehensive approach for intelligence in contemporary conflicts. With the new doctrine and the experiences from Uruzgan, the intelligence courses were also adjusted. Almost without exception, military instructors had served in an intelligence capacity in Afghanistan and thus had firsthand experience of both the deficiencies and the best practices.

The efficacy of these changes could be put to the test in new missions. For instance, JISTARC supported the Police Training Mission in Afghanistan and the maritime deployment around the Horn of Africa from 2011 and onwards. Deployments of this kind were well suited for a broader intelligence approach as espoused by the PMESII-method. Intelligence analysts could focus beyond threats on local dynamics and root causes of conflicts.[925] Yet the most interesting mission from an intelligence perspective presented itself in 2014 as the Netherlands opted to participate in the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA).

920 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 13.

921 Leo van Westerhoven, (2011, October 20). Nederlandse krijgsmacht bundelt inlichtingencapaciteit. *Dutch Defence Press*.

922 These organizations already enjoyed the benefit of being collocated at the same complex of Army barracks which allowed for close coordination.

923 Ministerie van Defensie. (2012). *Joint Doctrine Publicatie 2: Inlichtingen.* The Hague: Ministry of Defence p. 30-31.

924 Ibidem, p. 60-69.

925 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 13; Dutch civil servant 6.

Plagued by the effects of successive budget cuts, the Dutch armed forces opted for a relatively small but qualitatively high-profile contribution to the UN mission. The Dutch contingent would be centered by its contribution to the *All-Sources Information Unit* (ASIFU) of the mission. JISTARC would provide a company tasked with intelligence collection and a unit (ASIC) of analysts that would process and analyze the acquired intelligence. Other principal elements of the Dutch contribution consisted of a helicopter-detachment and a Special Operations Land Task Group (SOLTG). The latter unit would conduct long range reconnaissance missions and functioned as an additional sensor for the ASIFU.[926]

The ASIFU was a novel concept in an UN-mission and was therefore often referred to as an "experiment". In the history of UN-missions, collecting intelligence had been given short shrift as this activity was deemed incongruous with the declared impartiality of the missions. Furthermore, UN-forces often lacked the organizational and technical ability to establish a functioning intelligence process.[927] The ASIFU used the PMESII-method to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the environment. From this process, the ASIFU would produce analyses that should provide the mission's military and civilian components with predictive scenarios on which they could plan and execute their operations.

Although subsequent evaluations showed substantive critique towards the ASIFU in Mali, this mainly applied to how the intelligence unit and its products were used rather than the concept itself. A crucial point for consideration was that there was a disconnect between the comprehensive (PMESII) intelligence that the unit produced and the needs of the military units who were primarily concerned with threats against their forces. Furthermore, the intelligence sections of these units had little experience in both processing the complex products from the ASIFU and collecting intelligence themselves that could contribute to the overall mission process.[928] Despite these identified deficiencies, ASIFU showed that the Dutch intelligence effort in Mali was a step forward from Afghanistan, as it took on a broader view of intelligence collection and analysis that incorporated the PMESII-method instead of a narrow military perspective.[929] A new and positive development in the ASIFU was the use of an open source intelligence (OSINT) cell. Gathering and analyzing publicly available information, such as from local news outlets and social media, proved a useful, if fledgling, capability. During the operations in Uruzgan, OSINT was of limited use due to the lack of its availability there.[930] In sum, the Dutch participation in ASIFU built in large part on

926 See Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2013, November 1). Dossier 29521 Nederlandse deelname aan vredesmissies, nr. 213. Den Haag.

927 Sebastiaan Rietjens and Erik de Waard (2017). UN Peacekeeping Intelligence: The ASIFU Experiment. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 30(3), p. 533.

928 Ibidem, p. 541.

929 Ibidem, p. 549.

930 Erik de Waard, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Georges Romme and Paul van Fenema (2021). Learning in complex public systems: The case of MINUSMA's intelligence organization. *Public Management Review*, pp. 1-32.

the experiences in Uruzgan. While this effort was no resounding success, it shows that the lessons identified in the previous mission had been implemented in Mali.

The increased salience of intelligence in the Dutch armed forces was not only reflected by its vital role in deployments such as Uruzgan and Mali. While the military was confronted with a new round of budget cuts in 2013, intelligence was one of the few capabilities that would receive additional funding.[931] As the Dutch armed forces gradually regained budget, intelligence continued to be a theme that warranted increased attention. In the Defence Whitepaper of 2018, intelligence was again designated as a theme for investment throughout the organization.[932] This resulted in augmenting the intelligence capability within the army, of which JISTARC was the main beneficiary. Two additional companies were established: one for OSINT collection and analysis and one for technical exploitation intelligence.[933] The latter unit is dedicated to collect forensic intelligence from technological equipment. This includes biometric data such as fingerprints and DNA, but also digital data. A primary application for this capability is forensic investigation of IEDs to uncover the network responsible for its production. Although the concept underpinning the company is broader than just collecting intelligence on IEDs, it is a direct result of the experience in Uruzgan.[934]

Arguably the hardest observation on intelligence to address was the professionalization of intelligence personnel. To be sure, increased effort was made to train intelligence personnel. However, as there was no distinct career path for officers and NCOs who worked in intelligence, it was hard to build on their experience and retain knowledge.[935] A first step towards a specific career path was when the army established intelligence as a secondary specialization and labeled intelligence positions accordingly. With concurrent new personnel management arrangements, this allowed officers and NCOs to specialize in intelligence.[936] This step was augmented when branch-specific courses on intelligence were created for new officers (2017) and NCOs (2019). Spanning nine months, these courses harmonized the starting qualifications for new army personnel who started in intelligence positions.[937] As an ultimate development within intelligence, the Dutch army established an intelligence corps within a new *information manoeuvre* branch. With these successive measures, the intelligence personnel took important steps towards professionalization. As intelligence developed into a separate army branch, new career paths for personnel were created, thereby incentivizing officers and NCOs to build their experience in this vocation. A qualification of this development was that most intelligence positions in army battalions and brigades

931 Ministerie van Defensie. (2013). *In het belang van Nederland*. Den Haag p. 22-24.

932 Ministerie van Defensie. (2018). *Defensienota 2018: Investeren in onze mensen, slagkracht en zichtbaarheid*. Den Haag, p. 14.

933 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch scholar 1; Dutch army staff officer 31; Dutch army staff officer 32.

934 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 21

935 Interview Dutch civil servant 6; Dutch army staff officer 13.

936 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 34; Dutch army staff officer 31; Dutch army staff officer 32.

937 Interview Dutch army staff officer 34.

are not exclusively for intelligence personnel, which risks allotting such positions towards inexperienced NCOs and officers. As such, an important identified deficiency from Uruzgan remains unresolved.

To conclude, the intelligence capability within the Dutch army saw profound efforts to institutionalize lessons from the operations in Uruzgan and has resulted in changes in doctrine, organizations, operations, training and even a new career path for officers and NCOs (See table 4.10). This ostensible success can be ascribed to several factors. An important contributing factor is that in the evaluations on Afghanistan, most commanders recognized both the value of intelligence in operations and the deficiencies of the organization concerning this capability. Consequently, intelligence was a capability that was spared in times of scarcity and could grow when additional budget was allocated. Another aspect that contributed to change is the fact that as the primary intelligence unit in the armed forces, JISTARC contains elements that execute operations, train personnel and process knowledge and experience in new doctrine. This arrangement allows for swift adaptation of doctrine and training. Still, while the extent of institutionalization has been considerable, the more salient manifestations of learning took almost ten years to materialize. The establishment of an army intelligence corps and a unit for technological exploitation were only feasible with additional resources and provided they did not endanger existing organizational structures.

Intelligence	**Institutionalization**	**Influencing factors**
Intelligence process	Yes, experiences from Uruzgan were retained and developed. Incorporated in doctrine and applied, for instance in Mali	Learning and dissemination mechanisms
Professionalization of intelligence personnel	Yes, but after significant hiatus. Intelligence corps and associated career paths were established after several years	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.10: Institutionalization of lessons on intelligence

4.4.5.3: Non-kinetic activities

A substantial portion of the evaluation points after the TFU-mission had ended indicated that the Dutch military had to invest in new capabilities that had proven their value during operations in Afghanistan. While the PRT-concept had already evolved and delivered results during the mission, the integration of information operations within the campaign had in essence not moved beyond the recognition that the Dutch armed forces lacked the capability and capacity to employ this aspect successfully. Moreover, these non-traditional

military capabilities lacked a sufficient organizational base in the Dutch military. For instance, strategic communications and the PRT-concept had no set place in the peace time organization. No single branch or unit was responsible for retaining the experiences from the TFU-missions, drafting functional doctrine or training service members. For psychological operations, the situation was somewhat different as this capability had been made a secondary task for the Army's air defense corps. Evidently, psychological operations had scant relation with shooting at flying objects, and the dual tasking risked degrading the proficiency in one of the assigned duties.

A 2007 study on brigade headquarters, which had formed the building blocks of the TFU-staffs, indicated that the staffs had to be augmented with additional capabilities. In a new organization table, the brigade staffs were allotted two staff officers for information operations and two for psychological operations.[938] At face value, this was an improvement as the new positions could familiarize brigade staffs with these capabilities and incorporate them into the staff processes. In practice, qualified officers who could work in such positions were scarce. There was no doctrine or training in The Netherlands from which service members could be prepared for such tasks. Moreover, there was no career path for such capabilities. At best, working in psychological or information operation was an interesting and temporary diversion from more standard careers. Consequently, by 2011 many of these positions were still vacant.[939] In the successive budget cuts and reorganizations, the positions were quietly scrapped. During missions such as the Police Training Mission in Kunduz, Dutch troops conducted information operations in order to influence perceptions of the local population as part of a larger ISAF campaign. While this practice yielded additional experience, the efficacy of these efforts was unclear.[940]

The attention towards information operations as a capability for the armed forces gained new impetus with the Russian activities in the Crimea and Ukraine in 2014. The ability to shape perceptions of relevant audiences by Russian (dis)information campaigns came to the forefront and initiated renewed efforts to establish countermeasures for this in The Netherlands.[941] Concurrently, the Dutch army sought to enhance its own capability to attain non-kinetic effects through information operations. To be sure, the Dutch plans stopped well short from employing disinformation to influence audiences.[942] Still, military activities to influence perceptions and ultimately behavior are not without controversy in The Netherlands.[943]

938 Ministerie van Defensie. (2007). *Beleidsstudie Staven op Brigadeniveau*. Den Haag.

939 Van Osch, Information Operations, p. 207.

940 E. Broos and M. Sissingh (2013). Verhelderen van de informatieomgeving voor 'Information Operations' door 'Systemic Analysis'. *Militaire Spectator, 182*(7/8), p. 345-346.

941 P. Dekkers and P. Grijpstra (2016). *Informatie als Wapen*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie.

942 Land Warfare Centre. (2016). *Future Land Operating Concept: Editie Ascalon*. Amersfoort, p. 25.

943 Een soft maar gevaarlijk wapen, *NRC* (29 June 2020)

In the army plans, information operations were regarded as an integral part of military campaigns. Operations require orchestrated efforts in the physical, human and information domains. As such, military staffs need to understand how to information operations can be integrated in military operations to attain the stated objectives.[944] Evidently, this would be a marked improvement over the experiences in Uruzgan where information operations were treated as a discrete capability. The centrality of the information domain was reinforced by the army's future vision of 2018. It states that: "Future conflicts require a comprehensive approach with all instruments of influence and power, such as political, military, economical and information means"[945]. To this end, the army "will invest in capabilities and concept development for influencing behavior and protection against [...] manipulation and disinformation".[946]

The salience of information operations was translated into practical activities by the army. The army's *Civil-Military Interaction Command* (CMI co, the organizational successor of the erstwhile CIMIC-battalion) became the custodian of behavioral research, behavioral influencing, and engagement with external actors. This unit develops concepts for non-lethal influencing activities. Additionally, it seeks to cultivate and leverage a network of external partners such as government agencies, academia and NGOs. Its own network of reservists with specific knowledge should reinforce this task[947]

Another development is the army's initiation of a specific training course for officers in communication and engagement in 2019.[948] This formed a further step towards the establishment of a new corps of communication and engagement in the Dutch army in 2020. The branch is home to officers who specialize in psychological operations, civil-military interaction, or public affairs. In general, these officers are to be central to the efforts of integrating activities in the information domain in military operations. By instituting a specific branch in combination with specific training, service members can accumulate experience and knowledge on information operations and subsequently build a career in this specialization.[949] These developments show that the Dutch armed forces, and more specifically the army, attempt to address the identified deficiencies in executing information operations in Uruzgan (see table 4.11). However, in this instance it is the Russian activities in the information domain that have prodded the Dutch military into action rather than the latter's experiences in Afghanistan.

944 Land Warfare Centre. (2016). *Future Land Operating Concept: Editie Ascalon.* Amersfoort, p. 26-27.

945 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2018). *Veiligheid is vooruitzien: De toekomstvisie van de Koninklijke Landmacht.* Utrecht, p. 6.

946 Ibidem, p. 12-14.

947 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 30; Dutch army staff officer 27; Dutch army staff officer 14

948 S. van den Bulk (2019, May 7). Communicatie als wapen. *Defensiekrant*; Dutch army staff officer 14.

949 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 14; Dutch army staff officer 27.

Non-kinetic activities	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Integration of non-kinetic activities	No; experiences from Uruzgan were not consistently retained and developed. Lack of 'anchor point'	Learning and dissemination mechanisms
Professionalization of information operations personnel	Yes, but after significant hiatus. Communication & Engagement corps and associated career paths were established after several years	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.11: Institutionalization of lessons on non-kinetic activities

4.4.5.4: Counter-IED

After the redeployment from Afghanistan, the Dutch armed forces strove to institutionalize the acquired knowledge on IEDs. The Defence Staff evaluation stressed that the Dutch military should retain capabilities to deal with this threat. Consequently, the ad hoc organization of the Joint Task Force had to transition into a permanent institute that could function as a knowledge authority on IEDs. It was tasked to follow developments on IEDs and potential countermeasures and to serve as an advisory body to the rest of the armed forces.[950] In spite of the large budget cuts in 2011 and 2013, the establishment of a permanent counter-IED capability received an investment of 71 million Euros.[951]

The Joint Task Force was embedded in the army's *Land Warfare Centre*. As such, it became part of the land forces' unit that was tasked with concept development and doctrine. In 2014, the Joint Task Force was rebranded as the *Defence Expertise Centre Counter-IED*.[952] Furthermore, counter-IED capacity was embedded within the army's brigade staffs through specialized officers and NCOs.[953] While the institutionalization of knowledge on IEDs was relatively successful, procuring the necessary equipment for the armed forces proved to be harder. Lacking the sense of urgency provided by the operations in Uruzgan, further investments in counter-IED had to compete with other materiel projects for scarce resources in this period of financial austerity. Moreover, because of the (re-)embedding in the army, the Expertise Centre had lost its privileged position at the defence staff level and thus its ability to expedite acquisition processes.[954]

950 Ministerie van Defensie. *Lessons Identified ISAF*, p. 34-35; Ministerie van Defensie. *Best Practices*, 19/101-19/102.

951 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2011, May 20). Dossier 32733 Beleidsbrief Defensie, nr. 2. Den Haag, p. 91.

952 Ministerie van Defensie. (2014, October 8). Task Force Counter-IED wordt expertisecentrum. *Defensiekrant*.

953 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch army staff officer 26

954 Interviews Dutch army staff officer 26; Dutch army staff officer 16; Dutch scholar 1.

In recent missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mali, IEDs continue to pose a threat to deployed Dutch troops. The Dutch army has therefore recognized the enduring relevance of counter-IED knowledge and capabilities (see table 4.12).[955] As IEDs continue to proliferate and evolve in manifestations, efficacy and lethality, the Dutch military has to keep up in order to mitigate this threat to its troops and operations.[956] This imperative is reflected by persistent investments in technology and concepts that can be used to detect, disarm or protect against IEDs.[957]

Another recent manifestation of organizational adaptation regarding IEDs is the establishment of the JISTARC company for technical exploitation (described in sub section 4.3.5). This unit is tasked with collecting and analyzing intelligence that can help targeting IED-networks and thus prevent attacks.[958] These developments show that identified deficiencies in Uruzgan have retained their relevance in recent years for the Dutch armed forces, although financial constraints have stymied their implementation.

Counter-IED	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
JTF C-IED	Yes, JTF C-IED was retained as an expertise center	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture, resource allocation
Specific intelligence	Yes, but after significant hiatus	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics

Table 4.12: Institutionalization of lessons on counter-IED

4.4.6: Sub conclusion

At the end of the Uruzgan mission, there was a profound aspiration to capture and institutionalize the lessons within the Dutch armed forces. This was reflected by the various evaluation efforts and resulting reports. In the evaluations deficiencies had been identified regarding doctrine, training and (non-kinetic) capabilities that were considered necessary for counterinsurgency missions. High ranking officers recognized that the armed forces needed new capabilities and to invest in cooperation with external partners in complex missions. Although Uruzgan should not be considered the blueprint for future missions, general

955 Koninklijke Landmacht. (2016, January 22). Prioriteiten Kennis en Innovatie Landoptreden t.b.v. DKIP 2017 . Utrecht, p. 9.

956 W. Meurer (2015). *Countering de current en future IED dreiging*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie), p.2-4.

957 Defensie Materieel Organisatie. (2016). *Kennis- & Innovatieplan Grondgebonden Wapensystemen (GWS), 2016-2018*. Den Haag, p. 46.

958 Interview Dutch army staff officer 21; Dutch scholar 1.

lessons could be distilled that were applicable to all types of conflicts, such as the value of the Comprehensive Approach and the centrality of intelligence and non-kinetic activities. Of course, these considerations did not mean that the Dutch armed forces should neglect the capability to fight. If anything, the recent missions had degraded the ability to fight a capable foe. Still, a broader panoply incorporating and coordinating various instruments of power was required to be successful in modern conflict. This awareness was explicated in doctrine and policy papers, which professed the value of a capable military that could be employed using the Comprehensive Approach.

This aspiration was however impeded by the lack of real lessons learned organizations at the Defence Staff or within the services. The efforts to capture and implement the lessons were fragmented. As such, there was no authority with sufficient influence to ensure a coherent plan for institutionalization. Moreover, these efforts were undercut by dramatic budget cuts in 2011 and 2013. The armed forces lost more than 12.000 personnel positions, discarded significant amounts of equipment and was downsized in capacity. Consequently, the Dutch military was preoccupied by retaining basic capabilities, rather than investing in new ones. To be sure, some small investments were made because of the evaluations on Uruzgan such as counter-IED and intelligence. Nevertheless, financial constraints limited the ability to institutionalize these lessons to their full extent.

After 2014, the strategic analysis of The Netherlands changed. The Russian activities in Ukraine and the rise of the Islamic State alarmed Dutch policy makers about the necessity of the military. Consequently, the budget of the armed forces was gradually increased, thereby largely repairing the earlier cuts. The changes in the strategic environment also had repercussions for the substance of Dutch defense policy. Whereas in the last decades stability projection had gained in prominence, Russian assertiveness had renewed the attention to territorial defense.

For the Dutch military, this meant that it had to recalibrate towards conventional warfare. This was most pertinent for the Dutch army due to its leading role in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The general opinion within the army was that the combination of two decades of stabilization operations and the budget cuts had diminished its ability to perform high intensity combat operations. When additional funds became available, most proposed investments were planned towards increasing the combat readiness of the army and the military in general.

This is not to say that the experiences from Uruzgan are discarded in the Dutch Armed Forces. For instance, the Comprehensive Approach is still a central concept in doctrine and policy papers. However, the value of documents for achieving institutionalization is limited. More practical manifestations are, for example, the efforts of the German/Netherlands Corps to

implement the Comprehensive Approach in its organization and training. Other instances of institutionalization are the establishment of a counter-IED center and organizational developments regarding intelligence and information operations. By instituting specific branches for intelligence and communication and engagement, the Dutch army strove to enhance these capabilities through investing in specialized personnel. Nevertheless, if investments, training, and general organizational attention are focused on conventional warfare, the relevant experiences from the TFU-mission run the risk of being neglected. When newer capabilities, based on the lessons from Uruzgan, are not integrated within staffs and training exercises, a rift can occur between the traditional elements of the armed forces and the newer specialties, thereby diminishing the latter's value.

4.5: Conclusion

In retrospect, the ability of the Dutch military to learn from its Uruzgan-mission shows an uneven record. Despite the professed willingness of the Dutch armed forces to learn from the deployment, it lacked the organizational learning and dissemination mechanisms to do so. This was as much recognized both before the mission in 2005 as afterwards in 2010. Although there were various evaluations at different levels of the organization to capture lessons and observations, there was no central authority to enact institutional changes. Over the years since Uruzgan, the Dutch armed forces have invested little in the capability to learn. Assessing operational experiences, either from missions or exercises, is still absent. Mission evaluations are predominantly geared towards political accountability rather than learning from experience.

A strong suit of the Dutch military's learning processes in Afghanistan was the way in which informal knowledge sharing was facilitated by formal processes. Small unit tactics and counter-IED procedures were shared horizontally and quickly incorporated in both predeployment and in-theatre training. Furthermore, the various training organizations routinely visited Afghanistan to both learn the latest developments and evaluate their courses with the audience. Returning personnel were often tasked to help mentor and advise their counterparts of successive missions. Although this was a formal arrangement, the efficacy hinged on the quality of the knowledge, its sharing and personal rapport of the involved service members.

During the Uruzgan mission itself, several observations pointed to institutional deficiencies such as the lack of specialized personnel. This particularly applied to positions that had no equivalent in the armed forces standing organization that could serve as anchor points for knowledge retention and development. For instance, there were no organic units within the armed forces that executed PRT-like missions or information operations. While the

PRT-rotations showed meaningful adaptations over time, the knowledge evaporated as the units refocused on their organic tasks. Furthermore, there was no centrally directed training program for the PRT. Consequently, knowledge was shared informally.

Conversely, crucial capabilities such as intelligence did have organic positions and units in the Dutch army. These elements served as a semi-formal anchor point in which experiences were transferred through doctrine and training. In this way, intelligence personnel were able to adopt changes in Uruzgan. Still, the identified institutional deficiencies were not addressed by the army or the ministry. Dedicated career paths or even a specific intelligence corps were not supported by the army during or after the mission due to a lack of resources and an unwillingness to disinvest in existing capabilities.

Although coming ten years after Uruzgan, the recent establishment of new branches within the Dutch army for intelligence and communication and engagement are positive developments that should remedy the identified lack of personnel in these fields for future missions. These developments show that the institutional changes based on operational experiences have been initiated at grassroots levels. Evidently, these changes had to be accepted at the institutional level. As the evaluations at the end of the mission showed, investment and knowledge retention in these aspects were advocated at higher levels in the Dutch army and the ministry of Defence. However, the subsequent budget cuts stymied the implementation of these lessons. When the financial situation improved, some of the plans were rekindled by advocating officers, with additional insights from the altered strategic environment and new missions. These were bottom-up initiatives that eventually were accepted at the institutional level.

Other examples of observations from the field that were made possible by institutional responses were the measures against IEDs and the "civilianization" of the mission from 2008 an onwards. Both adaptations were facilitated by political support. Of course, there were significant differences between the threat posed by IEDs and the more general challenge of fostering governance and development in a counterinsurgency context. The former was an active response to the presence of (foreign) troops by the insurgents. In effect, the increased use of IEDs was an adaptation by the insurgents after direct confrontations against ISAF in 2006 and 2007 had proven too costly and ineffective. Conversely, the response of deploying additional civilians to Uruzgan was more a reflection of the dawning realities of counterinsurgency operations. Officers in the field recognized that they were not qualified to perform all the given tasks and requested specialized civilian assistance.

The most important aspect of the mission, adapting the campaign plan, was done in an informal fashion. Campaign plans were drafted on the initiative of operational analysts or TFU-commanders. While the three campaign plans varied in the extent that they incorporated

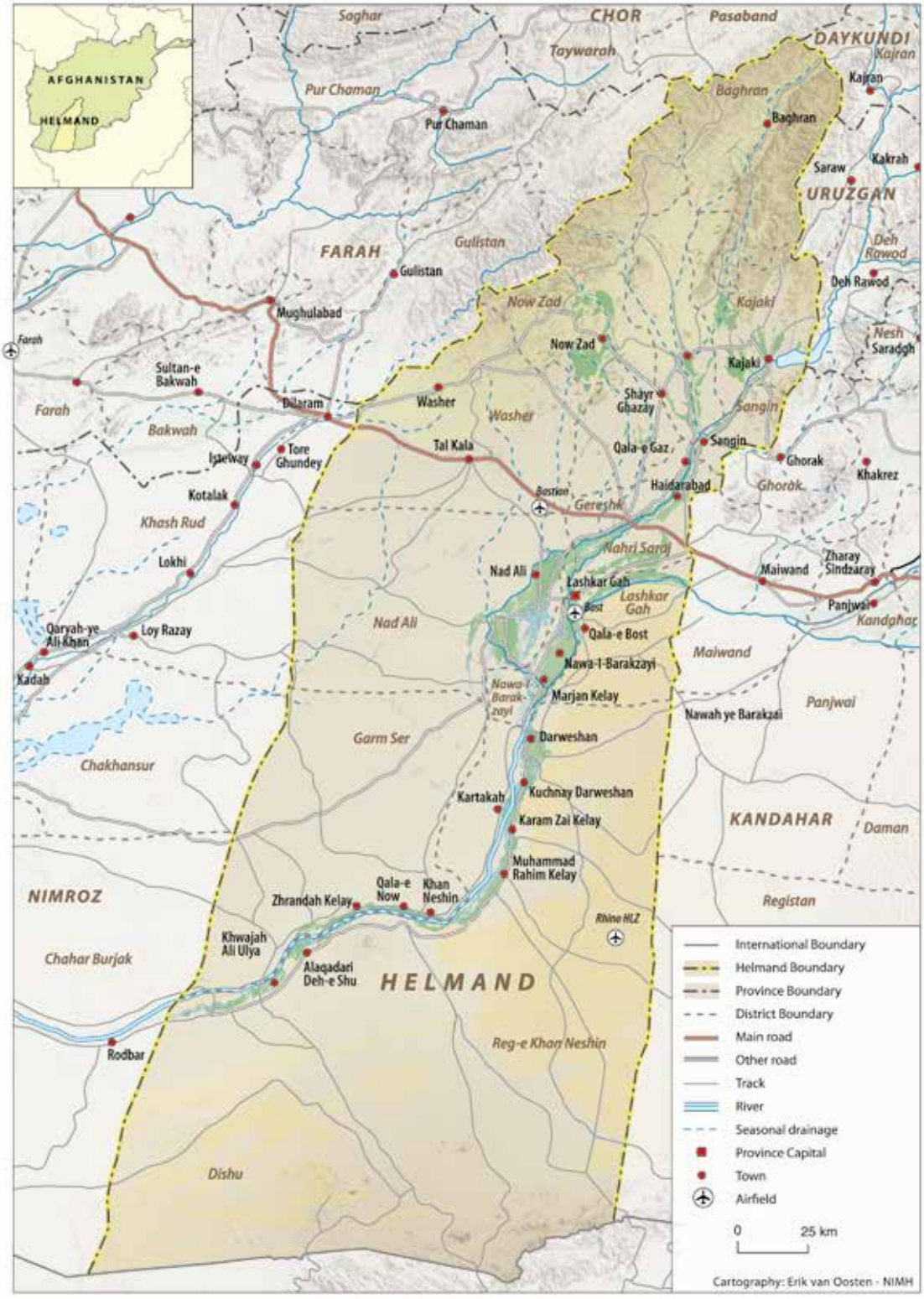
non-military perspectives, they were drawn up in a deliberate political vacuum as they were not formally sanctioned by the departments and consequently not subject to debate in parliament. The campaign plans sought to coordinate the efforts in the fields of security, governance and development in order to execute the Comprehensive Approach. In the field, the growing civilian contingent and the military personnel were increasingly able to plan and execute the operations, thereby giving substance to the ideal of the Comprehensive Approach. At the departmental level, the ministries routinely coordinated their efforts, yet the support for the campaign plans amounted to little more than acquiescence as these plans were considered as internal task force planning documents. Whether the Dutch ministry of Defence, preferably in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is capable of drafting (and adapting) a strategic guidance for a new mission remains to be seen. An attempt to do so for the Kunduz-mission was unfortunately stillborn due to political interference. The publication of an interdepartmental *Guideline Comprehensive Approach* is therefore of limited value if it is not practiced in missions.

The institutionalization of the Comprehensive Approach within the armed forces is more pervasive. A self-evident qualification of this statement is that this defeats the purpose of the concept. Nevertheless, the Comprehensive Approach still features in military doctrine as a guiding principle in any Dutch involvement in conflict. Furthermore, the German/Netherlands Corps has embraced the Comprehensive Approach in its organization and training. A potential pitfall of this general applicability of the concept is that its practical meaning is diluted. By contrast, in the counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, the value has become pertinent.

Recent observations show that the armed forces, and in particular the army, are recalibrating towards conventional conflicts and high intensity combat operations. In such scenarios, as seen in training exercises, the Comprehensive Approach and non-kinetic activities are far from primary considerations. Regaining the ability to fight a capable, well-equipped adversary takes precedence in practical terms such as training, education and investments in new capabilities. This can lead to divergence between the combat arms that refocus on conventional warfare and capabilities such as civil-military cooperation, intelligence and non-kinetic activities that are more geared towards stabilization operations. An additional hazard is that due to this focus at certain levels, the efforts in other areas, often with their roots in operational experiences in Afghanistan or elsewhere are seen as less relevant and therefore subject to increased scrutiny.

In sum, the Dutch armed forces in Uruzgan adapted to an extent in relation to the operational environment. However, these changes were in large part initiated through informal processes and only at a later stage supported by formal organizational support. The formal learning mechanisms mostly geared towards capturing observations and not implementing

lessons. After the mission, the Dutch armed forces intended to institutionalize the relevant experiences from Uruzgan. When the financial situation allowed this, meaningful institutional adjustments were made, including the establishment of new branches. In light of a new strategic analysis that awards more weight to conventional capabilities, these organizational changes lack a coherent vision. The prime culprit for this is the enduring lack of organizational arrangements that help to learn from operational experiences.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District Boundary
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