Adapting to improve: the Odyssey of the operational mentoring and liaison teams of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium

Wiltenburg, I.L.

Adapting to Improve

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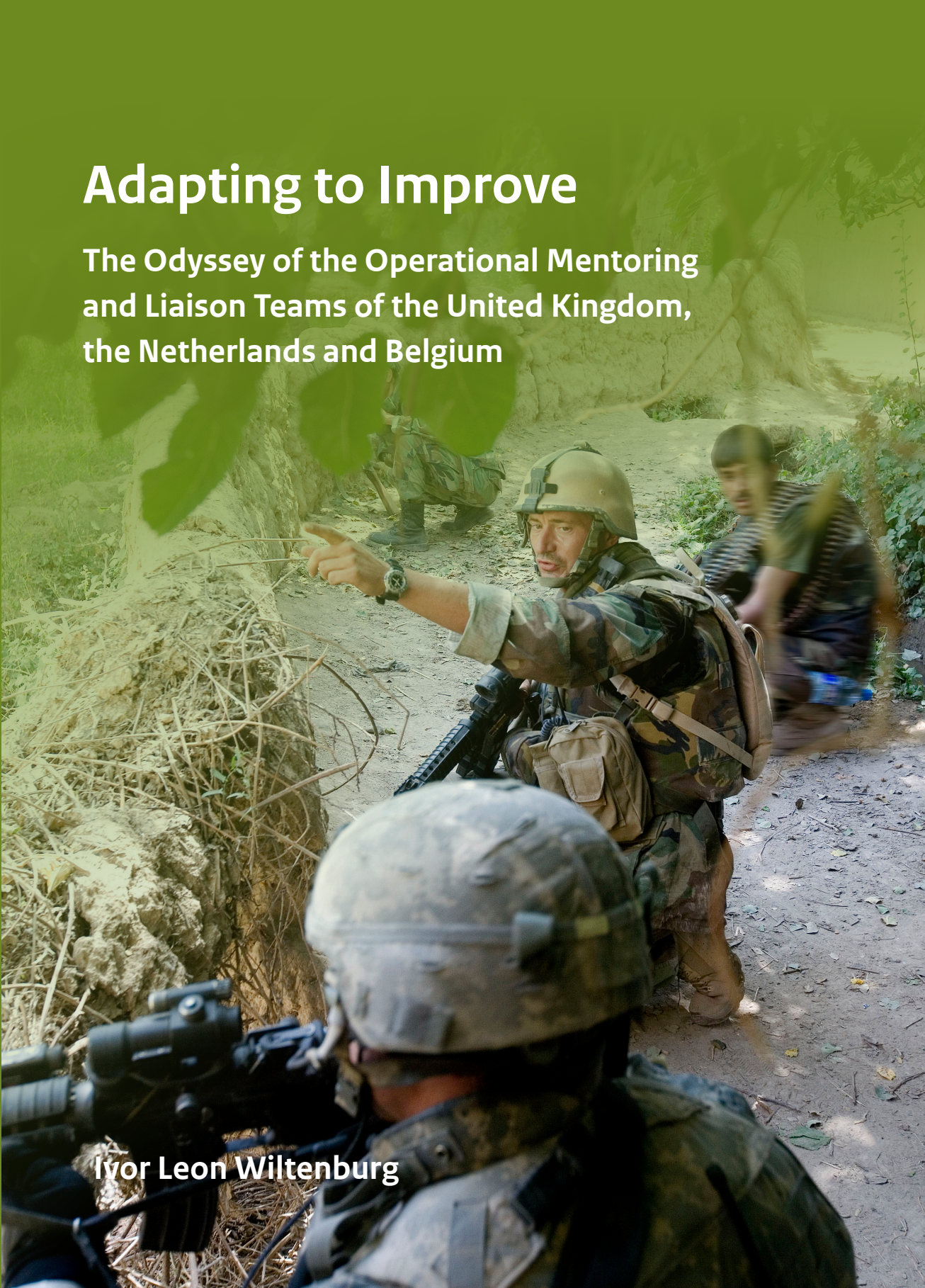

Ivor Leon Wiltenburg

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Table of contents

Table of contents

Acknowledgements **7**

Table of contents **10**

Prologue **16**

Part 1

Chapter 1: Introduction **23**

1.1 Research Puzzle: the Objective and Relevance of SFA-type Operations 26

1.1.1 The Transfer of Political, Financial or Escalation Risk 27

1.1.2 The Mobilisation of a Partner to Defeat or Attrit an Adversary 28

1.1.3 The Building of the Partner's Institutional Capacity 29

1.1.4 Gaining Influence with a Partner 30

1.1.5 Opportunity for a Bespoke Military Participation 31

1.1.6 Findings and observations 32

1.2 The other side of the mountain: adverse effects of SFA 32

1.3 Subconclusion on the utility and challenges of SFA 37

1.4 Operationalising SFA 38

1.4.1 Counterinsurgency Operations 41

1.4.2 Unconventional Warfare 44

1.4.3 The creation of SFA capacity 46

1.4.4 SFA specific risks to the force 48

1.5 Conclusion of the research puzzle and main research question 55

1.6 Research design and methodology 56

1.7 Structure 60

1.8 The Establishment of a National Afghan Army 61

1.9 The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams 64

Chapter 2: The Theory of Military Innovation **67**

2.1 Introduction 67

2.2 Schools of Thought within Military Innovation Studies 68

2.3 External Factors of Influence 70

2.3.1 Domestic Politics 70

2.3.2 Alliance Politics 71

2.3.3 Strategic Culture 72

2.3.4 Civil-military Relationship 73

2.4 Internal Factors of Influence 74
2.4.1 Military Leadership 74
2.4.2 Organisational Culture 75
2.4.3 Disseminating Knowledge 75
2.4.4 Manifestations 76
2.4.5 Doctrine and Concepts 76
2.5 Types of Organisational Learning 80
2.5.1 Informal Organisational Learning in Conflict 80
2.5.2 Formal Organisational Learning in Conflict 81
2.5.3 Institutionalisation of Inter-conflict Learning 82
2.6 Subconclusion 83

Part 2
Chapter 3: The OMLTs of Task Force Helmand 2006–2010 87
3.1 Introduction 87
3.1.1 British Strategic Culture 89
3.1.2 The British Political Decision-making Process Regarding the Use of the Armed Forces 92
3.1.3 The British Armed Forces 94
3.2 The Decision Path to Helmand 95
3.2.1 OMLT HERRICK 4: 7th Parachute Regiments Royal Horse Artillery 97
3.2.2 OMLT HERRICK 5: 45 Royal Marine Commando. 110
3.2.3 OMLT HERRICK 6: 1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards 114
3.2.4 OMLT HERRICK 7: 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment 118
3.2.5 OMLT HERRICK 8: 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment 125
3.2.6 OMLT HERRICK 9: 1st Battalion The Rifles Regiment 129
3.2.7 OMLT HERRICK 10: 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment 132
3.2.8 Operation ENTIRETY 135
3.2.9 OMLT HERRICK 11: 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment II 136
3.3 Subconclusion 140

Chapter 4: The OMLTs of Task Force Uruzgan 2006–2010 145
4.1 Introduction 145
4.1.1 Dutch Strategic Culture 146
4.1.2 The Dutch Political Decision-making Process 153
4.1.3 The Dutch Armed Forces Structure 154
4.2 The Decision Path to Uruzgan 157
4.2.1 OMLT 1 161
4.2.2 OMLT 2 167

4.2.3 OMLT 3 170
4.2.4 OMLT 4 179
4.2.5 OMLT 5 185
4.2.6 OMLT 6B 189
4.2.7 The Brigade OMLTs 191
4.2.8 OMLT 8C 193
4.2.9 OMLT 9C 195
4.3 Subconclusion 197

Chapter 5: The Belgian OMLTs in Kunduz 201
5.1 Introduction 201
5.1.1 Belgian Strategic Culture 201
5.1.2 The Belgian Political Decision-making Process 204
5.1.3 Belgian Armed Forces Structure 205
5.2 The Decision Path to Kunduz 207
5.2.1 OMLT 1: 3 PARA 208
5.2.2 OMLT 2: The Chausseurs Ardennais 216
5.2.3 OMLT 3: 2 Commando 219
5.2.4 OMLT 4: Bataljon Bevrijding / 5 Linie 223
5.2.5 OMLT 5: 12ème de Ligne Prince Leopold – 13ème de Ligne 226
5.2.6 OMLT 6 and 7: 3 PARA (2) and Chasseurs Ardennais (2) 228
5.2.7 MAT 8: Regiment Carabiniers Prins Boudewijn – Grenadiers 230
5.3 Subconclusion 232

Part 3
Chapter 6: Analysis and conclusion 237
6.1 The strategic rationale behind SFA-type deployments in Afghanistan 237
6.2 Military innovation during the OMLT deployments 241
6.2.1 Tactical and Operational Adaptations 241
6.2.2 Force Levels, organisational structures and Resources 244
6.2.3 Education and training 246
6.2.4 Dissemination 248
6.3 Learning from conflict: what lessons have been institutionalised? 250
6.4 Conclusion 255
6.5 Avenues for further research 256

Appendix 1: List of interviews 261

Appendix 2: List of Questions Used in the Semi-structured Interviews 269

Bibliography **271**

Samenvatting **291**

Curriculum Vitae **297**

Prologue

The intricacies of security force assistance became apparent to me in the summer of 2007 when confronted with the twists and turns of working with the Afghan National Army (ANA) during my first deployment to Afghanistan. Although a formative experience for any young officer, being attached to a so-called Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) introduced me to new perspectives on the variety of tasks required of Dutch Army personnel. As part of an early OMLT rotation, we had to glue together a mixed team of six unacquainted men during a short pre-deployment training, and prepare for a task we had only the flimsiest understanding of: who were these Afghan soldiers? What were their capabilities? How were they equipped? What type of operations would be conducted? How would we be supported? Most of these questions were only answered—albeit in part—upon arrival in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan.

During the deployment, we had to come to terms with the bureaucracy of the Dutch Army, the lurking Taliban insurgency in Uruzgan and, most importantly, the distinctive Afghan warrior culture. Being somewhat familiar with dealing with the Army's bureaucracy, and having little influence on the insurgents' behaviour, the latter aspect especially was cause for reflection ex post. How did we end up doing this type of work? We did not speak the local language and we were not quite selected for our diplomatic skills and ability to quickly build rapport with indigenous people. Moreover, we lacked certain aspects that command respect amongst our Afghan colleagues: we were younger than our new Afghan friends, which was troublesome in a society that values seniority. We were outranked by our mentees and lacked *wasta* amongst the Dutch Battlegroup and Task Force. Nonetheless, we went about our assignment, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, making the most of our situation in the best traditions of the Dutch Army.

Several years after redeploying, the realisation dawned that being part of the OMLT had been quite an exceptional experience. Mentoring an indigenous force during operations—or more colloquially, experiencing the utter chaos of combat whilst embedded with, what seemed to us, a rag-tag band of oddballs that had been recruited into the ANA—was quite dissonant with my Western-style military upbringing within the infantry. Indeed, the disciplined structuring of manoeuvres via our ingrained tactics, techniques and procedures was aimed to eviscerate any unnecessary emotions from fighting. Conversely, the shouting, the aimless discharge of fully automatic weapons and the complete disregard of friendly positions by the Afghans that we observed would turn out to be a shared experience amongst the many OMLT veterans interviewed for this dissertation. As the Afghan National Army improved somewhat thanks to many years of close cooperation with a host of international advisers, the Dutch Army withdrew from Uruzgan, and the OMLT, in 2010, leaving the ANA in the province far from its intended mark of operating independently.

Upon reflection, it transpired that mentoring during combat was a military activity with which the Dutch Army had no recent experience, nor had it any formal military discourse on this topic. Notwithstanding, a second tour, this time in Africa, reaffirmed that mentoring, training and advising was becoming a staple of the Dutch armed forces, and that the issues encountered in 2007 had not yet been solved in 2015. If training indigenous forces was becoming a mainstay for us, it looked somewhat anomalous that we as professional soldiers were still only preparing to fight a mechanised war we had been practising for since the dawn of the Cold War.

Simultaneous with the execution of training, advising and assistance operations by the Dutch Army, a discourse on that very topic sprang to life internationally. The term now adapted into NATO parlance for this type of operation is Security Force Assistance (SFA), and the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams in Afghanistan—or more broadly speaking, combat mentoring—was labelled as a variant of SFA. Upon scrutiny, SFA turned out to be quite a common military endeavour. The United States (US) armed forces had ample experience with SFA during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Many types of collaborations had taken place in contemporary history, varying in interconnectedness, size, type, duration, location, legality, physical risk, domain and importance. Considering this abundancy, the question remained why, in my observation, the Dutch Army had to reinvent the wheel as it commenced its participation in the Afghanistan War in 2006. This question marked the starting point of this academic journey into SFA, and more specific combat mentoring, which expanded into multiple case studies aiming to identify the lessons learned, and to gain an understanding of the institutionalising—or lack thereof—within the armed forces of the selected case studies.

Part 1

An Analytical Framework for Understanding SFA as a Tool for International Intervention

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

Training, advising and assisting foreign security forces is a challenging task at the best of times. Many practitioners attest to the demanding environment of working with indigenous forces.[1] These challenges are present on many levels. Dissimilar languages, cultures and personalities challenge cooperation and mutual understanding between the recipient and provider of assistance. On a broader scale, building an effective partner fighting force capable of conducting joint and combined operations independently is even more challenging. Although it seems relatively straightforward to construct a light infantry-type militia wielding small arms in support of Western foreign policy goals, integrating advanced equipment into joint operations requires expertise and experience that often requires years to acquire. Moreover, Western policymakers also aim to establish a depoliticised meritocracy that often is beyond realistic expectations. Over the last decennia, the results of ameliorating foreign security forces have thus been ambiguous at best. This includes the subject of this research, the Western efforts to stand up the Afghan National Army via Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs).

Despite the challenges, utilising the armed forces to augment the capability and capacity of foreign security forces have gained a foothold in the political toolbox of Western states as a preferred way of warfare.[2] Although this practice is not revolutionary -it has been done throughout history-, increasing the potential of an aligned foreign security force is progressively a reasonable alternative to more direct involvement for many states. During the two conflicts that defined Western military involvement during the first decennia of the 21st century -the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq- great effort has been put into creating national armies supporting Western policy goals, albeit mostly ill-fated.[3] Subsequently, a shift originated from the 'endless wars' such as in Iraq and Afghanistan -unsustainable economically, lacking popular support and unsustainable financially- to more sustainable interventions via indirect ways.[4] Indeed, shifting the burden of the fight to indigenous forces

1 Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019.

2 Matisek and Wiltenburg, *Security Force Assistance as a Preferred Form of 21st Century Warfare*.

3 Adam Scher, "The Collapse of the Iraqi Army's Will to Fight: A Lack of Motivation, Training, or Force Generation?," (*Army Press Online Journal,* 2016); J.F. Sopko, Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: An Assessment of the Factors That Led to Its Demise, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (2022).

4 Astri Suhrke, "Waging war and building peace in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 4 (2012):487; Carter Malkasian, "How the Good War Went Bad: America's Slow-Motion Failure in Afghanistan," *Foreign Aff*, 99. (2020). Neta C. Crawford, "United States Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post-9/11 Wars through Fy2020: $6.4 Trillion." *Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs*. https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2018/Crawford_Costs%20of%20War%20Estimates%20Through%20FY2019.pdf.

with Western assistance provides a logical narrative to reduce the intensity and, thus, the costs of the operation in both blood and treasure to Western armies.[5]

In particular, the American shift to this more indirect approach has had a knock-on effect on many other Western states. Indeed, following the lead of the US and medium powers such as France and the United Kingdom (UK, small states have increasingly contributed to training and equipping militaries and militias in known hotspots such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya but also a host of African states not in a state of conflict.[6]

As the demand for these types of training, assisting and advising operations are rising, one particular observation stands out: what is being asked for is quite unclear, as no consensus exists on the characteristics of these types of deployments. The variety in the execution of these missions -differing in size, type, duration, location, legality, physical risk, domain and importance-, has made adequately describing and defining these operations difficult. In an attempt to shed light on these types of operations, many terms have been coined to describe this military activity by both policymakers and scholars. [7] The terms include Security Assistance, Security Cooperation, Remote Warfare, Security Sector Reform, Capacity Building, Building Partner Capacity, Train, Advise and Assist (TAA) missions, Military Assistance, the By-With-Through approach, Vicarious Warfare, Proxy Warfare, Foreign Internal Defence and others.[8] Each term covers broadly the same topic but differs in financing, goals, methods, execution or doctrine. The plethora of terms used obfuscates

5 Knowles and Watson, *Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from Contemporary Theatres*.

6 For instance, the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program was funded and managed by the US Department of State. The initiative is designed to improve African militaries' capabilities by providing selected training and equipment necessary for multinational peace support operations. The Dutch government joined the programme in 2008 and deployed training teams in Uganda, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Niger and Rwanda. The Capacity Building Mission in Iraq (CBMI) provided training and equipment for both regular and special Iraqi Forces, as well as Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

7 Taylor P. White, "Security Cooperation: How It All Fits," *Joint Force Quarterly* 72 (2014).

8 Tom Watts and Rubrick Biegon, *Defining Remote Warfare: Security Cooperation*, Remote Warfare Programme (Oxford Research Group, 2017); Norman M Wade, *The Military Engagement, Security Cooperation & Stability SMARTBOOK: Train, Advise, Assist* (Lakeland: The Lightning Press, 2016); Taylor P. White, "Security Cooperation: How It All Fits," *Joint Force Quarterly* 72 (2014); Stephen Watts, Kimberly Jackson, Sean Mann, Stehen Dalzell, Trevor Johnston, Matthew Lane, Michael J. McNerney, Andrew Books, "Reforming Security Sector Assistance for Africa," (RAND Corporation, 2018); White, "Security Cooperation: How It All Fits."; Joseph Votel and Eero R Keravuori, "The by-with-through operational approach," *Joint force quarterly* 89, no. 2 (2018); Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, "Surrogate warfare: the art of war in the 21st century?," *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018); Thomas Waldman, "Vicarious warfare: The counterproductive consequences of modern American military practice," *Contemporary Security Policy* 39, no. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1393201; NSO, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Security Force Assistance (SFA)* (Brussels: NATO Standardization Office, 2016); Andrew Mumford, *Proxy warfare* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

academic analysis of this military activity. For readability reasons, it is therefore important first to introduce the term 'Security Forces Assistance' (SFA) as the preferred term in this research. The rationale behind the choice of SFA is twofold. In the first place, SFA is a term now used in the doctrines of NATO, the United States and the United Kingdom, and it covers the military activities described in this dissertation.[9] Moreover, SFA is the most neutral term, as it does not imply involvement from a particular country, nor has it any affiliation with a distinct academic school of thinking. As used in this research, SFA consists of *activities that develop and improve, or directly support, the development of local forces and their associated institutions by training, equipping and combat assistance.*

Interestingly, most of the research on SFA-type operations was done by American or British scholars on either American or British SFA operations, leaving a hiatus on the activities of other states participating in SFA.[10] Also, questions regarding its effectiveness, possibilities for improvement and the role of these missions in foreign policy started to be addressed only recently, as these questions had received little academic scrutiny up to that point.[11] On a positive note, the literature on this topic has been increasing in the last five years, which coined several terms mentioned earlier. However, this body of literature indicates that supporting foreign security forces has been far from a panacea for solving security problems in affiliated states.[12] The failed attempts to construct the Afghan and Iraqi national armies -both crumbled to the Taliban (2021) and ISIS (2015) forces respectively- are a case in point. However, many other SFA-type operations might be identified returning similar chequered results.[13]

9 NATO Standardisation Office, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Security Force Assistance (SFA)*; UK Department of Defence, UK Department of Defence, Land Operations, UK Ministry of Defence, (London: Land Warfare Development Centre, 2017); Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Defense Security Assistance Manual*. http://www.samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-1#C1.1.

10 The few articles on small state SFA provision include: Coombs, Howard G. "Canada's Lessons." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 49, no. 3 (2019): 5. Hansen, Vegard Valther, Helge Lurås, and Trine Nikolaisen. "Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (Omlt): The Norwegian Army and Their Afghan Partners ". *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* (2012).; Wilén, Nina, and Pierre Dehaene. "Challenges with Security Force Assistance in Niger: Understanding Local Context and Aligning Interests." (2020).

11 Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan J. Baker, "Small footprint, small payoff: The military effectiveness of security force assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1-2 (2018). 18.

12 Garrett J Kaye, *Set Up for Failure: The Use of US Security Force Assistance to Prepare Foreign Security Forces for Traditional Combat Operations*, US Army School for Advanced Military Studies Fort Leavenworth United States (2017); Emily Knowles and Abigail Watson, *No Such Thing as a Quick Fix: The Aspiration-Capabilities Gap in British Remote Warfare*, (London: Oxford Research Group, 2018); Michael Shurkin, John Gordon IV, Bryan Frederick, Christopher G. Pernin, *Building Armies, Building Nations: Toward a New Approach to Security Force Assistance*, (RAND Corporation, 2018); Waldman, "Vicarious warfare."; Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, "Small footprint, small payoff"; Karlin, "Why Military Assistance Programs Disappoint", 189-192.

13 Jahara Matisek, "The crisis of American military assistance: strategic dithering and Fabergé Egg armies," *Defense & Security Analysis* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2018.1500757. 281-283

This provides us with a paradox: the political and strategic requests for more military capacity to ameliorate foreign security forces are at odds with the results on the ground. The stated policy goals -assisting a state to ensure its internal and external interests are served, rather than intervening in a potentially costly endeavour-, seem reasonable, however, the outcome of SFA does not add up to its envisioned potential. Considering the chequered results, we must therefore delve further into the problem. Dissecting the process from policy to practice, in its most basic form military capacity is being committed to a policy goal, which during the execution of the operation assigned to it yield certain results. To answer how and where SFA outcomes deviate from its intended policy goals, the first step is to examine why SFA is being used as a preferred way of contemporary warfare.

1.1 Research Puzzle: the Objective and Relevance of SFA-type Operations

In the previous paragraph, the ambiguity of SFA as a military way has been described. Undeniably, the track record of SFA is not encouraging. So what are the incentives for policymakers to continue with SFA? Although no singular reason might be present, Watling and Reynolds (RUSI) argue that four objectives are frequently pursued by patron states. These four reasons include the transfer of political, financial or escalation risk, the mobilisation of a partner to defeat or attrit an adversary, the building of the partner's institutional capacity and the ability to gain influence with the partner state.[14] Watling and Reynolds base this distinction on researching eleven contemporary and historical cases.[15] Each case represents a global or regional power intervening via SFA, albeit with a distinct emphasis on British and American-led operations.[16] As Watling and Reynolds' study does not encompass smaller states' political ends, the list of motives for SFA-type operations must be augmented with objectives more commonly found amongst smaller states: the possibility to participate in a bespoke manner fitting to the limited military potential of many small states and the ability to show commitment and support to the international community or a hegemonic ally. The latter reason will be integrated into section 1.1.5, augmenting Watling and Reynolds' argument, which is limited to a bilateral relationship. As this section will indicate, these five reasons, often in combination with each other, shape the political environment that favours

14 J. Watling and N. Reynolds, *War by Others' Means: Delivering Effective Partner Force Capacity Building*, (RUSI, 2020).

15 Watling and Reynolds, *War by Others' Means*, 6.

16 Watling and Reynolds, *War by Others' Means*, 6. The selected cases in this study are the British support to the 1916 Arab Revolt; the Allied intervention in Russia 1918–20; the Special Operations Executive (SOE) operations in France during the Second World War; the American training to South Vietnam; the Soviet training to the Egyptian military between 1967 and 1973; the British training to Omani forces; the American operations in support of the Afghan Mujahideen; the British training and assistance to Yemeni forces since 2004; the Coalition training to Iraqi and Afghan forces since 2001; the Iranian training to the Houthis in Yemen and Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in Iraq since 2015; and the international training to the armed forces of Mali since 2012.

these limited interventions and thus explains the continued popularity of SFA amongst Western states, overcoming the challenges as explained in the previous paragraph.

1.1.1 The Transfer of Political, Financial or Escalation Risk

Warfare, especially on the scale of the counterinsurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq are prohibitively costly in both blood and treasure, with the costs of these campaigns already exceeding six trillion US dollars.[17] Also, more than 8,500 coalition lives were lost since 2001 fighting in these conflicts, and tens of thousands service members were wounded in action.[18] With the increased understanding that these 'endless wars' are not sustainable, it is perceived that SFA-type operations offer the opportunity to meet strategic ends without the cost in blood and treasure regularly linked with expeditionary warfare, effectively outsourcing the more gruesome parts of warfare to local agents.[19] The use of proxies or 'surrogate' forces to perform combat duties in lieu of Western formations allow the patron (state) "to manage the increasing portfolio of risks globally while minimising its exposure to human, financial and reputational costs."[20] This is a direct result of the dilemma between the perceived necessity to intervene in weak states and the increasing averse attitude of Western polities concerning expeditionary warfare. Therefore, the concept of externalisation of violence by using third parties as surrogates or proxies has been reintroduced as a popular foreign policy tool. The added advantage of this approach is the increased distance between the violence and the domestic public, as the state is able to "dissociate itself from organized violence executed under its direction by surrogates, [and thus] can also avoid bearing the political costs of warfare."[21] Although enabling proxy forces has not given Western state a free pass—often Western involvement in enabling proxy forces has led to public and political scrutiny[22]—the agency of the recipient in concordance with the relative inconsequence from the critique from the patron's society has provided Western capitals a valuable foreign policy tool absent exorbitant costs.

17 Neta C. Crawford, "United States Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post-9/11 Wars through FY2020: $6.4 Trillion," *Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University* (2019), 1.

18 See: http://icasualties.org/, accessed 19/10/2020.

19 Rauta et al., "A Symposium–debating 'Surrogate Warfare'and the Transformation of War," 3; Krieg, "Externalizing the Burden of War".

20 Krieg and Rickli, "Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21st Century?" 114.

21 Krieg and Rickli, "Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21st Century?" 117.

22 In the Netherlands, the provision of 4x4 trucks to 'moderate' rebel groups backfired when the assets were proven to be used by groups that were labelled 'extremist' and 'terrorist.' Consequently, all support to moderate rebels was suspended and the government was questioned extensively by the parliament on the issue. See also Holdert and Dahhan, "Nederland steunde terreurbeweging in Syrië"; Cordesman, "America's Failed State Wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.".

Alternatively, the aversion towards the presence of large Western forces in large numbers also constitutes an operational necessity. Accusations of neo-colonialism, anti-Western local sentiments or geopolitical developments might prevent the deployment of (large) military formations to global hotspots.[23] For instance, China would vehemently oppose strong, overt US military deployments to Taiwan, as would Russia in Ukraine. Other locations are 'too hot to handle,' as direct involvement in places such as Libya or Syria would have the potential to lead to another 'endless war,' while also provoking third party involvements. The use of surrogates or proxies in combination with technological support allows for strategic influence in a conflict, without risking unwarranted escalation.

1.1.2 *The Mobilisation of a Partner to Defeat or Attrit an Adversary*

The operational reality of a conflict could demand the quick creation of effective combat units over long-term goals. Exemplified by the twenty-first-century interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, Western states proved unable to field enough forces in the field to suppress the growing insurgency in both countries. Indeed, coalition forces struggled to augment their own forces with indigenous forces both qualitatively and quantitatively. In both cases, a US-led 'surge' in troops was deemed necessary to regain the initiative.[24]

In the context of personnel-capped Western interventions, quickly mobilising local forces has proven highly important in counterinsurgency in order to create the force to hold the ground after an area has been cleared of insurgents. This concept harkens back to the "clearing-holding-winning-won" adage as first theorised by British officer Robert Thompson and its subsequent variations.[25]

Otherwise, extra troops are necessary as the intervening force is short on numbers and unable to effectively control their area of operations without (local) reinforcements. The need for the local forces' numbers—as well as their distinct qualities in understanding the environment—was shown during the Anbar Awakening in Iraq, as well by as the enduring demand by the British in 2006/2007 to dispatch more ANA to Helmand province as the single British battalion was fixed in a number of fortified district centres and desperately short on numbers.[26] Indeed, building the capacity of indigenous forces is an inherent part of contemporary conflict which are mostly irregular in nature. Irregular Warfare might not

23 Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*, 199.

24 Ben Barry, *Harsh Lessons: Iraq, Afghanistan and the Changing Character of War*, (Routledge, 2018) 20-33

25 M. Huizing, "Basisprincipes van klassieke counterinsurgency," *Militaire Spectator* 181, no. 2 (2012): 49.

26 For more information on the first British rotation in Helmand, see: Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars*; Stuart Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para* (Hachette UK, 2009); Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*; Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*; British Army, Operation Herrick Campaign Study, Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015).

be the preferable method of conflict for Western capitals, but it has dominated the past two decades, and is very likely to play a part in future conflict, as very few competitors would be willing to play to the strengths of their adversaries.[27]

Still, other cases point to the mobilisation of partner forces to attrit a mutual opponent, the latter being engaged in armed conflict with the partner entity. In these instances, the overall goal of SFA-provision is enemy-centric, which, especially during the Cold War, occurred when denying an enemy any access or influence in a conflict environment circumvented open conflict or the providing state's armed involvement. Examples include the Cuban assistance to Angola, the Soviet support to Egypt in the building-up phase of the Yom Kippur War and the French support to the Chadian military in the conflict between Chad and Libya in 1978–1987.[28] Also, the British and American support to the Afghan Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan war (1979–1989) was aimed at the attrition of Soviet forces, rather than pursuing ideological or humanitarian aims within the state of Afghanistan.

However, the standing up of indigenous forces in a speedily fashion often holds tension with the wider institutional development of the security forces of the host nation, as the following section will explain.

1.1.3 The Building of the Partner's Institutional Capacity

One of the main issues with twenty-first-century Western SFA is that the operational scope has been too focused on "building an army in the absence of a viable state that has the institutional capacity and political willpower to sustain that army."[29] To sustain their armed forces, the recipient partner must have security institutions that are capable to provide "stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour."[30] However, in contemporary SFA-type deployments, standing up indigenous light infantry units has held prominence over institution building, as the operational reality necessitated quick increases of combat power against a raging insurgency. Building security institutions whilst fighting a war has been compared to building an airplane while flying it, as the units that form up a large part of the institution are simultaneously engaged in war fighting.[31] This not only shifts the focus off institution building, but also creates an atmosphere where antagonising third party actors have a damaging influence on institution building progress. As Watling explains:

27 Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes*", 17-18; David H. Ucko, "Nobody Puts IW in an Annex: It's Time to Embrace Irregular Warfare as Strategic Priority," (Modern Warfare Institute, 2020), https://mwi.usma.edu/nobody-puts-iw-in-an-annex-its-time-to-embrace-irregular-warfare-as-a-strategic-priority/. accessed 05/05/2021

28 Watling and Reynolds, *War by Others' Means*, 19.

29 Matisek and Reno, "Getting American Security Force Assistance Right," 69.

30 Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 12.

31 Eric Trudell, "Hit the Ground Running: Advising the First (and 1st) Security Force Assistance Brigade," *Army Law* (2018), 3.

"The fundamental problem with the pursuit of institutional development at the expense of combat effectiveness is that these policies are often implemented against the backdrop of clear and serious security threats, and the application of hard power by an adversary can quickly undo institutional development."[32]

The establishment of institutions, and with that the recipient's ability to internally train, equip and sustain their forces, are therefore often conditionally for the intervening powers to withdraw.[33] Overlapping with the mobilisation of a partner's forces, the development of a host nation's security institutions as a condition to leave makes it a prominent reason for intervening states to invest resources.

1.1.4 Gaining Influence with a Partner

The provision of Military Assistance is a powerful tool to gain influence with a selected partner. This influence is gained between partners, but also towards third party actors by showing adherence to the third-party foreign policy. Recent events are indicative of many SFA-type operations which have the intent to gain influence over the partner. For instance, in the contemporary environment of great power competition, Russia has provided NATO-aligned Turkey with S400 anti-air missiles, effectively challenging the interoperability between the assets of Turkey and its NATO allies. Moreover, Russian trainers working with the Turkish army are ideally located to attain information on NATO assets and procedures. In a similar, albeit less contentious vein, SFA allows for bespoke deployments to less-developed states in order to secure trade-offs such as international influence, intelligence and quid pro quo arrangements.[34] Also, SFA has been used as a bargaining tool to gain access to training areas, and to influence the domestic policy of sovereign states such as Pakistan.[35] However, the provision of Military Assistance to gain influence has a partial clandestine character, as the public acknowledgement of seeking influence may "reduce its success, either because the partner does not like the perception that it is being manipulated, or because in knowing what a patron wants out of the relationship can increase its demands."[36] Therefore, the aims of providing Military Assistance are frequently not published, nor does SFA always have tangible results. With Military Assistance in great demand with developing states, the use of SFA as a bargaining chip to further a providing state's political aims is logical and common.

32 Watling and Reynolds, *War by Others' Means*, 18.

33 Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 22–32.

34 Reuters Staff, "Factbox: No Quid Pro Quo: Trump's Defenses in the Impeachment Investigation," *Reuters*, 2. December 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-impeachment-defenses-factbo-idUSKBN1Y629G, accessed 29/12/2020; British Army, "The British Army in Africa," (n.d.), https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/africa/, accessed 29/12/2020.

35 Karlin, "Why Military Assistance Programs Disappoint".

36 Watling and Reynolds, *War by Others' Means*, 22.

Lastly, the influence gained by participation in SFA-type operations might also not be aimed at the recipient of the SFA, but at key allies. A prime example of this occurred after the alliance defection by the Dutch in Afghanistan by leaving Uruzgan province, as attempts were made to restore relations with the US and France through Dutch military participation in Kunduz and Mali.[37] Both deployments were—at least in part—SFA-type operations, and it was clear that the SFA provided had no other utility than to "put/keep our flag on the map."[38] Admittedly, gaining influence via SFA is not a prerogative to SFA-type operations; however, in combination with the other motives to embark on this type of operation, gaining influence is frequently quoted as one of the main reasons.

1.1.5 Opportunity for a Bespoke Military Participation

SFA is a type of military commitment that can be scaled to the commitment of its participants. This is an important characteristic for states that do not possess the military capacity to support larger scale operations. With most training missions focusing on basic military skills such as marksmanship and first aid,[39] the training compendium does not require certified units which are able to perform on a combined arms-peer-to-peer warfare level. This makes SFA ideal for states with limited armed force capacity. Dutch contributions to the ACOTA/GPOI mission in Africa illustrate the possibilities of participation with an American-led mission without having to commit formations or units to the mission, but rather a few select service members are selected for a short deployment that requires little additional equipping or training. For small states, limited participation is a genuine opportunity to show the flag, and although this will not tip the scales in the grander scheme of things, it does add to both the legitimacy of an operation by broadening the coalition, as well as clearing the ground for a rapid increase in numbers if so needed.

Furthermore, training missions especially do not reach 'the level of the fight' at all, and are therefore exceptionally suitable for participations by risk-averse governments. But even within an SFA-type operation, states may manage not only the size of their commitment, but indeed the risk. The very nature of SFA, ranging from training indigenous forces on a relatively safe post to assisting local forces in high-intensity combat, and combat mentoring roles, provides variables to which the deployment might be tailored. For instance, the

37 Ghassan Dahhan, "Nederland wil in Mali prestige opvijzelen na exit uit Afghanistan," *Trouw*, 21 October 2013, https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/nederland-wil-in-mali-prestige-opvijzelen-na-exit-uit-afghanistan~bddeobba/, accessed 30/12/2020; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, "Op Zoek Naar Draagvlak: de Geïntegreerde Politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan," (2020), 18.

38 Buitenlandse Zaken, "Op Zoek Naar Draagvlak: de Geïntegreerde Politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan"; Interview Lt. Col. Van den Hazel. Van den Hazel stated that four-star admiral Bauer, the Dutch Chief of the Defense Staff, informed him that his role during the EUTM mission in Mali would be to the end of "putting our flag on the map".

39 Watling and Reynolds, *War by Others' Means*, 106.

OMLT mission in Afghanistan allowed for a rather limited contribution in the relatively safe environment of Kunduz province, Afghanistan as per the Belgian deployment. Within the same mission, the more capable British army agreed to an extensive commitment over a long period in Helmand.

1.1.6 Findings and observations

SFA offers numerous advantages to the patron state and the recipient alike. As explained in this paragraph, SFA-type deployments allow for a broad spectrum of strategic advantages. Perceived as a low-risk, high-reward type of operation, SFA has gained prominence as a military method to avoid large-scale operations whilst still holding the ability to influence the flow of the conflict as well as the relation with the partner state. Moreover, smaller states generally are willing to tip in with sometimes no more than a token effort in order to further legitimise interventions or to show (political) commitment to their allies or international institutions, improving the international standing. The positive narrative of SFA-type operations also appeals to policymakers: a constructive effort to empower local forces to hold their own in dealing with security issues both domestically and abroad.

The combination of opportunities that SFA-type operations offer provides a comprehensive and compelling argument to participate in them. Considering the outcome and eventual withdrawal from a conflict, SFA accelerates the formation of local security forces, which tempers the demand for foreign forces for the provision of security. As a functioning local security apparatus might be considered conditional for withdrawal and as such part of the 'exit strategy' in contemporary irregular warfare, providing SFA is an absolute inevitability for leading states/organisations, and an easy opportunity for lower-tier allied forces to participate.[40] Moreover, SFA has been re-established as a method in great-power competition, as access and influence of global powers often flow through their military ability and its advantages to developing states.[41]

1.2 The other side of the mountain: adverse effects of SFA

In theory, SFA contributes to both the security situation in the recipient state and the donor state's interests as the SFA efforts fulfil (part of) the foreign policy goals of the provider. However, in his seminal article on SFA, Stephen Biddle correctly addresses the agency of the recipient as a possible cause of predicaments. Biddle uses principal-agent (PA) theory as a lens to contemplate SFA-interactions, and while we see later in this paragraph that PA-theory

40 Noll et al., *Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2015: The Dilemma of Leaving: Political and Military Exit Strategies*. 240-241.

41 Round table Egmond Institute 28/11/2019, see https://www.egmontinstitute.be/events/european-security-force-assistance-and-the-rise-of-great-power-competition/ accessed 20/04/2020.

is not per se applicable to the complex environment, it does provide useful insights into the issues c.q. adverse effects associated with agency.

Providing means, training or assets to the receiving entity, the providing entity essentially delegates authority to another to carry out actions on its behalf, in this case, the use of force.[42] As these actions may or may not yield a favourable outcome, the behaviour of both the provider (principal) and the receiver (agent) and the possibilities to influence each other are fundamental for success in executing SFA-type operations. The interaction between the principal and the agent form the basis of PA-theory. PA theory comprises a body of ideas developed originally by economists to explain interactions between parties to a contract and subsequently generalised and adapted to a wide range of situations in which the principal delegates authority to the agent to carry out actions on its behalf.[43] In political science, it has been applied to explain interactions between elected officials and bureaucrats, legislators and committees, civil authorities and the military, domestic agencies and multinational organizations, or guerrillas and state patrons, among many others. These delegation decisions, including PA-theory, are cost-saving strategies.[44] The PA-theory has recently been used by Biddle et al. and Eli Berman in their respective publications to explain the outcomes of several SFA-efforts and proxy conflicts.[45] The relevance of PA-theory in regard to SFA operations is clear: as one state supports another in order to gain advantage, the providing, principal, state delegates security tasks towards the recipient, agent, state. Within the SFA context, the agent is expected to perform tasks the principal wants done, and in return supports and enables the agent for its efforts. Although the interaction between both actors seem straightforward, the unique positions of both the principal and the agent lead to a complications. The act of delegation creates four problems: interest asymmetry, information asymmetry, moral hazard and adverse selection.[46] These four problems create an inherent agency loss, or divergence between the outcome the principal seeks and the outcome the principal obtains.[47] The next section elaborates on these issues.

Interest asymmetry occurs when the interests of the principal and the agent differ. To some degree, this is almost always the case. For instance, the foreign policy goals of the provider

42 Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, *Surrogate warfare: the transformation of war in the twenty-first century* (Georgetown University Press, 2019).

43 Jean-Jacques Laffont and David Martimort, *The theory of incentives: the principal-agent model* (Princeton university press, 2009), 2.

44 Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*, 4.

45 For their full thesis, see: Stephen Biddle and Eli Berman, *Security Force Assistance: Cases and Policy*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. Cambridge United States (2018); Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, "Small footprint, small payoff"; Berman and Lake, *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence Through Local Agents*.

46 Laffont and Martimort, *The theory of incentives: the principal-agent model*, 4.

47 Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, "Small footprint, small payoff" 97.

normally would not include coup-proofing, ethnic or religious issues or politics with third-party actors. Furthermore, in the cases described in this dissertation, the principal is delegating the use of force to its agent, partially or wholly of the strategic, operational or tactical burden of warfare to a human or technological surrogate with the principal intent of minimizing the patron's burden of warfare. As such, it is logical for the agent to be reluctant to engage in the inherent dangers of combat without any self-interest.[48] This would occur on all levels, as the recipient might be reluctant to expose its armed forces to attrition, which might influence its power base. Also, on the tactical level, the willingness to fight and suffer the physical consequences of being engaged in combat is of interest to the combatants, but less so for the providing state. More so, the agent has an interest in obtaining the best equipment, advice and assistance available, while the principal's interest is cost reduction. These two interests are usually not in agreement with each other. To overcome these interest misalignments, PA theorists argue that some conditionality should be included in the agreement, as this would be an incentive for the recipient party to agree on their part of the deal.[49] Whether or not an incentive is actually is implemented varies per deployment.

In most PA problems, the agent is better informed, or more knowledgeable about the performed tasks than the principal. This constitutes information asymmetry.[50] In SFA, the complex security situation in a failed or failing state is usually not easily ascertained, and so the principal must invest in its ability to gauge how the agent is performing. These investments to counter information asymmetry, however, are of course detrimental to the principal's initial objective, i.e. cost reduction. Still, many aspects of information in international politics are not easily determined. Knowledge on local norms and values, language, religion, tribal relations, old feuds and other cultural issues might be arduous to apprehend. In addition, the recipient might have other goals to gain by keeping the provider uninformed, such as to attain additional assistance. The problem of information asymmetry is especially important in the SFA environment as the providing states will respond when full disclosure is given about how the assistance is used, and whether or not the SFA has resulted in favourable results.

A moral hazard occurs when the agent has the incentive to act contrary to the inclinations of the principal. This provides a dilemma for the principal. The principal must be a reliable partner, however, the more assurances he provides to the agent, the less likely the principal is to enforce sanctions when the agent acts contrary to the principal's interests and vice versa. If a principal is entirely committed to supporting the agent, it is more likely that the agent acts contrary to the agreed tasks, as the principal is no longer in the position to

48 Berman and Lake, *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence Through Local Agents*, 4-5.

49 Ibid. 4-6.

50 Laffont and Martimort, *The theory of incentives: the principal-agent model*, 3.

enforce sanctions.[51] This moral hazard is to some degree inevitable in PA relations as both the principal and the agent never fully align on their mutual interests.

The final problem, adverse selection, occurs because whilst conducting SFA-type operations, both the principal and the agent do not have the luxury of choice in many cases. A telling example would include the European Union's attempts to reduce illegal immigration in the Mediterranean, finding itself restricted in having to deal with the Libyan Coastguard as one of the few legitimate partners to attain the EUs migration goals.[52] In adverse selection, the parties willing to engage the provider are not necessarily the parties that the provider is interested in.[53] However, in the international arena, and especially in a conflict environment, it is hard to be too selective on whom you pick as a partner, especially when both the provider and the aspiring recipient ostensibly share a common goal. The problem of adverse selection becomes prominent when the receiver does not longer wish to uphold the agreements that have previously been made. This subsequent agency loss creates a difference between the principals' objectives and the agents' execution.

Biddle et al.'s study involved PA-theory to explain and qualify the success of SFA missions between a principal (the US) and an agent, such as El Salvador, Iraq and South-Korea. However, analysing current conflicts involving SFA-programmes, the basic PA-model encounters several deficits. These include an altered perception of the role of the principal and the introduction of more actors in the same environment who fulfil different and overlapping roles, with their own strategic objectives. The next section will elaborate on these actors and their effect on standard PA-theory applicability.

51 Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, "Small footprint, small payoff", 96.

52 Martin Baldwin-Edwards and Derek Lutterbeck, "Coping with the Libyan migration crisis," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 12 (2019). 2246-2247.

53 Daniel L. Byman, "Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2006.31.2.79, U.S. allies that are fighting al-Qaida-linked insurgencies often suffer illegitimate regimes, civil-military tension manifested by fears of a coup, economic backwardness, and discriminatory societies. These problems, coupled with allies' divergent interests, serve to weaken allied military and security forces tactically, operationally, and strategically. The ability of the United States to change its allies' behavior is limited, despite the tremendous difficulties these problems create, because relying on allied forces is a key component of U.S. strategy in the war on terrorism and the U.S. goal of handing off security to Iraqi military forces. To reduce the effects of allies' weaknesses, the United States should try to increase its intelligence on allied security forces and at times act more like a third party to a conflict. In addition, Washington must have realistic expectations of what training and other efforts can accomplish; Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's war in Afghanistan, 2001–2014* (Random House, 2017).

Besides the principal, other nations are commonly asked to join in for multinational SFA-missions.[54] When other nations agree to support the principal, these nations are asked to perform parts of the SFA-mission. In performing these tasks, the subcontracting nations become agents to the principal. After all, tasks are delegated to the subcontracting nation, which it will have to perform in order to keep up to its part of the agreement. The subcontractor subsequently provides SFA to the original agent. In this scenario however, it must be considered that the subcontractor might duly be uninterested in the strategic goals of the principal, but might pursue its own strategic interests. The original agent is confronted with multiple partners with different strategic objectives. In this environment, the principal moves from a hegemonic position to a competitive role where the original agent is able to accept aid and assistance from multiple actors.[55]

Second, Biddle et al. considered the agent a stable and stately actor. While true in the selected cases, in current conflicts the environment is far more ambiguous and volatile.[56] Currently, rebel groups in Syria regularly switch loyalty, change leadership, rename or fragment into different derivative groups. The effect of this behaviour of recipients of SFA is that the principal, or the subcontractor, has increasing difficulty in preventing the agent from shirking from the agreed terms for receiving assistance. Additionally, the divergence from the strategic goals set before the SFA-mission may accordingly cause one or more SFA-suppliers to forego their efforts since the provided assistance becomes a political liability when said assistance is used for illegal or counterproductive actions.[57]

Third, the provision of SFA to actors in a warzone affects other regional or even global powers who might oppose the increased capability of the recipient of the SFA.[58] Additionally,

54 See for instance the Capacity Building Mission in Iraq, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, the ACOTA programme and the SFA efforts in Mali.

55 Shultz Jr, *Security Force Assistance and Security Sector Reform*, 52.

56 M Chris Mason, *The Strategic Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan: Why the Afghan National Security Forces Will Not Hold, and the Implications for the US Army in Afghanistan*, Army War College Carlisle Barracks PA Strategic Studies Institute (2015), 87-88.

57 In the Netherlands, the provision of 4x4 trucks to 'moderate' rebel groups backfired when the assets were proven to be used by groups that were labelled 'extremist' and 'terrorist'. Consequently, all support to moderate rebels was suspended and the government was questioned extensively by the parliament on the issue. See also Milena Holdert and Ghassan Dahhan, "Nederland steunde terreurbeweging in Syrië", *NOS*, September 10, 2018, https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2249806-nederland-steunde-terreurbeweging-in-syrie.html. A variation of the misappropriation of assets as a result of a lack of cohesion in foreign policy efforts is reported by the Los Angeles Times: Nabih Bulos, W.J. Hennigan and Brian Bennett. "In Syria, militias armed by the Pentagon fight those armed by the CIA" *Los Angelos Times*, March 27, 2016, https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-cia-pentagon-isis-20160327-story.html.

58 Karlin, "Why Military Assistance Programs Disappoint" 112.

opposing action is possible when the aforementioned regional or global power is not opposed to the recipient becoming more capable, but objects to the provider of the SFA, as it might affect the regional balance. After all, the provider of the SFA is able to assert a position of power in the region as a result of the assistance provided. These 'opposing principals' might subsequently react to the SFA-provision, by means that include obstruction, detrimental action towards the SFA-recipient, supporting an opposing local actor or offering the recipient a support package of their own. The addition of all these actors and their strategic objective greatly adds to the complexity of the SFA-mission. The augmentation to the PA-theory not only shows the increased complexity of the SFA-mission, but it also put the agent firmly in the centre of proceedings. Indeed, the agent might be inclined to 'shop around' for the most profitable provider of aid and assistance given the abundance of willing nations to provide it, or even accept SFA from multiple, even opposing principals. The opaqueness of the strategic and operational environment makes the application of unrefined PA-theory limited. Still, in describing the relation between the main contributor and a single recipient, PA-theory offers insight in the causes and extent of agency loss in the process, and as such can be used to assess the success or lack thereof in SFA-type operations. Moreover, PA-theory can used as a framework to identify lacking mechanisms of leverage to enforce agent compliance.

The relation between the principal and the agent is paramount for achieving positive long-term results when providing SFA. Still, often the receiving agents misuse -or abstains from using- the provided assistance. Misuses of SFA include the newly gained capabilities for criminal activities, such as crimes against humanity by suppressing ethnic groups and corruption.[59] A common practise by recipient governments is to coup-proof the administration, or contrarily, use the foreign assistance to stage a coup d'état.[60]

1.3 Subconclusion on the utility and challenges of SFA

SFA offers numerous advantages to the patron state and the recipient alike. As explained in this paragraph, SFA-type deployments allow for a broad spectrum of strategic advantages. Perceived as a low-risk, high-reward type of operation, SFA has gained prominence as a military method to avoid large-scale operations whilst still holding the ability to influence the flow of the conflict as well as the relation with the partner state. Moreover, smaller states generally are willing to tip in with sometimes no more than a token effort in order to further legitimise interventions or to show (political) commitment to their allies or international institutions, improving the international standing. The positive narrative of SFA-type

59 W. Reno, "Tactics Without Strategy: Security Force Assistance in Very Weak States." Conference Paper, Peace Research Institute Oslo, Oslo 2019.

60 James T Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing: Its practice and consequences in the Middle East," International Security 24, no. 2 (1999) 132-134. " International Security 24, no. 2 (1999

operations also appeals to policymakers: a constructive effort to empower local forces to hold their own in dealing with security issues both domestically and abroad.

The combination of the opportunities that SFA-type operations offer, provides a comprehensive and compelling argument to participate in SFA-type operations. Considering the outcome and eventual withdrawal from a conflict, SFA accelerates the formation of local security forces, which tempers the demand for foreign forces for the provision of security. As a functioning local security apparatus is ultimately conditional for withdrawal and as such part of the 'exit strategy' in contemporary expeditionary warfare, providing SFA is an absolute inevitability for leading states/organisations, and an easy opportunity for lower-tier allied forces to participate.[61] Moreover, SFA has been re-established as a method in great-power competition, as access and influence of global powers often flow through their military ability and its advantages to developing states.

Considering the utility of SFA as described above, it becomes clear that SFA is not considered to act as the backbone of military strategy in a regular war of necessity. Still, the current war in Ukraine reaffirms the utility of SFA in supporting aligned states during interstate warfare.[62] The main reason for SFA in that war is that a more direct form of support might cause unwanted escalation. So SFA is limited to wars and conflicts that do not warrant the full deployment of Western armies, or in other words, is either a substitute or at best an addition for Western power projection, what then is the playing field for SFA-type operations? The answer is found when we operationalise SFA.

1.4 Operationalising SFA

In the Western military discourse, a dichotomous distinction between regular and irregular warfare is frequently made. The concept of regular warfare rests on the perception that wars are fought between the militaries of opposing states. Regular warfare consequently developed into a rule-based confrontation, with each side attempting to gain an advantage by using technology, the industrial basis or superior organisation. In this sense, regular conflicts were concluded as the political goals were achieved by the victorious state and subsequently affirmed in a peace agreement. Alternatively, conflicts that did not adhere to this rule-based confrontation were dubbed 'irregular conflicts'. Liberal democracies have proven to be less adept at combating irregular forces. In resisting regular armed forces, irregulars employ hit-and-run tactics and dissolve into the general populace, adept at outlasting their opponents using time to their advantage. Irregular forces outwait or out-grind their regular opponents

61 Noll et al., *Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2015: The Dilemma of Leaving: Political and Military Exit Strategies*. 272

62 Ivor Wiltenburg and Vibeke Gootzen, "Feeding the Underdog on Fertile Ground: Security Force Assistance in Ukraine" *Atlantisch Perspectief*, 2022.

until the political will to sustain the conflict is depleted.[63] Undeniably, irregular forces have proven to be able to regularly hand a strategic defeat to major Western powers, with telling examples in French Indo-China and Algeria (France, 1946-1954, 1954-1962), Vietnam (U.S., 1955-1975) and Afghanistan (USSR, 1979-1989).

As the antithesis of regular warfare, irregular warfare can be defined as "a violent struggle involving non-state actors (including violent armed groups acting as state proxies) and states with the purpose of establishing power, control and legitimacy over relevant populations."[64] One defining aspect of irregular warfare is that it differs in the way armed groups attempt to obtain their political purpose.[65] Opposing regular standing armies, irregular forces must apply their resources in a far more careful manner, as they lack the industrial base to replace combat losses. To irregular forces, replicating the tactics of regular opponents and concentrating their forces for a battle is most often a forlorn option. Small unit tactics and indirect action are, therefore, more abundant in these conflicts than direct confrontations. This might alter as the ratio between their capacity and capability becomes more aligned. A better equipped and trained violent non-state actor (VNSA) or proxy force is better able to oppose regular forces in conventional combat, as the degree of irregularity of an actor is directly linked to the strength of the regular army it faces.[66]

The most recent iterations of irregular warfare by Western powers are the large-scale war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, both campaigns have yielded dubious strategic returns. Without political solutions to these conflicts, the Western attempts to address these conflicts by reducing violence and protecting the local populations proved ultimately to be in vain. This has led to profound disenchantment with these types of irregular operations in Western states, in which Western troops assume direct responsibility for the security functions of a foreign state that is assailed by insurgents.[67] As Western militaries prepare for, and prefer to operate in a regular tradition -that is to apply technological superiority to secure quick victories on a clear battlefield- the prevailing response after being engaged in a counterinsurgency is for Western militaries to recalibrate to fighting conventional, high-intensity wars against peer competitors.[68] Irregular warfare operations are subsequently discarded as an exception to the rule, and

63 Azar Gat, *Victorious and vulnerable: Why democracy won in the 20th century and how it is still imperiled* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 131-153.

64 Kitzen, *Operations in Irregular Warfare*, 5.

65 Kitzen, *Operations in Irregular Warfare*, 3.

66 Carl Schmitt, "The theory of the partisan," *Berlin: duncker und Humblot* 1 (1963), 3.

67 Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir, *Insurgencies and counterinsurgencies: national styles and strategic cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 367; Martijn Kitzen, "Western military culture and counterinsurgency: an ambiguous reality," *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 40, no. 1 (2012): 1-24.

68 Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes*, 18

institutional focus quickly moves to the preparation for regular warfare.[69] Furthermore, according to some observers, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in combination with increasing budget constraints, have led to the loss of regular combat capabilities and skills in Western militaries, which could have serious consequences when faced with threats by a peer or near-peer adversaries.[70] As such, the withdrawal by Western militaries from large-scale irregular campaigns has led to two distinct trends. First of all, there is the reappraisal of regular capabilities that are needed to deter state competitors such as Russia and China. This is manifested by renewed emphasis on regular warfare in doctrinal publications and the acquisition of weapon systems. Secondly, Western states continue to commit their armed forces to intrastate conflicts, albeit in a more indirect manner that can be categorised as SFA.

SFA has a place in both regular as well as irregular conflict. In regular conflict, SFA might be used to bolster the recipient's ability to defy internal and external threats, which by design is in line with the political goals of the providing entity. The most prominent use of SFA, however, is in irregular warfare. Although SFA might be used as a stand-alone option, building the capacity of the recipient to counter a violent non-state actor, it is a way in the other types of operations fighting irregular wars.

Classifying irregular warfare James Kiras has identified five main categories of irregular warfare; coups d'état, terrorism, revolutions, insurgencies and civil warfare.[71] Kiras also remarks that terrorism and insurgency are most relevant to the study of irregular warfare due to the time and geographic scope. Indeed, SFA efforts focus to a large extent on countering terrorists and insurgencies, but SFA-type operations have also been a factor in coups d'état (as well as coup-proofing by the incumbent governments of a recipient state), revolutions and civil wars.

Although liberal democracies have found it challenging to come out on top during irregular conflicts, history indicates that it is far from impossible for Western conventional armed forces to win irregular wars, as the outcome of irregular conflicts in El Salvador, Sierra Leone, and Algeria indicate.[72] Successfully countering irregulars requires deviating from the regular types of warfare. Western armies have been optimised to fight. Countering irregular warfare requires the ability to work amongst the people and use not only kinetic but also non-kinetic activities if

69 Downie, *Learning from conflict*, 103-105; David Fitzgerald, *Learning to forget: US Army counterinsurgency doctrine and practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 2.

70 Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the myths of the new way of war* (Cambridge University Press, 2013),318-345; Gian P Gentile, "Freeing the Army from the Counterinsurgency Straitjacket," *Joint Force Quarterly: JFQ*, no. 58 (2010): 121-122.

71 James D. Kiras, "Irregular warfare: Terrorism and insurgency," *Understanding Modern Warfare* 224 (2007).

72 Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to victory: detailed insurgency case studies*, (RAND Corporation, 2013), 19-20.

the operational environment mandates it.[73] The aforementioned efforts of a 'comprehensive approach' or similar concepts are indicative of Western efforts to include non-military means into the military organisation. Also, the comprehensive approach demands an interagency approach to attend to the stabilisation issues at hand in the area of operations. In order to operationalise irregular warfare efforts, Western armed forces have identified five types of operations: counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, stability operations, unconventional warfare and security force assistance.[74] The next section will further elaborate on irregular warfare operations and the role of SFA herein, as SFA is supplemental to all types of irregular warfare and, as such, is part of all types of irregular warfare operations. However, due to the scope of the research, the focus of these operationalisations will be on SFA during counterinsurgency operations and unconventional warfare. Although SFA has a profound use during stability operations, counterterrorism and as a stand-alone effort, this research will focus on SFA provision during the Afghanistan conflict, which by its nature was a counterinsurgency started by an unconventional warfare effort in 2001.

1.4.1 Counterinsurgency Operations

Western militaries have been intensively involved in counterinsurgency campaigns since the turn of the century, and as a result, the subsequent academic and military discourse on this topic provides a wealth of knowledge on counterinsurgency.[75] Counterinsurgency, or COIN, is the antithesis of an 'insurgency,' also described as a "popular movement that seeks to overthrow the status quo through subversion, political activity, insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism."[76] COIN thus involves opposing that popular movement in reaching its goals.

The lack of success during contemporary COIN campaigns also led to criticism from scholars such as Porch and Gentile, who argue that "small wars are long, dirty affairs fought most often in remote places among peoples little inclined to see the arrival of Western forces as liberation. Even when they are achieved, military victories in small wars seldom come at an acceptable political, diplomatic, legal, moral, and financial cost."[77] Israeli scholar Azar Gat theorises dialectically that two methods of COIN are generally applied: a ruthless and excessively violent campaign usually associated with authoritarian regimes, not hampered by the necessity to abide by international law or human rights, and the method pertained to

73 Kitzen, *Operations in Irregular Warfare*, 6.

74 Ibid., 2.

75 For further reading on COIN, see: David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," *Survival* 48, no. 4 (2006); Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground up: Twenty-first Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2018); John A. Nagl et al., *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

76 David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 604.

77 Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, 327.

contemporary Western counterinsurgency campaigns. The former is exemplified by Gat in his treatise on the roots and evolution of conflict:

> Historically, the crushing of an insurgency necessitated ruthless pressure on the civilian population, which liberal democracies have found increasingly unacceptable. Pre-modern powers, as well as modern authoritarian and totalitarian ones, rarely had a problem with such measures and, overall, have proved quite successful in suppression. Suppression is the sine qua non of imperial rule. The British and French empires could sustain themselves at a relatively low cost only so long as the imperial powers felt no scruples about applying ruthless measures, as the British, for example, did most memorably in Ireland, the Scottish Highlands and India as late as the 1857 Mutiny.[78]

The current attainment of the Russian and Chinese counterinsurgency campaigns against Chechen, Tibetan and Uyghur insurrections form a case in point. However, post-modern Western laws and values prohibit these practices, and as such Western COIN operations have evolved into a population-centric approach, aiming at winning the consent of the population and, in doing so, defeating the insurgency.[79] This practice is colloquially known as 'winning hearts and minds' of the population (WHAM). In doing so, Western liberal COIN strengthens and legitimises the authority of the host-nation government, boosting the control over society whilst simultaneously undermining the insurgency in its efforts to influence the local populace.[80] Western COIN, hence, no longer focuses on kinetic operations aiming to kill or capture irregular forces but attempts to avoid indiscriminate force and civilian casualties, as that would prolong the conflict and antagonise the same population the COIN campaign is attempting to win over.[81]

One of the more influential scholars on Western counterinsurgency theory, David Kilcullen, has posited in his article "Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency" that a foundation of information and control is exerted through the pillars of security, politics and economics.[82] SFA is naturally an effort to improve the pillar of security; however, according to Kilcullen, these three pillars must be developed simultaneously in order to achieve the goal of control. As noticed in the introduction, the need for a comprehensive approach is one of the key

78 Azar Gat, "The Roots and Evolution of Conflict: From Cain to the Present," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to War* (Routledge, 2016), 80.

79 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 358.

80 Kitzen, *Operations in Irregular Warfare*, 10.

81 For the formal military (American) thinking on counterinsurgency operations, see the US FM 3-24: Nagl et al., *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.

82 David J. Kilcullen, "Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency" (paper presented at the US Government Counterinsurgency Conference, 2006), 4.

criticisms of contemporary SFA. Kilcullen explains that if the pillar of security were developed without the other two, it would be detrimental to the mission: "too much security assistance without political consensus or governance simply creates more capable armed groups."[83] In this model, security is seen not only as physical security, the kind that is provided by police or defence forces, but also as human security: healthcare, human rights, sanitation, civil defence, etc.[84]

Furthermore, it is recognised by Kilcullen that in order to be effective, all agencies that are involved must be marshalled. This includes not only the various government agencies but also "all agencies of the host nation, multiple foreign allies and coalition partners, international institutions, non-government organizations of many national and political flavours, international and local media, religious and community groups, charities and businesses."[85]

Although Kilcullen understands that his model of the three pillars of counterinsurgency is inherently flawed due to the models' simplification of the complex environment of counterinsurgency, he appreciates the necessity of comprehensiveness as well the difficulties that come with the byzantine organisation of a coalition effort.

So what is the role of building the capacity of the intervened state? Western states use SFA in counterinsurgency campaigns in a similarly comprehensive way as described above: recruiting, training, equipping and deploying local forces to provide a boost in the availability of 'boots on the ground.' Moreover, the establishment of a well-functioning security apparatus improves the stability of the state.[86] A functioning state is often a prerequisite for Western powers to be able to decrease their presence and is, therefore, part of the 'exit strategy.'[87] Also, increasing the presence of local forces is often beneficial in the COIN campaign. Not only does it give the impression to the local populace that the state is improving the social contract between the people and the state, but indigenous forces are also often better equipped for a 'war amongst the people' since they are part of the people, sharing both the language and the culture. The process of handing more executive capacity to indigenous forces is often part of the campaign plan, frequently referred to as the country name complemented with the "-isation" suffix, i.e., Vietnamisation (in effect, the successor

83 Kilcullen, "Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency," 5.

84 Ibid., 5.

85 Ibid., 5.

86 Kerr and Miklaucic, *Effective, Legitimate, Secure: Insights for Defense Institution Building*, xv.

87 Noll et al., *Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2015: The Dilemma of Leaving: Political and Military Exit Strategies*, 121.

of the French practise of *jaunissement*), Iraqisation, Afghanisation, etc.[88] However, the actual implementation of this part of the campaign plan is sometimes delayed to the point that the intervening party experiences political pressure to complete the operations. Lastly and importantly, indigenous forces have some leeway in implementing a more 'ruthless' approach to the COIN campaign. Whereas international forces are often restrained by a myriad of national caveats, this is often not the case for indigenous forces, which are usually bound only to their national laws and international human rights and, as such, have a broader ability for the application of violent means.[89] However, indigenous forces also might have the tendency to conform to local norms and values, which might pertain to behaviour unacceptable to Western forces, but would be within the norms of their (tribal) culture. These clashes of culture are part of the challenges of SFA operators, who are manoeuvring between the norms and values of their home country and the host nation.[90]

Within COIN campaigns, SFA has great potency to legitimise and enforce the COIN campaign by effectively boosting its numbers with personnel familiar with the human and physical terrain. Improving security subsequently leads to further possibilities in state building and eventual withdrawal from the conflict. This argument is reflected in the free-handed dissemination of SFA amongst the security forces of selected states, in casu Afghanistan and Iraq. Overlapping with COIN, stabilisation operations also incur SFA to convalesce target security forces.

1.4.2 Unconventional Warfare

Unconventional warfare is a type of warfare that differs from the traditional, 'conventional' way of warfare of the armies of states.[91] Unconventional warfare is one of the oldest, most cost-effective and historically most successful forms of warfare, and it has been practised by both regular as well as irregular forces for centuries.[92] When conducted by states, rather than violent non-state actors, unconventional warfare has typically been a special forces prerogative. Unconventional warfare's characteristics include the insertion of relatively small numbers of special forces with local forces, in order to improve their combat effectiveness

88 Robin L. Duane, "The Afghanization of Afghan Security," *Small Wars Journal* (2014), https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-afghanization-of-afghan-security; Melvin R Laird, "Iraq: Learning the Lessons of Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs* (2005).

89 Presentation Azar Gat, Why Counterinsurgency Fails, Oxford Changing Character of War Centre, 28/01/2020

90 Noël van Bemmel, "Op Patrouille in Chora met Bird Man," *De Volkskrant*, 7 September 2007, https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/op-patrouille-in-chora-met-bird-man~badfa48a/.

91 Robert J. Bunker, "Unconventional Warfare Philosophers," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 10, no. 3 (1999): 136, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592319908423253.

92 David Kilcullen, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1 (2019) 62-64.

by providing equipment, training and combat support.[93] Crucially, the deployed special forces must also guide the local forces towards the strategic objectives of their state. These objectives might include regime change, destabilising governments or coercing an occupying force to allocate scarce forces to defend against the local security forces, thereby improving the combat power ratio elsewhere in the operational theatre.[94] A recent, and highly effective example of unconventional warfare would constitute of the efforts of US special forces (SF) to combine with airpower and the local forces of the Afghan Northern Alliance, which resulted in a shock victory against the Taliban in a matter of months. The combination of airpower, SF and local forces has subsequently been dubbed the 'Afghan Model' and was reiterated in and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by a US led coalition, albeit with the Kurdish Peshmerga as its local ally.[95] Since then, however, the Afghan model has become subject of a polemic on its applicability in other theatres.[96] Still, the use of SFA—Military Assistance in Special Forces parlance—in unconventional warfare operations is likely to stay an important aspect of contemporary conflict. The relatively low-risk approach of sending in limited numbers of the most highly skilled warriors in support of local forces keeps both the cost in blood and treasure down. Furthermore, the use of Special Forces allows governments some leeway in deciding on military action, as SF regularly are allowed to operate outside of parliamentary oversight ex ante the deployment.[97] As the use of airpower is not as firmly opposed by either parliamentary opposition or public opinion, the question of how local forces have become so effective in the terminal guidance of precision ordnance is most often not asked.

Also, unconventional warfare (UW) has the added advantage of its secretive nature. As Kilcullen notes, the increasing occurrence of operations below the threshold of open

93 Timothy D. Brown, *Unconventional Warfare as a Strategic Force Multiplier: Task Force Viking in Northern Iraq, 2003* (Joint Special Operations University, Center for Strategic Studies, JSOU Press, 2017), 18

94 Kitzen, *Operations in Irregular Warfar*, 15-16.

95 Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002) 2.

96 Tijs H. M. Althuizen, "The New Way of Limited Warfare: The Value of the Afghan Model of Warfare after the Fight Against ISIS" (NLDA, 2018); Stephen Biddle, "Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq," *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006); Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas E. Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model," *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006); Geraud Laborie, "The Afghan Model More Than 10 Years Later: An Undiminished Relevance," *Air & Space Power Journal-Africa and Francophonie* 4, no. 3 (2013); Althuizen, "The New Way of Limited Warfare".

97 James Strong, "The War Powers of the British Parliament: What Has Been Established and What Remains Unclear?," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 1 (2018), 21. Arthur Ten Cate and Martijn Van Der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'* (Leiden University Press, 2015), 42.

warfare, often referred to as hybrid warfare or grey zone warfare, solicits a response other than the deployment of an aircraft carrier or an armoured brigade.[98]

The solid interaction between Special Forces operators and local militias have proven to be a successful approach. UW connects to a different aspect of SFA in combat mentoring, which appeals to influencing an actor with whom the SF operations have no formal control over. This necessitates building rapport and trust between the UW-specialists and local militia leadership in a situation of mutual dependency, which the US Special Forces Command has identified as a key characteristic for future Green Berets.[99]

1.4.3 The creation of SFA capacity

Having established the 'why' of SFA-type deployments in the previous paragraph, the next question must be addressed is the 'how'. Most Western states prepare and equip military units and formations to perform specific duties during combat scenarios. These duties are generally divided into combat units (C), combat support units (CS) and Combat Service Support units (CSS). Infantry and cavalry units are considered combat, artillery, air defence and engineer units are designated as CS and logistics and medical support units and formations are considered CSS. Indeed, it is the emphasis on the role of units and formations during *combat* where its expertise deviates from its application during SFA-type operations. For instance, combat units are typically designed to close in with, and kill the enemy during regular major combat. Conversely, SFA operations aim to transfer the application of violence to a third-party agent, through the transfer of knowledge (training and advising) and equipment to an aligned recipient force.

However, the force structure of a regular unit does not resemble the force structure needed for SFA-type operations. A majority of the positions within a unit are tasked with executive duties; drivers, gunners, medics, riflemen etc. Although these soldiers are paramount for creating combat power, they are selected nor trained to transfer knowledge to a non-Western recipient force in a SFA-type operation. Within regular units, training, instructing and mentoring tasks are habitually assigned to non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officers, albeit typically within the template of its own army's (organisational) culture, equipment, language, social environment, geography and laws. Thus, when tasked with executing a SFA-type operation, aimed at transferring knowledge to a recipient foreign force, the heuristic

98 Kilcullen, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare." 69.

99 A Green Beret Reflects on Necessity of Strong Relationships with Local Allies, https://www.army.mil/article/178409/a_green_beret_reflects_on_necessity_of_strong_relationships_with_local_allies; John Friberg, "Robin Sage, Unconventional Warfare Exercise" (2016), https://sofrep.com/news/robin-sage/ accessed 15/09/2020; David G. Fox, A Joint and Interagency Unconventional Warfare Training Strategy for Special Forces in the 21st Century, Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennnsylvania (2005). 2-3.

method is to create a bespoke unit consisting of a cadre of NCOs and officers deemed capable for this novel task.

Designating SFA-type operations as a novel task is done here deliberately, as at the beginning of the century, many (small) states had scant doctrinal foundations or professional discourse on SFA.[100] The US was the major exception, as the US Armed Forces had a solid doctrinal foundation on what it dubbed Foreign Internal Defence, a variety of SFA. Indeed, no major Western state possessed dedicated forces aimed to provide SFA at the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, any iteration of SFA-type deployments required restructuring the force table and a reorientating of the mission statement. This is an important observation as SFA-type operations have inherent versatility considering the execution, as described before. Whilst some parts of SFA are quite simple and require little adaptation -the transfer of 4x4 vehicles to rebel forces in Syria by the Dutch, for example-, other aspects of SFA are highly complex and require a broad range of skills. With regard to the latter, the combination of training, advising and mentoring within combat operations (combat mentoring) is such a mission.

Combat mentoring implies through its etymology that a certain form of patronage exists between the mentor and mentee, and this mentorship would come to fruition on the field of battle. This simple deduction infers that combat mentoring holds the middle ground between training the force, where the trained soldiers are deployed to the field of battle without their instructors, and military leadership, where a body of men is led by its officers into combat, with the prerequisite of formal military training before entering the fray. As a result, combat mentoring exposes its practitioners to various scenarios requiring a different skill set than a trainer, instructor or officer.[101] Indeed, the ability to adapt to the mix of training and combat required excessive amounts of flexibility and resourcefulness, and the necessity to liaise with higher echelons from different nations, indigenous personnel and local translators required the mentors to be able linguists.

In the past, combat mentoring was not performed by regular forces. Indeed, considering the skill set required for combat mentoring, this type of SFA was conducted under the 'military assistance' moniker, which was, and still is a Special Forces prerogative.[102] Military Assistance (MA) has been incorporated into the formal doctrines of all NATO members who have an SF unit in their force structure, who doctrinally conduct three types of operations. Besides MA

100 Wiltenburg, "Security Force Assistance: Practised but not Substantiated." 88.

101 Cartwright, J. "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op Herrick 8." *British Army Review* 146 (2009). 34, 36-37.

102 Wiltenburg, I. L., and M.W.M. Kitzen. "What´s in a Name: Clarifying the Divide between Military Assistance and Security Force Assistance." *Small Wars Journal* (2020).

they include Special Reconnaissance (SR) and Direct Action (DA).[103] NATO doctrine AJP 3.5 'Special Operations' defines MA as a "broad category of measures and activities that support and influence critical friendly assets through organizing, training, advising, mentoring, or conducting combined operations."[104] As such, the concept includes activities like capability building of local security forces, engagement with local, regional, and national leadership and civic actions supporting and influencing the local population. Additionally, MA might also encompass all other actions designed to support local security forces. For SF engaged in MA, this typically boils down to (a combination of) training, advising, and mentoring/ partnering activities. Overall, NATO considers MA an activity undertaken by SF or Special Operations Forces (SOF) and focused on 'critical friendly assets'. As such, Military Assistance and SFA are closely related military activities, however, special forces receive special training and equipment to mitigate the risk of embedding with indigenous forces.[105]

1.4.4 SFA specific risks to the force

As states attempt to mitigate the risks to their own soldiers by employing proxy, surrogate or partner forces, it reduces the exposure of its regular forces to the brunt of the battle, however is also ropes in specific risks to the force committed to the provision of SFA. As this section will explain, these risks stem from the immersion of SFA-practitioners within the indigenous force. This immersion results in the separation of SFA-operators from the values, norms and standards that Western personnel have become accustomed to, both in a moral as well as a material way. This section details the unique environment, which by its very nature exposes SFA-personnel to risks that are absent whilst operating as a regular Western force.

First, SFA-practitioners that actively mentor their charges in combat experience a vastly more complex environment when compared to conducting operations with their own unit. SFA-troops engaged in combat with indigenous forces must be able to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, in the regular presence of a language barrier, and an often diffuse or absent hierarchical structure between indigenous forces and SFA-troops.[106] Amongst the most pressing tasks are self-defence activities, as casualties amongst SFA-personnel generally prevent effective assistance and mentoring. Whilst monitoring the tactical situation, the SFA-team must also advise the indigenous commanders as well as provide the unit with liaison tasks, fire support, and medical evacuation. Whilst multitasking, SFA-personnel is reliant on the local forces to provide them with protection against enemy action. However, the interaction between adjacent units, local forces, interpreters and the SFA team itself is

103 NATO Standardization Office, "AJP-3.5 Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations," (2019).

104 Wiltenburg and Kitzen, "What´s in a Name".

105 Ibid.

106 Powerpoint presentation Specialised Infantry Group, Interview UK Army officer 24 03/07/2020;

far more complicated when customary tactics, techniques and procedures are either absent or not adhered to, which is frequently the case amongst indigenous forces.[107]

These complications include communication glitches, as SFA-personnel usually interact with local troops through interpreters or using a non-native language. Furthermore, SFA-personnel are not in command of a local unit or formation. So, as SFA-personnel are not in charge of the mission, the agency of the local forces allow them to deviate from the guidance given, possibly leading to a deteriorating tactical situation.[108] Also, SFA-forces that accompany local security forces in combat must recognise that combat is conducted in a less organized manner, which might increase violence of action, but also increases the risk of friendly fire incidents.[109] In all, SFA forces are not experiencing access to the levels of force protection, services and support that Western armed forces usually provide to deployed personnel.

Furthermore, whilst planning for regular conflict, the military decision-making process of Western armed forces revolves around principles like the ability for units to mutually support each other, the integration of combat, combat support and combat service support operations and organising the battle by assigning times and location for different military assets to sort effects.[110] These principles are often, to variable degrees, lacking with the partnering forces, requiring external support to enable indigenous troops in combat operations.[111] In this combat assistance role, a physical risk to the involved SFA-personnel is present, especially as the indigenous forces are not able to adequately cover SFA-operators in combat. This has several reasons. First, the military capability of the recipient force is almost always significantly less, as this is the reason to provide SFA in the first place. Many practitioners have experienced the haphazard and uncoordinated reaction to enemy fire by their trainees.[112] Several SFA-practitioners have elaborated on the local forces' reaction

107 Interview UK Army officer 24 03/07/2020, Interview NLD TFU CO 59 24/06/2020, Interview NLD TFU CO 24 06/07/2020

108 Interview UK Army officer 24 03/07/2020, Interview NLD TFU CO 59 24/06/2020, Interview NLD TFU CO 24 06/07/2020

109 Interview NLD Army officer 12 16/06/2020, Interview NLD INF OMLT XO 46 14/05/2020, Interview NLD INF OMLT CO 82/83 02/04/2020; see: Brief minister over onderzoek CDS naar in Afghanistan gesneuvelde militairen - Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme, Den Haag, 2008 https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmj1eyo/vi3k9te6s2no, accessed 07/07/2020.

110 Land Warfare Center Koninklijke Landmacht, *Landoperaties Doctrine Publicatie 3.2* (Amersfoort, 2014) I-17.

111 27 925 Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme Nr. 193 Brief van de Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken, van Defensie en voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking https://www.parlement.com/9291000/d/uruzganbesluit_2005.pdf; 07/07/2020; Bert Van Vlerken "OMLT - Mentor in Afghanistan". http://www.rhid.be/website/images/livres/rmb/03/RMB_3_bert%20van%20vlerken.pdf accessed 07/07/2020

112 Interview NLD Army NCO 85 12/05/2020; Interview NLD INF OMLT CO 82/83 02/04/2020 ; Interview UK Army officer 24 03/07/2020, Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019.

to enemy fire, and deemed it frequently less disciplined than what is being expected from professional Western forces. In a telling example, US troops have dubbed the typical Iraqi army´s response to enemy contact the ´death blossom´, after the 1984 sci-fi movie that depicts a spacecraft wildly firing in all directions without aiming.[113] Other interviewees described how their Afghan trainees conducted live-firing exercises correctly in the prone position, but stood up on their feet as soon as the shooting started because "fighting was done standing up."[114] This inability to perform basic military tasks has repercussions. In a 2019 survey, it was shown that only 18% of Dutch SFA-personnel was confident in conducting combat operations with their indigenous counterparts.[115] In the same survey, key military characteristics amongst the recipient force, such as discipline, marksmanship, physical fitness and military decision making were graded well below the level that would be expected from a peer soldier.

Second, combined forces of trainers and trainees are usually not able to respond to enemy contact effectively and coherently, as this, per military definition, requires a combination of coordinated firing and manoeuvring. Western units and formations have optimised the art of firing and manoeuvring by standard procedures, colloquially called 'TTPs', for 'tactics, techniques and procedures' or drills. Small tactical units like platoons and companies spend a considerable amount of time to master the process of suppressing the enemy with direct and indirect fire, and subsequently move, under the cover of fire, towards a position to eliminate the threat. Indigenous forces are frequently unable to adhere to the basics of cover and concealment, fire and manoeuvre and the tactical nous expected from Western soldiers. As indicated by a British officer on cooperation with indigenous forces: "We deploy on patrols and other activities with a simplified concept of operations, rudimentary SOPs, and an understanding that, in contact, the Afghan National Army's response will be erratic and unpredictable."[116]

Many SFA-practitioners have indeed indicated that local security forces lack key skills that are required to effectively perform in combat.[117] The discrepancy in military prowess is

113 Daniel Green and William Mullen, *Fallujah redux: The Anbar awakening and the struggle with Al-Qaeda* (Naval Institute Press, 2014), 53.

114 Interview NLD Army NCO 85 12-05-2020.

115 Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019.

116 Written comment on the ANA performance, email correspondence UK Army officer 24, 07/07/2020

117 Greg Townsend, *Getting More Out of FID and SFA: A Strategy for More Effective Foreign Internal Defense and Security Force Assistance As a Way to Build Partnership Capacity*, National Defense University Norfolk VA Joint Advanced Warfighting School (2015). 23,30; Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-02-16-0502160272-story.html accessed 12-05-2020; Green and Mullen, *Fallujah redux: The Anbar awakening and the struggle with Al-Qaeda*, 53. Terrence K Kelly, Nora Bensahel, and Olga Oliker, *Security force assistance in Afghanistan: identifying lessons for future efforts* (Rand Corporation, 2011), 76-77.

exacerbated by the small numbers of each SFA-team, which prevents them from taking over or applying enough combat power to influence larger-scale combat operations by themselves. Although SFA-operations might be perceived as less dangerous to the force, practitioners attest that "in fact there is considerable risk. Of course, quantitively there is less exposure to physical risk to the few that are engaged in tactical enablement and accompaniment on operations, but these soldiers will be exposed to at least as much risk as regular troops."[118] These risks include the physical risks due to operations with less-able indigenous troops, but also the added risks that result from a relative lack of services not available to SFA-practitioners.

Another risk to the force occurs when, whilst deployed, Western troops usually can reply on modern facilities, including medical evacuations by air, modern and well equipped field hospitals, decent food and amenities when possible. Of these facilities, the access to (military) hospitals is the most pressing. As all Western forces aim to provide injured servicemembers with adequate medical care, the golden standard is to have all injured personnel treated within the hour, the so-called 'golden hour'.[119] However, small footprint deployments usually lack medical facilities, or if present, medical facilities that conform to Western norms. Indeed, in many cases, SFA-personnel have to resort to local hospitals and doctors in the case of calamity. As one respondent stated: "in the case of an emergency, we would have to be evacuated from our training location in Burundi to a hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. I do not see how that could have happened within 4 to 5 hours at the quickest."[120] More than 34% of survey respondents also indicated that adequate medical care within the golden hour would not have been possible within the 'golden hour'. When attached to local forces, SFA-personnel frequently find themselves disconnected from medical care. As will be described in a later chapter, the well-documented Battle of Chora in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan in 2007, the Afghan National Army, supported by a Dutch team of mentors was arguably the main effort of the battalion-sized operation. Still, the Dutch and the ANA pushed forward without any medical back-up, much to the frustration of the troops involved.[121]

In a similar vein, a regular observed negligence by Western military staffs in Afghanistan involved the acceptance of risks forthcoming of the unavailability of protective assets to Afghan forces, augmented with Western combat assistance troops. This would include a lack of defensive equipment in ANA-manned patrol bases, but also accepting the risks of Afghan

118 Written correspondence UK Brigadier 30, commanding officer Spec. Inf. Gp., and UK Army officer, Future Ops Spec. Inf. Gp.

119 Tanisha M. Fazal, Todd Rasmussen, Paul Nelson and P.K. Carlton, "How Long can the US Military's Golden Hour last?" *War on the Rocks*, (2018). https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/how-long-can-the-u-s-militarys-golden-hour-last/ Accessed 07/02/2020.

120 Email correspondence Army Officer NLD 33 20/11/2019.

121 Interview NLD 85, 12/05/202, NLD 83, 22/04/2020, NLD 27, 11/06/2020, NLD 16, 28/05/2020.

Army units patrolling without medical or engineer 'enablers"[122], a definite no-go criterium for Western patrols. The presence of Western SFA-practitioners embedded with the ANA were in these cases either forgotten or ignored.[123]

In other theatres, the enforced rules and considerations concerning the unavailability of medical care within the 'golden hour' to national troops have led to restrictions in operations with partner forces. Operations have halted when medical evacuation or care could not be guaranteed within the hour. When these restrictions indeed involved the mentoring force, the mitigation of the risks concerning the availability of medical care have had an adverse effect on the relationship between trainers and trainees. Indigenous troops have been assigned to combat operations where the mentors/trainers were not allowed to follow, negatively impacting the bond between the mentors and their charges. The rapport between the trainers and trainees is a highly relevant factor, which is not only important for combat effectiveness but also has repercussions for the safety of the trainees.

Lastly, working with indigenous troops means exposure to, and clashes of, culture. As stated in the previous section, training, advising and assisting missions contain in-built risks to the involved military personnel. SFA-personnel is exposed to local security forces for extended periods of time, usually in a small group of fellow soldiers. The continued exposure of Western forces within a different cultural environment has the potential for interpersonal conflict. Mostly, these clashes are mediated and resolved peacefully, even when the possibility of escalation was considered by the involved SFA-personnel.[124] Frequently, however, friction is resolved violently, and especially in Afghanistan local servicemembers used their firearms in personal conflicts. These instances became so frequent after 2008 that it became known as 'green-on-blue attacks'. The term green-on-blue has drifted into common military parlance through American use, who consider US forces 'blue', other allied forces 'green', and the enemy 'red' forces. 'Green-on-blue attacks' indicate that members of the recipient security forces target friendly military forces, usually with small arms fire. Green-on-blue is thus a case specific version of blue-on-blue, colloquially known as 'friendly fire', where friendly troops are mistakenly engaged by other friendly troops. Amongst the cases selected in this dissertation, the UK has suffered from green-on-blue attacks leading to casualties, whilst the Netherlands have avoided such attacks, although on several occasions, disputes between the ANA and the Dutch forces escalated to the point of weapons drawn. In one case, the Dutch forces in Afghanistan resorted to cover the Afghan National Forces in their defensive perimeter in 2009, as the Dutch forces did no longer have any trust in both the Afghan

122 In common military parlance, support units are often referred to as 'enablers'. Although sometimes considered mildly derogatory, this is not the intent within this research.

123 Interview NLD 76, 02/09/2020, personal diary NLD Marine officer. interview NLD 84, 23/07/2020.

124 Interview GBR 24, 03/07/2020, Interview NLD 99 20/05/2020.

soldiers' ability to effectively guard their line nor their loyalty to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) efforts.[125] Moreover, the Australian Army, close partners of the Dutch in Uruzgan until the Dutch departure in 2010, suffered a green-on-blue attack resulting in three Australian deaths.[126]

Belgium did also not suffer casualties from green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan, although the relation between the ANA and the German/Belgian mentoring formation were extremely tense at one stage.[127] This was the result of the accidental killing of several ANA service members by a German armoured vehicle in Kunduz in 2010 after a prolonged contact with the Taliban in Kunduz, when German troops mistook the ANA vehicle for the enemy.[128] Although the relations did normalise over time, thinly veiled threats by ANA personnel towards their mentors were indicative of the openly hostile environment.[129]

During the Afghanistan intervention, green-on-blue attacks have led to the death of 157 ISAF servicemembers between 2007 and 2013, according to a 2018 study.[130] Although the vast majority of these attacks have occurred in Afghanistan, incidents have occurred in Iraq as well. The reason behind green-on-blue attacks vary. Recent scholarship on green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan indicates that the majority of these attacks stemmed from personal grievances and escalated personal confrontations between Western servicemembers and ANSF personnel.[131] Contrary to Taliban claims, NATO asserts that only one quarter of attacks are a result of Taliban infiltration.[132] Still, green-on-blue attacks cause a knock-on effect that far exceeds the damage done by the initial incident. As described by Nate Rawlings:

125 Interview NLD 99 on Operation Mani Ghar, 2009, 20/05/2020.

126 https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1820781676-48585/link/29 accessed 28/12/2020.

127 Interview BEL 27, 12/11/2020; Von Ulrike Demmer, Matthias Gebauer and John Goetz. "German military criticised for deadly mistakes" *DerSpiegel*, May 31, 2010, https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/friendly-fire-casualties-in-afghanistan-german-military-criticized-for-deadly-mistakes-a-697803.html.

128 Deutsche Welle. "Friendly Fire" *DW*, 2010. https://www.dw.com/en/german-troops-kill-at-least-five-afghan-soldiers-in-friendly-fire-incident/a-5429577 accessed 28/12/2020.

129 Interview BEL 12 10/11/2020.

130 Neil Shortland et al., "Murder on Maneuver: Exploring green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan," *Armed Forces & Society* 45, no. 2 (2019): 372.

131 Jeffrey Bordin, "Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility: A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Force Personnel and US Soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF-Committed Fratricide-Murders" (paper presented at the United States. Department of the Army, 2011).

132 Thom Shanker "General Notes Taliban Coercion in some Attacks on Troops" August 23, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/world/asia/general-notes-taliban-coercion-in-some-attacks-on-troops-in-afghanistan.html?_r=2&ref=world Accessed 04/08/2019.

"The attack was devastating–on a micro level, beyond the killed and wounded, the incident destroyed the platoon's mission to train and mentor the Iraqi soldiers. On a macro level, as word spread throughout an American military that's not as big as it seems, it seeded deeply held suspicious of supposed allies."[133]

The bond of trust between SFA-personnel and the training audience is considered essential for successful SFA-operations, and green-on-blue attacks have resulted in widespread distrust between trainers and trainees. Also, the solution to mitigate the number of casualties from these attacks have lowered trust even further: the 'guardian angel' practise, i.e. to always have a Western soldier guarding the trainees whilst in full combat gear, is undeniably an overt sign of distrust towards the local security personnel.

Although multiple reasons have been identified, the cultural friction between Western and Afghani soldiers are a main cause of internal conflict. NATO leadership recognised that many of the personally motivated insider attacks occur because of Western ignorance of Afghan culture, not Taliban infiltration.[134] Several instances of burning the Quran have especially led to distrust and reluctance towards Western forces.[135] As Javid Ahmad asserts: "Afghans are expressive about the disrespect they feel when NATO troops enter mosques with shoes, burn or insult the Quran, detain civilians indefinitely, break into houses, damage property during searches, or accidentally kill civilians.[136] Still, whether resulting from infiltration by antagonistic actors or resulting from clashes of culture between the trainees and trainers, green-on-blue attacks form a real and significant risk to the trainers, as well as partnering forces.

These green-on-blue attacks in particular are detrimental to the rapport between local forces and SFA-personnel, endangering not only the tactical, but even the strategic effectiveness of the SFA-operation, as not only the immediately involved are affected, but the mutual trust between trainers and trainees became a point of concern nationwide. The guardian angel principle is a measure to mitigate the risks of green-on-blue, but have a detrimental effect of the SFA-effort as a whole. However, as special forces became stretched as they were unproportionally deployed during the initial years of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, combat mentoring edged into the realm of regular forces, who, as a result had to adapt to

133 Nate Rawlings, "Blue on Green: A never ending trend", July 23, 2012, *Time*, https://nation.time.com/2012/07/23/blue-on-green-a-never-ending-trend/ Accessed 04/08/2019.

134 Javid Ahmad "Dress like allies, kill like enemies: An analysis of insider attacks in Afghanistan" (Modern War Institute, 2017) (https://mwi.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Dress-Like-Allies-Kill-Like-Enemies.pdf Accessed 07/02/2019.

135 Adam Simpson, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Hope for a Sustainable Settlement Fades in Afghanistan," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 4, no. 4 (2012).

136 Javid Ahmad "Dress like allies, kill like enemies".

this new type of mission.[137] Additionally, the regular troops had to confront the specific risks associated with combat mentoring, whilst not necessarily equipped, trained or selected in the same manner as their special forces colleagues.

1.5 Conclusion of the research puzzle and main research question

In this introduction, this research has observed that SFA is a complicated military activity. Not only are SFA-type operations not clearly defined and cover a very broad spectrum of activities, they also yield very ambiguous results. Still, the political demand for SFA is rising, which leads to the paradox that apparently there is a rising need for a state's military to perform activities of which the literature suggests that it is not particularly effective, if not the opposite.

Therefore, this dissertation has elaborated on the policy goals associated with SFA and the challenges to successful SFA provision. Moreover, this introduction concludes that SFA has its utility in support rather than in lieu of major regular combat operations, and as such is particularly suitable for certain types of irregular warfare, counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare in particular. Thus, as the demand increases, the literature suggests that some SFA derivatives -donating materiel, training local forces in a permissive environment- are rather uncomplicated. However, where the provision of materiel overlaps with training and mentoring the recipient force in a contested environment, the provision of SFA, in casu combat mentoring, becomes intricate. As very little doctrine is present on SFA itself, common military practice is to assign combat mentoring deployments to special operations forces under the 'military assistance' moniker. As SOF became overstretched due to excessive demand for their specialised skillset, combat mentoring sidled into the domain of regular forces. As a result, regular units and formations would have to adapt to this novel method of operating, as it established force structure and capabilities were inadequate.

In order to shed light on the utilities and challenges of SFA in a contested environment, this thesis focuses on how this has been done in practice. Therefore, the research aims to explore the efforts made by Western states during a recent operation: the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) in Afghanistan. The OMLTs were created to train, mentor and support the nascent Afghan National Army, which was part of the exit strategy of the states contributing to the International Security Assistance Force. These OMLTs were bespoke units performing an unorthodox task. As a result, each OMLT had to adapt to the variables of the location it was deployed to. These differed in geology, human terrain, enemy disposition and present allied forces. Also of influence were the state's strategic culture, the equipment

137 Jahara Matisek and Ivor Wiltenburg, "Security force assistance as a preferred form of 21st century warfare: The unconventional becomes the conventional," in The Conduct of War in the 21st Century (Routledge, 2021) 173.

and staffing of its armed forces and language. This has been an innovative process for each OMLT, which has been a journey into unchartered territory for the units involved. Taking into consideration the persisting and increasing demand for these types of deployments, this leads to the main research question of this dissertation:

How have the armed forces of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium adapted to the OMLT task in Afghanistan, and what institutional changes have materialised as a consequence of this adaptation?

As military innovation theory is the logical theoretical lens to regard the innovation process of each OMLT, military innovation theory will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. First, the introduction continues with an explanation of how the main research question should be researched.

1.6 Research design and methodology

As stated in section 1.1, SFA is a broad and complex military operation. It might be a part of irregular and irregular warfare, but might also be employed for state building activities outside of a conflict scenario. It might furthermore be utilised to gain tactical, operational or strategic objectives. Thus, it can't be covered by a single field of science. It involves aspects of international relations, strategic studies, organisational theory, military innovation theory, military history and foreign policy analysis.

This dissertation uses the method and logic of the comparative case study, which is a frequently used method in the field of political science and international relations.[138] For a good comparison, the study will be focused as well as structured. The focused nature will allow for addressing certain aspects of each case examined, narrowing the scope of the research.[139] The structured approach to the study will allow for systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings of each case.[140]

In a structured and focused case comparison, the research must first specify the research problem, and the class of events to be studied. Then, the variables of the relevant theories must be defined. These include the dependant, independent and intervening variables. In the third place, the cases must be selected, studied and compared. This will be followed by

138 Dvora Yanow et al., "Case Study Research in Political Science," *Encyclopedia in Case Study Research* (2008).

139 Alexander L. George et al., *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2005), 67.

140 George et al., *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 67.

the decision how to best characterise variance in the independent and dependent variable. Lastly, a detailed set of standard questions must be formulated to apply to each case.[141]

The main reason for this case selection is its relevance to the research goal of this dissertation. In order to scope the research, it was opted to select two cases that are mostly comparable with each other, together with one partly dissonant case. For comparison purposes, each case is a Western state who has been involved in the War in Afghanistan. All cases are parliamentary democracies with high standards of living. The armed forces of each selected case are modern forces with a voluntary staffing. Furthermore, each case is a member state of NATO and are aligned in their goal of North Atlantic stability. The dissonant case, Belgium, differs from the other two cases as it was not deployed to the south of Afghanistan, but the rather quieter northern province of Kunduz. Also, Belgium was late to deploy an OMLT to Afghanistan, as it only fielded its OMLT in 2009, almost three years after the other two cases under scrutiny in this dissertation. Belgium thus had the advantage of being able to feed off the lessons learned by its strategic partners through emulation. Lastly, the accessibility of data in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium, both physically, geographically as well as linguistically, added to the rationale to select these particular states for this comparative case study.

	United Kingdom	The Netherlands	Belgium
Elite (military)	14	39	13
Practitioner (military)	28	103	24
Civilian	1	6	0
Total	43	148	37

Data was collected via mixed methods. These methods included data collection from primary sources, including focus groups, round tables, and a series of (elite) interviews with senior civil and military policymakers and OMLT-practitioners and surveys amongst SFA practitioners, including the OMLT.[142] The interviewees were approached mainly via the my professional network. As a serving officer, I have an extensive network of former OMT practitioners, commanding officers and supportive staff, mainly within the Netherlands armed services.

141 Yael Nahmias-Wolinsky, *Models, Numbers, and Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2004), 33.

142 The 2019 survey was conducted amongst Dutch SFA practitioners. The data collected via this survey was only partly useful for this research, as it had a broader scope than the OMLTs. The subsequent 2020 survey was conducted amongst Dutch OMLT personnel, and was also used to select interviewees. No survey was conducted amongst SFA/OMLT personnel of any of the other two case studies. In this dissertation, this survey is referred to as "Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019."

Internationally, the interviewees were approached via business email addresses accessible to employees of the Dutch Ministry of Defence, social media (mainly LinkedIn) and through international regimental channels. With regard to the latter, it is noteworthy that my own Regiment (42 Battalion Limburgse Jagers) is connected historically to the Belgian Chausseurs Ardennais Regiment. The connection to this particular regiment led to several useful follow-ups including the Belgian commanding officer of the Landcomponent. My position as a serving officer, in combination with my NATO security clearance and letters of recommendation signed by Dutch general officers allowed for a basis of trust amongst those approached, which undoubtedly resulted in a more open attitude towards the research. Moreover, as the research progressed, I was able to tap into the network of earlier interviewees, resulting in an extensive international network of OMLT practitioners. The interviews were held using the semi-structured method. In using this method, it allowed for a theoretical focus, however also allowing the interviewees to provide information that is relevant to the cases, especially on those topics that the interviewees are expert on or have first person experience. Furthermore, the unique experiences of each interview-participant can be integrated as well as additional topics that the interviewees seem relevant.

The interviews were partially recorded and subsequently transcribed. Otherwise, elaborate notes were taken during the interviews by either myself or a third participant. In a significant number of cases, especially during the Covid epidemic and mostly concerning the British case, the interviewee prepared a written response to the questions. These written statements were augmented by the data provided during a subsequent interview, either by a video link or telephone. The transcriptions were subsequently uploaded into NVIVO and coded using nodes to organise the transcripts on topic, events, geography and time.

Ego-documents of interviewees and other practitioners including diaries, emails and letters were also included in the research and fed into NVIVO. Each interviewee or respondent was informed of the purpose of the interview and that he or she agreed to allow his/her comments to be included. To accommodate for the wishes of part of the interviewees, the non-elite interviews were anonymised, as well as several elite interviews. The commanding officers of all OMLT rotations of all case studies were addressed, as well as a number of commanders on the Task Force / Brigade level. Practitioners were contacted through either my personal professional network, or via a snowball method: many interviewees were keen to open up their personal network for this research. Lastly, practitioners were contacted as a follow-up on a reference to their names in regimental gazettes or professional military literature. This explains the doubling of a number of authors as interviewees.

Furthermore, the data was collected from secondary sources including peer-reviewed articles in academic journals, books and military doctrine. For this dissertation, access was granted to both the archives of the Belgian and Dutch armed forces. Unfortunately, the British archives

were not accessible for academic research, nor will they be opened up to researchers for the foreseeable future. As this research leans significantly on data collected through interviews, and it is well known that one's memories are prone to degrade over time, the data collected through interviews was validated by either subsequent interviews with other participants or stakeholders, or secondary sources as described above. Indeed, a great effort has been made to ensure that no generalising claims are made during this research based on single sources or interviews alone.

During the data collection period, the lacunae in the historiography of the Dutch OMLTs were recognised by the Dutch Institute of Military History (Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, NIMH). As this dissertation did not have the scope to accommodate a volume on the Dutch OMLTs alone, a collaboration was set up, in which the data collection for the Dutch OMLTs was done in part by an associate researcher, including interviews and archival research. The hiring of an associate researcher has led to a deepening and broadening of the case study of the Netherlands' OMLT, which would not have been possible otherwise due to the sheer volume of the interviews held. The collaboration has led to a comprehensive jointly written pre-publication of the Dutch case study (in Dutch), which was published as the book *'Met Geweer En Geduld, Trainen, Adviseren En Vechten Met Het Afghaanse Leger in Uruzgan*.[143] The dataset generated for the Dutch case will also be used for further research into combat mentoring in Uruzgan province by Lysanne Leeuwenburg. Secondly, the analysis of the Belgian case study was supported by a FMW intern, who assisted in collating and structuring the data from the archives, as well as assisting in translating the (military) French to Dutch. The result of this cooperation is published as "Belgian Military Adaptation to Combat Mentoring: The Operation Mentoring and Liaison Team Experience of a Small State" in the journal *Defense & Security Analysis*.[144]

Many variables affect the eventual outcome of SFA-type operations. In the first place, the technical execution by the providing entity must be correct. Secondly, the recipient entity must be able to absorb the newly received knowledge, expertise and equipment within their institutions. Lastly, whether or not the ends of the providing entity are reached depends on the recipients' use of the newly acquired military capacity and capability.

Quantitative research is not applicable due to the above. In the first place, no unit of measurement exists for values such as 'combat power,' 'fighting power,' or 'combat effectiveness.' The overall capability of a force can be assessed, rather than measured, as the

143 Lysanne Leeuwenburg and Ivor Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer En Geduld, Trainen, Adviseren En Vechten Met Het Afghaanse Leger in Uruzgan*. (Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, 2022).

144 Ivor Wiltenburg and Vibeke Gootzen, "Belgian Military Adaptation to Combat Mentoring: The Operation Mentoring and Liaison Team Experience of a Small State," *Defense & Security Analysis*, Taylor and Francis (2023) (forthcoming).

true potential of a force lies in the human capacity.[145] Also, as Rupert Smith elaborates, "the very nature of battle is an adversarial activity, emanating from confrontations apparent and potential. There is always an opposing side, whether potential or real. A measure of force is therefore always in comparison to the one opposing, it is never absolute."[146] One might count soldiers, weapons and equipment, but that will give you only an idea of the potential power of a force, not of its true capability.[147] Besides the intricacies of quantitative research on this topic—also the available data that is typically available on SFA-type operations, such as the amount of treasure that has been transferred to the recipients for the use of training provided to the recipient forces—the number of troops that have been sent through the training pipeline is typically limited. Not only are both not indicative of the quality or effectiveness of the forces that have received training (as neither indicate the meaningful use of the trained troops), but data is also regularly manipulated in order to show results up in the chain of command.[148] This effect is amplified by the usually short training deployments and high turn-over rate of deployed personnel, in combination with incentives for commanding officers to report successful missions.

To conclude this section, it is important to note that I have been personally involved in the OMLT in 2007, and I have also been deployed to Afghanistan as part of a battlegroup (2009). This has significant advantages, due to my field experience and ability to tap into my extended military network. However, having been part of one of the institutions under study, there is the possibility that I have preconceived ideas based on my personal experience. To mitigate the influence of these experiences on the conclusion of this dissertation, the parts that I have been directly involved in were validated by other primary and secondary sources. Moreover, feedback was received by a small circle of (officer-) scholars to ensure the proper academic distance when assessing the subject of this research.

1.7 Structure

The current chapter has presented the motive, relevance and goals of this research, which has culminated in the research question. The next chapter will elaborate on military innovation theory, followed by three empirical chapters: the OMLT fielded by the UK in

145 Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (Vintage, 2008), 240.

146 Ibid. 240.

147 Ibid. 240.

148 Op Zoek Naar Draagvlak: de Geïntegreerde Trainingsmissie in Kunduz in Afghanistan, accessed 03/05/2020 https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/01/30/rapport-op-zoek-naar-draagvlak-de-geintegreerde-politietrainingsmissie-in-kunduz-in-afghanistan; Jahara Matisek and Emily Knowles, Podcast Foreign Military Assistance, Human Rights and Peacebuilding; https://www.saferworld.org.uk/multimedia/warpod-ep-15-foreign-military-assistance-human-rights-and-peacebuilding, accessed 03/06/2020.

Helmand province, (chapter 3) the OMLT deployed by the Netherlands in Uruzgan province (chapter 4) and the Belgian OMLT in Kunduz (chapter 5). Chapter 6 will offer an analysis and conclusion of this dissertation. However, prior to the theoretical and empirical chapters, a general introduction to both the ANA and the OMLTs will have to be presented, as the later chapters will build on that foundation. As all three empirical chapters will generally refer to the ANA and OMLT, this introduction would not be complete without elaboration on both.

1.8 The Establishment of a National Afghan Army

After the Taliban regime was overthrown in 2001, the building of a new national army immediately started in Afghanistan.[149] Until 2003, this Afghan National Army (ANA) was, however, mainly a symbol. At that time, the strength needed to actually affect the external and internal security of the Afghan State was still lacking. In the three years that followed, the US developed initiatives under the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) flag to raise the ANA to a higher level. But it was not until 2007, when the war in Afghanistan escalated again, that the OEF/ISAF coalition started a structured programme to set up a large and capable Afghan army that should be able to guarantee security in Afghanistan itself.

Broadly speaking, the foundation of the ANA thus fell into three phases. The first phase began with the December 2001 Bonn Accords, which called for the numerous Afghan guerrilla groups, often known as mujahideen, to be integrated into a national Afghan security apparatus with the help of ISAF. The idea was that this army would be a relatively small organisation, far removed from the 250,000-strong force envisioned by the newly appointed Afghan Defense Minister (and Northern Alliance warlord) Mohammed Qasim Fahim at the time. A large Afghan army seemed far too costly to the US and the UK, the main sponsors of the new Afghan government. Those sponsors were supported by other countries in the reconstruction of the Afghan security sector. Several allies set themselves up as lead nation for establishing parts of the security apparatus. The US was the lead nation for the establishment of the armed forces and the intelligence services, and the UK led the fight against drugs. In addition, Germany was to set up the national police organisation, Japan became responsible for the disarmament of militias and Italy was leading in the development of an Afghan Public Prosecutor's Office.[150] As the lead nation, the US started training the

149 Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James A. Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 264–71; For the initial years see: Antonio Giustozzi "Auxiliary Force or National Army? Afghanistan's 'ANA' and the Counter-insurgency Effort, 2002–2006," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18.1 (2007): 45–67; T.X. Hammes, "Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Orbis* 60.1 (2016): 278–91.

150 Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 265.

first units of the ANA in 2002.[151] American SF were instructed to set up two Afghan infantry units, which, together with soldiers previously trained by the British, planted the seeds of the new army. In consultation with the British and the Afghan Ministry of Defense, it was decided to make the units broadly a copy of battalions of modern Western armed forces. These two kandaks consisted of four companies (toli) and a staff. The toli each consisted of three platoons. In total, a kandak, at least on paper, consisted of about six hundred soldiers.[152] The first kandaks were so-called light infantry units and did not yet have vehicles or heavy weapons, and its training consisted of a ten-week course. However, the US preferred to work with the former Northern Alliance militias. With neither the coalition nor the Afghans themselves taking the regular army seriously, it suffered from desertions and low morale, further eroding its fighting power.[153] The final blow to this first attempt to establish a national Afghan army was the realisation that the Afghan Ministry of Defense was controlled by one of the local warlords and not by the Afghan government. The United States decided to start over and disbanded the ministry.

The second attempt to build up the ANA soon followed. The new set-up aspired to an armed force without the influence of the warlords. The staff had to consist of volunteers and had to be an ethnic reflection of the (tribal) Afghan society.[154] Its establishment was overseen by the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) in Kabul, a US military organisation specifically created to oversee the planning and implementation of the Afghan security forces and to coordinate between the different agencies. The new Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC) served as the location where the new Afghan recruits received their initial training. This training centre provided space for four kandaks in total. The units that were trained and left Kabul were linked to American Embedded Training Teams, which consisted of US military Special Forces personnel. The ETTs remained with the Afghan units and provided additional training on location—i.e., where the Afghan kandak deployed to—and supported the Afghan soldiers during operations. This effort bore more fruit and the fledgling Afghan army grew rapidly. Unfortunately, desertion remained a major problem, with the result that the actual numbers of deployable soldiers were much smaller than the reported numbers. In the meantime, from about 2004–2005, the Taliban advanced again, especially in the east and south of Afghanistan, and it turned out that the Afghan security forces were unable to cope with the uprising.[155] It was therefore decided to

151 Obaid Younossi, Peter Dahl Thruelsen, Jonathan Vaccaro, Jerry M. Sollinger, & Brian Grady, *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army*, (RAND Corporation, 2009), 13.

152 Ibid., 265.

153 Giustozzi, "Auxiliary Force or National Army?" 45-50.

154 Ibid., 46.

155 Farrell, Theo, and Antonio Giustozzi. "The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand Insurgency, 2004–2012," *International Affairs* 89.4 (2013): 850.

expand the Afghan armed forces, by now formally known as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).[156] These would reach 70,000 men in 2010 and receive better equipment, communications equipment, heavier weapons and additional training. The intended quality impulse created a proportional need for extra mentor and training capacity in addition to the existing ETTs, and via ISAF HQ the coalition partners were forwarded a request to provide personnel for this. This call was well received and soon the first Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams were active. Still, a modus had to be found for the coexistence of the two types of teams, which had to work together with the ANA, over which the coalition had no formal say. The ETTs were managed in the OEF chain of command, with the CSTC-A as the highest operational headquarters. The OMLTs were ISAF units and commanded by ISAF headquarters in Kabul.[157] To synchronise the efforts of OEF, ISAF and ANA, an Afghan Regional Security Integration Command (ARSIC) was established at the level of each Regional Command.[158] Through this organisation, the OMLTs, the ETTs and the ANA in the sectors were connected to each other, and the operations were de-conflicted as much as possible.

After 2006, the ANSF expanded after to 35,000 men at the end of 2007, to 75,000 in 2008 and 95,000 in 2009.[159] This growth continued in subsequent years, with the ANSF gaining a strength of 134,000 men in 2010 and 171,000 in 2011. The kandaks were re-equipped with American material, mostly Ford Ranger pick-ups and International trucks, and later also HMMWV (Humvee) 4x4 wheeled vehicles. A transition was made to mode modern weapons, in which the venerable equipment, usually made in the Soviet Union, were exchanged for American rifles, machine guns and mortars. In addition to the expansion of the regular ANA kandaks, investments were also made in various specialist units, including commando kandaks, counternarcotics kandaks and support and logistics units. The constant expansion of the ANSF caused a proportional increase in the number of Allied ETTs and OMLTs. Moreover, where the initial OMLTs were focusing on light infantry work, the support units of the ANA Brigades were now also receiving OMLT assistance, as did the Brigade Staff.[160]

156 Farrell, Osinga, Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 268.

157 Younossi, Thruelsen, Vaccaro, Sollinger & Grady, *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army*, 36.

158 Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) Operation Enduring Freedom Embedded Training Teams First 100 Days, US Army (Unclass), (2008).

159 Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 268.

160 Younossi, Thruelsen, Vaccaro, Sollinger, & Grady, *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army*, 36.

1.9 The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams

According to NATO, "the Operational Mentor [sic] and Liaison Team programme is an important part of NATO-ISAF's contribution towards the development of the Afghan National Army."[161] Indeed, the OMLT and the ANA might be considered to be a heteropaternal superfecundation, considering the time of conception in combination with their different origins. Working in close coordination with the Operation Enduring Freedom's Embedded Training Teams, the OMLTs were to provide training and mentoring for the ANA. They also were to serve as a liaison capability between ANA and ISAF forces, co-ordinating the planning of operations and ensuring that the ANA units receive necessary combat support (including close air support, casualty and medical evacuation).[162] ISAF expected the OMLT to be deployed at least six months, and to deploy throughout Afghanistan with their ANA partner units.[163] The required time frame of six months served as a minimum to ensure that the OMLTs and ANA could build rapport during their interaction.[164] The higher tactical formations, i.e., the ANA Corps and garrison OMLTs, were an exception to this rule, as it was expected that these headquarters would remain in place permanently. The ANA corps were assigned to an area of operations that would be reminiscent to the Regional Commands as used by ISAF.

As indicated by Figure 4, the chain of command for the OMLTs were quite opaque from the start, which contributed to many of the command and control issues documented by the OMLTs and in part described in this study. The OMLT had a formal command relationship with the commanding officer of the Regional Command (RC), but were reporting to the Regional Corps Advisory Command. This subsidiary of the RC, however, were not in control of the OMLT, but were only allowed to provide guidance. Besides the ISAF chain of command as depicted below, the OMLTs also reported in their national hierarchy. The last complicating factor was that the ANA were, as part of the armed force of a sovereign state, not under command of either ISAF nor the OMLTs, which confounded the OMLTs who were stated to accompany the ANA wherever they went.

161 OMLT Factsheet, Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) Media Operations Centre (MOC) NATO HQ Brussels, https://www.scribd.com/document/457411873/omlt-factsheet#, accessed 29/03/2023.

162 Ibid.

163 Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) Operation Enduring Freedom Embedded Training Teams First 100 Days, US Army (Unclass), (2008), 56.

164 Ibid., 56.

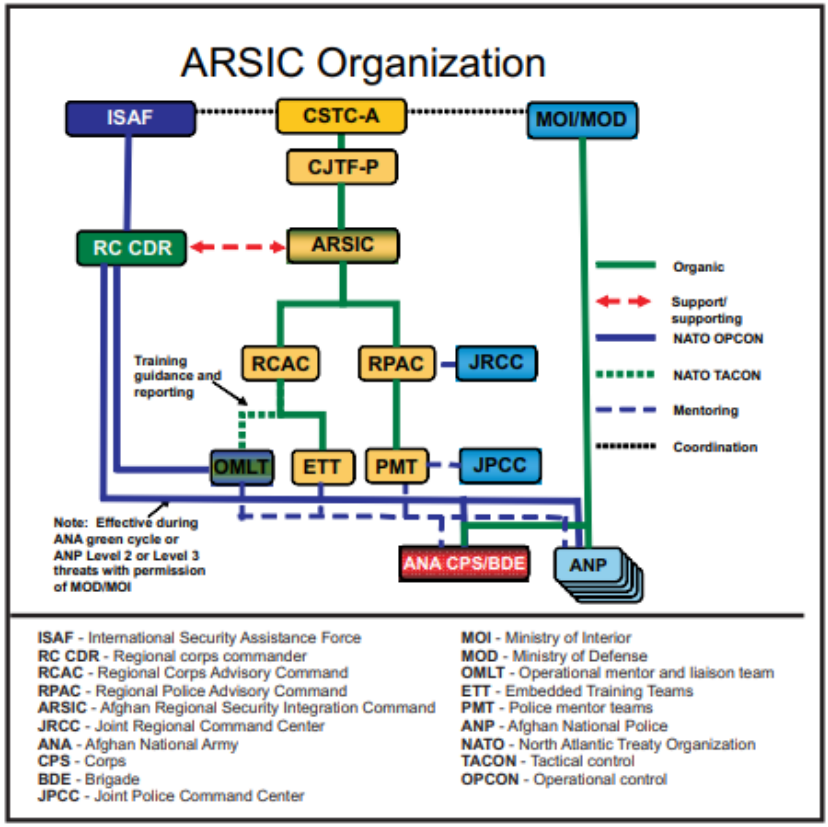

Figure 4 OMLT hierarchy

In any case, the OMLTs should accompany the ANA battalions in small groups. The exact amount of OMLT members required differed from source to source, which led to some confusion during the early OMLT rotations. Although this research could not find any ISAF order specifying the exact requirements of OMLT personnel, the assigned service members were required to process through a pipeline of training consisting of national training, NATO pre-deployment training, and in-theatre training. The implementation of this directive varied per country, and will also be elaborated upon in the empirical chapters.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2: The Theory of Military Innovation

2.1 Introduction

Security Force Assistance, and by extension, combat mentoring, was not a significant part of the military discourse in the armed forces of the United Kingdom, Belgium and the Netherlands at the start of their respective OMLT deployments. Still, significant differences might be observed when observing the case studies' approach to combat mentoring between the first and last rotation of the OMLT deployed. The changes include adaptation to the OMLT's staffing, training, tactics, techniques and procedures, equipment, force levels and equipment. The change between the first and last iterations of the OMLT can be explained through the lens of military innovation studies. This chapter details the theory of military innovation, describing the various schools of thought regarding the incentives of military organisations to adapt as well as the organisations' reactions to these drivers of change.

How military organisations change has been the subject of academic scrutiny for decades, although the number of literature has increased after the 1990s following the Gulf Wars (1991) and the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). From the 2000s onwards, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have acted as a catalyst in the academic interest in how militaries innovate, adapt and learn.

Interestingly, military innovation and military adaptation are ill-defined, as Adam Grissom and Rob Sinterniklaas have demonstrated in their respective publications.[1] Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff theorised that "innovation is one of three pathways whereby military change occurs, the other two being adaptation and emulation."[2] Adaptation is subsequently defined as "adjusting existing military methods and means," emulation as "importing new tools and ways of war through imitation of other military organizations," and innovation is explained by Farrell and Tarriff as "involving new military technologies, tactics, strategies and structures."[3] This dissertation uses the definition given by Farrell and Terriff for two reasons: first, the definitions presented by Farrell and Terriff cover all forms of military change and thus present a comprehensive demarcation. Second, as Martijn van der Vorm explained in his treatise on military learning during conflict, other definitions are inconsequential as

1 Rob Sinterniklaas, *Military Innovation: Cutting the Gordian Knot* (Faculty of Military Sciences, Netherlands Defence Academy, 2018), 17–21; Adam Grissom, "The Future of Military Innovation Studies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 5 (2006), 907–8.

2 Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 6.

3 Ibid., 6.

they refer to contextual contrasts, which are not relevant as this dissertation's cases focus solely on the War in Afghanistan.[4]

2.2 Schools of Thought within Military Innovation Studies

Within the field of military innovation studies, several schools of thought can be distinguished. Barry Posen, in his seminal work "The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars" (1984), considered military doctrine a key indicator of innovation. According to Posen, the doctrine would reflect the outcome of "discussions within and between the professional military and civilian leadership."[5] As Posen considered military organisations inert and fundamentally opposed to change, large alterations would be consequential if Posen argued that armed forces themselves are inherently prone to inertia. For innovation to occur, external intervention would be obligatory by the civilian leadership, who would interpret the geopolitical context and subsequently impose innovation on the military with the collaboration of what he dubbed "maverick officers."[6]

Reacting to Posen's argument, Stephen Rosen argued in his 1991 article "Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military" that Posen was right in asserting that innovation was at its heart a bureaucratic exercise and bureaucracies were not designed to change, and therefore the question why militaries were innovating becomes relevant. Rosen argued that innovation is incited by the senior officers within a service that develops "a new theory of victory, an explanation of what the next war will look like and how officers must fight if it is to be won."[7] This outlook into future conflict by the militaries' leadership would constitute a more potent driver for change than the civilian oversight model that Posen advocated. Rosen argued that as senior leadership would affect the career paths of junior officers, the officers with consistent views would play a more prominent part as they would occupy positions of influence as a result of their allegiance towards the senior leadership. Intrinsically, the effect of 'maverick officers' as promoted by Posen would be of little influence as they would not be in a position of sufficient power to broker "a change in one of the primary combat arms of a service in the way it fights or alternatively, as the creation of a new combat arm."[8]

In his 2006 article, Adam Grissom distinguished two other schools of military change. Grissom considered Posen to be the forefront scholar on the "civil-military model" and

4 Martijn van der Vorm, *War's Didactics: A Theoretical Exploration on How Militaries Learn from Conflict*, Netherlands Defence Academy (Breda: NLDA Press, 2021), 34.

5 Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

6 Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 222–36.

7 Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military.* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 20.

8 Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, 7.

Rosen the main scholar on what he defined as the "intraservice model."[9] A variation of the intraservice model was labelled the "interservice model" by Grissom, which he described as changes within the military that are not driven by rivalry within the different branches of a service but rather by the services of the state themselves. Grissom argues that the core contention of the interservice model constitutes resource scarcity, which in turn catalyses innovation. The model contests that in addressing contested mission areas, services will compete with one another, resulting in innovation. Cases of the interservice model of innovation would include the US development of different variants of nuclear delivery systems and rotary wing close air support assets, both of which were contested by different services within the US armed forces.[10]

Lastly, Theo Farrell argues that culture, defined as "'intersubjective beliefs about the social and natural world that define actors, their situations, and the possibilities of action,"[11] is an important factor in military innovation. Thus, according to Farrell, culture enables military innovation, "fundamentally shaping organisations' reactions to technological and strategic opportunities."[12] Farrell identifies three manners in which militaries change. First, senior army leadership enables cultural change in order for innovation to occur, dubbed "planned change." Second, an "external shock" to the cultural system, such as the move towards pacifism as encountered in the contemporary Japanese and German armed forces after the shock of defeat in WW2, would undermine existing norms, paving the way for a cultural change. Last, the emulation of other states' militaries gives prominence to some innovations while containing others. Cross-national observations between professional armies give reference to what also might work for the observer, resulting in emulation of the changes and innovations as observed. Grissom termed this school of military innovation studies the "cultural model."[13]

Besides the grouping of the different schools of learning, a central contribution by Grissom to the discourse on military organisational learning was his observation of the importance of "bottom-up" drivers. As Grissom recognised that the four different schools of military change that he categorised explained military change from a top-down perspective, historical evidence suggests that meaningful change was frequently initiated through the experiences of deployed units on the field of battle.[14] Grissom noted that although research on bottom-

9 Grissom, "The Future of Military Innovation Studies." 913-916.

10 Ibid., 913

11 Farrell and Terriff, *The Sources of Military Change*, 7.

12 Ibid., 7–8.

13 Adam Grissom, "The Future of Military Innovation Studies," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 5 (2006): 908.

14 Ibid., 928.

up innovation existed, the field of innovation was deficient in providing conceptual models upon which to test the empirical data.[15]

2.3 External Factors of Influence

So what incites militaries to adapt? Theo Farrell theorises that "pressures from operations are the most important driver of military adaptation."[16] These pressures might stem from intensifying current operations or new operational challenges. The challenges might instigate adaptation to doctrine, planning and training, or campaign strategy, and force levels and resources if the challenges are stern enough.[17] Besides operational challenges, new technologies are recognised as important drivers for military change by Farrell: "the arrival of new technologies on the battlefield, or adaptive use of old technologies by opponents, creates new operational challenges. These and other operational challenges generate requirements for new technologies and associated organisation capabilities."[18]

Still, the mere existence of operational challenges or technological advancement does not incite military adaptation. Other factors "shape the process whereby states and militaries respond to imperative and the opportunities to adapt."[19] Van der Vorm differentiates between external and internal factors. External factors include domestic politics, alliance politics, strategic culture and civil-military relations, as identified by Farrell, but also defence policy and the stately perception of (external) threat.[20] Internal shapers would include leadership, organisational culture, learning mechanisms, dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation and organisational politics.[21]

2.3.1 Domestic Politics

The ability of a military to adapt is affected by the importance given to the operation by domestic political considerations. When a military operation is considered highly important by domestic leadership, more resources would be allocated to the military mission, enabling the possibility to adapt.[22] In 2004, the newly elected Spanish prime minister decided to

15 Ibid., 925; Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 32.

16 Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James A. Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 6.

17 Ibid. 6.

18 Ibid. 8–10.

19 Ibid. 10.

20 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*; Tom Dyson, *Organisational Learning and the Modern Army: A New Model for Lessons-Learned Processes* (Routledge, 2019), 55–59.

21 Francis Hoffman, *Mars Adapting: Military Change during War* (Naval Institute Press, 2021).

22 Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 10.

immediately withdraw the Spanish contingent from Iraq.[23] This led to a serious diplomatic spat in Spanish-US relations, as well as to a full stop to the Spanish military operations in Iraq, which had only begun a year earlier.[24] In a similar vein, the Dutch government fell after the Dutch Labour Party decided against an extension of the Dutch mission in the Uruzgan province. The Dutch Labour Party attempted to minimise the projected losses in the upcoming municipal elections, and as the Uruzgan mission was not popular amongst the constituency, the party voted against NATO's request for an extension, leading to the fall of the government in 2010.[25]

In contrast, following a defeat in the congressional elections in 2006, US President George W. Bush decided to react to the electorate's dissatisfaction with regard to the war in Iraq by doubling down on the military's efforts in Iraq, authorising the increase in troops which became known as the 'surge.'[26] Although the lack of progress in Iraq was already well-known in Washington, the electoral defeat provided the impetus for the surge.[27] The surge in troops and equipment provided the means necessary to pursue a counterinsurgency like US General Petraeus had envisioned as he headed the team that drafted the US Army's field manual on the topic, the influential FM 3-24.[28]

2.3.2 *Alliance Politics*

Another influential shaping factor is alliance politics. NATO is the cornerstone in the security politics of many NATO-aligned states, including the cases in this dissertation. Within alliances, and in this case within NATO, the US is able to influence junior partners to participate in military operations.[29] Furthermore, a hegemonic ally is able to influence how wars are fought by exerting pressure on the junior partner to acquire new capabilities or to expand the military presence already in the theatre.[30] Major changes during the Afghanistan

23 Charles Powell, "A Second Transition, or More of the Same? Spanish Foreign Policy under Zapatero," *South European Society and Politics* 14, no. 4 (2009): 524.

24 Powell, "A Second Transition, or More of the Same? Spanish Foreign Policy under Zapatero," 525.

25 George Dimitriu and Beatrice De Graaf, "The Dutch COIN Approach: Three Years in Uruzgan, 2006–2009," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21, no. 3 (2010): 429.

26 See: Joel D. Rayburn et al., *The US Army in the Iraq War, Volume 2: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007–2011*, Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (2019).

27 David H. Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the US Military for Modern Wars* (Georgetown University Press, 2009), 112–13.

28 For a full description on the drafting of the FM 3-24 see: Conrad C. Crane, *Cassandra in Oz: Counterinsurgency and Future War* (Naval Institute Press, 2016).

29 Wiltenburg and Vorm, "Small State Strategic Thinking"

30 Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga," Innovating on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in The Netherlands Armed Forces," in *A Transformation Gap?* (Stanford University Press, 2020), 133–34; Kristian Søby Kristensen and Kristian Knus Larsen,

campaign, such as the population-centric counterinsurgency approach, were initiated by the US, and subsequently, smaller contingents were asked to follow the hegemon's lead.[31] A telling example of the influence of alliance politics is the Dutch participation in the police training mission in Kunduz province after the withdrawal from Uruzgan did not go down well in Washington and was even considered to be a "defection" from the coalition.[32] Unfortunately, the attempt to make amends in Kunduz were beset by domestic politicking, making the Kunduz deployment a costly and impotent bid to improve the ANSF.[33] In conclusion, the relationship with the US or other major allies has proven to be an important shaper towards the size and scope of smaller allies' military contribution and the ensuing resource-driven ability to adapt during the tenure of the conflict.[34] This dissertation will elaborate on the strategic culture of each case, as this provides a distinct lens through which to understand national decision-making regarding the combat mentoring missions in Afghanistan.

2.3.3 Strategic Culture

How and why states wage war is described by the concept of strategic culture. According to Kilcullen, strategic culture is not only about the military, but it includes the government and society as well. This Clausewitzian approach towards strategic culture is summarised by Kilcullen as a "national way of war."[35] Farrell defines strategic culture as the "sum of beliefs about the use of force that are shared by the military and policy communities of a state. Such beliefs, or norms, prescribe when and how military force may be used."[36] As it is, strategic culture is loosely defined, with Farrell's definition itself a variant of Jack Snyder's definition describing Soviet strategic culture regarding limited nuclear warfare in the 1970s.[37] Another definition of strategic culture by Biehl, Giegerich and Jonas provides a more externally oriented view towards strategic culture: "a strategic culture is a number of shared beliefs, norms and ideas within a given society that generate specific expectations about the respective community's preferences and actions in security and defence policy. In this context, a community's security and defence identity, expressed through its preferences and

"Denmark's Fight Against Irrelevance, or the Alliance Politics of 'Punching Above Your Weight,'" *Global Allies: Comparing US Alliances in the 21st Century* (ANU, 2017), 63.

31 Howard G. Coombs, "Canada's Lessons," *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 49, no. 3 (2019): 69; Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 56.

32 Justin Massie, "Why Democratic Allies Defect Prematurely: Canadian and Dutch Unilateral Pullouts from the War in Afghanistan," *Democracy and Security* 12, no. 2 (2016).

33 Binnelandse Zaken, "Op Zoek Naar Draagvlak: de Geïntegreerde Politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan."

34 Hugh White, *How to Defend Australia* (La Trobe University Press, 2019), 195; Sten Rynning et al., "En god alliert: Norge i Afghanistan 2001–2014," (2016).

35 Mansoor and Murray, *The Culture of Military Organizations*, 35.

36 Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 17–18.

37 Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, (RAND Corporation, 1977), 8.

behavioural patterns, derived from shared experiences and accepted narratives specific to a particular security community."[38]

So, strategic culture is an important variable regarding a state's approach to warfare. Considering geographical, historical and demographic aspects, strategic culture might be used to explain a nation's force structure, risk appetite and willingness to use the military as an instrument of foreign policy. Strategic culture describes how states and their leaders view the role of war, the nature of their enemy, how force should be used and against whom.[39] Furthermore, strategic culture indicates the strategic and operational preferences regarding the use of armed forces. Every state has its own strategic culture, and by understanding strategic culture, one can understand the behaviour of the state and predict and explain operational preferences. This dissertation, however, does not aim to add to the debate on what strategic culture is and how it should be interpreted.[40] Rather, strategic culture will be assessed through a more interpretive approach by utilising Gray's definition of strategic culture, of which he states that it comprises "the persisting (but not eternal) socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions and habits of mind and preferred methods of operation (so, behavioural patterns) that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience."[41] As this dissertation will indicate, the difference in strategic culture does not only exists transatlantically, as Kagan described, but also amongst the continental European member states within the NATO alliance, influencing the choices made on force structure as well as length and type of deployment.[42]

2.3.4 Civil-military Relationship

The last factor of influence that is recognised by Farrell is the relationship between military and civilian leadership. This relationship is paramount in most studies on military innovation, as indicated by the debate between Rosen and Posen, as detailed in section 2.2. Ideally, civilian and military leadership cooperate to enable military change. However, an increased partnership between military and civilian leadership requires the latter "cultivate an understanding of military matters" and the former to have the necessary "political knowledge

38 Heiko Biehl, Bastian Giegerich, and Alexandra Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe* (Springer, 2013), 12.

39 Laura Chappell, "Differing Member State Approaches to the Development of the EU Battlegroup Concept: Implications for CSDP," *European Security* 18, no. 4 (2009): 419.

40 For a more comprehensive analysis into strategic culture, see: Alan Bloomfield, "Time to Move On: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 3 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2012.727679.

41 Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 51.

42 Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (Vintage, 2004), 11.

to question policy."[43] Changes in strategy may be more quickly attained when a polity has firm control over its military, and likewise, the military might be able to impose change—especially on the operational and tactical levels—when strong civilian leadership is absent.[44]

2.4 Internal Factors of Influence

Military organisations are not dependent on external factors to incite change. Indeed, military organisations have significant agency to shape their learning processes.[45] Hoffman defines this learning ability as "the aggregate ability of a military organization to recognize and respond to performance gaps generated by campaign pressures, unexpected adversary actions or unanticipated aspects of the operating environment via adaptation or innovation."[46] Upon further analysing how an organisation learns from its experiences, Hoffman concludes that this depends on a number of variables. These variables pertain to the internal mechanisms of a military organisation: military leadership, organisational culture, mechanisms of learning and dissemination of knowledge.[47] This section will dive into these internal factors of influence in order to elaborate on the impact and influence of each of these variables.

2.4.1 *Military Leadership*

Military leadership is amongst the most easily recognised factors in military learning. Indeed, as this dissertation will indicate, the impact of individual commanding officers on a counterinsurgency campaign has a significant effect. Historically, the impact of individual commanders on the outcome of a battle or (counterinsurgency) campaign is well documented, and a general consensus within the literature suggests that leadership affects organisational accomplishment.[48] The impact of, for instance, US generals Stanley McCrystal and David Petraeus on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are well documented.[49] However, as Van der Vorm argues, the entire chain of command within a military organisation affects its ability to adapt and learn, as open-mindedness to new ideas by senior leadership acts as a catalyst for

43 Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 17.

44 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 57; Deborah D. Avant, "The Institutional Sources of Military Doctrine: Hegemons in Peripheral Wars," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1993).

45 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 59.

46 F. G. Hoffman, King's College London, School of Social Science and Public Policy, *Learning While Under Fire: Military Change in Wartime* (King's College London, 2015), https://books.google.nl/books?id=DEaHDAEACAAJ, 42.

47 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*," 65; Hoffman, *Learning While Under Fire*, 42.

48 Liam S. Collins, *Military Innovation in War: The Criticality of the Senior Military Leader* (Princeton University, 2014), 55.

49 Collins, *Military Innovation in War*, 377–412.

the promotion of initiative at the lower tactical levels.[50] Vice-versa, leadership that is opposed or inert to change affects the organisation's ability to implement change negatively.

2.4.2. Organisational Culture

The culture of the military organisation affects learning as it reflects its norms and values. As this directly correlates to the behaviour of individuals—in casu pertaining to the perceived necessity for change—, it in part determines the way in which innovation is implemented. The organisational identity and the perceptual lens—its self-image, its attributes and its role in relation to its environment—complete the categories of organisational culture.[51] However, especially in military organisations, culture is not homogenous. Indeed, the different services of the military often have distinct cultures, which ultimately have significant overlap, but also important differences. This is, for example, evident in the way the "5th generation Air Force" narrative is promoted by the Royal Netherlands Airforce (RNLAF).[52] In this way, the RNLAF attempts to incite a cultural attitude that allows new ideas to prosper. Other services may or may not have a more conservative approach towards innovation. The organisational culture—specifically its attitude towards learning—thus influences if and how innovation is implemented. Reflecting on culture, Farrell states that "culture, as both professional norms and national traditions, shapes preference formation by military organizations by telling organizational members who they are and what is possible, and thereby suggesting what they should do. In this way, culture explains why military organizations choose the structures and strategies they do, and thus how states generate military power."[53]

2.4.3 Disseminating Knowledge

New knowledge—notwithstanding its source—has to be spread throughout the organisation in order to become institutionalised. Many organisations have dedicated staff sections to ensure the collection, analysis and storage of lessons encountered and learned.[54] Indeed, the knowledge that is implicitly available in a military organisation has to be made explicit in order to reach a more general public. This formalisation of knowledge is—again within a military organisation—done through field training exercises, adaptations in formal doctrine and education in military academies and schools. In practice, units develop new tactics, techniques and procedures that work for them in a specific operational environment. As has become more and more common, military units rotate in and out of the theatre on a four- to

50 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 60.

51 Jeannie Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency and Strategic Culture* (Georgetown University Press, 2018), 24–25.

52 D. Luyt, "Transforming the RNLAF into a 5th Generation Air Force: Just Doing It!," *Transforming Joint Air & Space Power: The Journal of the JAPCC*, 11–16.

53 Theo Farrell, "Culture and Military Power," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 03 (1998): 416.

54 In each of the three case studies in this dissertation, a formal staff section on lessons learned was present within the organisation during its deployments in Afghanistan.

fifteen-month rotation scheme, after which it is customary to share best practices informally through individual and collective networks, as well as through more formal channels such as regimental gazettes, branch or service journals and the incorporation of these best practices in the pre-deployment training of other units and formations.[55] The eventual incorporation of lessons learned is the first indicator of knowledge being shared within the organisation, although the process leading up to the publication of doctrinal updates is subject to the bureaucratic process and might take several years.[56]

2.4.4 Manifestations

All these drivers and shapers lead to manifestations of military change. As Sinterniklaas has collated, manifestations of military change include a change in TTPs, plans and operations, military strategy, education and training, force levels and resources, doctrine and concepts, and lastly, organisational structures.[57] Of these, several are rather straightforward, such as force levels and resources, as changes in either one are easily quantified. Others, including military strategy and doctrine, need further elaboration. The next section will explain the manifestations of military change. Several manifestations of military change are expressions of military doctrine at different echelons and can be explained through the exploration of the utility of military doctrine. Likewise, the levels of operation are indicative of military change during a campaign and partly overlap with the concept of doctrine. The next section will discuss the position of military doctrine at length.

2.4.5 Doctrine and Concepts

The formal outing of military thought on a subject is generally referred to as doctrine. As stated before, Posen considered military doctrine to be an important indicator for innovation and regarded doctrine to be a reflection of the "outcome of discussions within and between the professional military and civilian leaderships about which type of military could best serve the interests of the state."[58] Other important aspects would include technology, the geostrategic situation of a country, the capabilities of the anticipated adversary and the state's own capabilities.[59] According to Posen, the result was a military doctrine that was both feasible and desirable and that, in essence, described how a military organisation preferred to fight wars. Besides written doctrine itself, Posen considered force posture,

55 Paddy O'Toole and Steven Talbot, "Fighting for Knowledge: Developing Learning Systems in the Australian Army," *Armed Forces & Society* 37, no. 1 (2011): 51–52.

56 Email correspondence Lt. Col. Sellmeijer, former contributor to the Dutch Defence Doctrine publications.

57 Sinterniklaas, *Military Innovation: Cutting the Gordian Knot*, 31.

58 Ibid., 7.

59 Ibid., 7

inventory of weapons and organisational control mechanisms important manifestations of the implementation of that military doctrine.[60]

Likewise, doctrine constitutes the fundamental principles by which the military forces, or elements thereof, guide their actions in support of their objectives.[61] It establishes a common frame of reference, including intellectual tools that military leaders use to solve military problems.[62] It is supposed to focus on how to think rather than simply following a fixed set of rules. As doctrine is generally focused on best practices, lessons learned and how-tos on all levels of operation, it includes tactics, techniques and procedures that, in most cases, would generate a suitable solution for military problems.

Changing doctrine is one of the manifestations of change in military innovation, alongside military strategy, force levels and resources, organisational structures, plans and operations, education, training and lessons learned.[63] As such, doctrine reflects the changing approach to how military organisations conduct their operations. Military doctrine, as a formal product of military thought and only valid for a certain amount of time, is therefore expedient to understand to what extent SFA as a military activity aligns with the operational and tactical levels of operation. NATO defines doctrine as "fundamental principles by which the military forces guide their actions in support of objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgement in application."[64] These fundamentals will indubitably resound in the execution and performance of a country's armed forces when engaged in SFA-type missions.

Military doctrine explains the utility of SFA-type operations, as it classifies the variables SFA seeks to influence. Principal to any armed force is the concept of fighting power, a concept that describes the operational effectiveness of armed forces or any element of them.[65] The concept guides force development and preparation.[66] Interestingly, the goals of providing SFA are broadly similar to the results of increasing fighting power. Although the doctrinal concept of fighting power is projected on one's own armed forces, it is universally applicable to all combatants, including the recipients of SFA.

60 Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 7.

61 John Spencer, "What is Army Doctrine?" *Modern War Institute* (2016), https://mwi.usma.edu/what-is-army-doctrine/, accessed 04/02/2019.

62 Ibid.

63 Sinterniklaas, *Military Innovation: Cutting the Gordian Knot*. 23.

64 NATO Standardization Office, *Allied Joint Doctrine* (Brussels, 2017), p. 1-1.

65 British Ministry of Defence, Land Operations, UK. Land Warfare Development Centre 3-1 – 3-16.

66 Ibid., 3-1 – 3-16.

The goal of providing Security Force Assistance	**Fighting Power**
Improve local forces	Increase operational effectiveness
Focused on local forces and associated institutions	Focused on armed forces or elements of it
Focused on force improvement and development	Focused on force development and preparation

In asserting that an important goal of SFA on the lower levels of operation is the increase of fighting power, further examination of the concept of fighting power is needed. The power of a military force is composed of three related factors: "the means—both men and materiel; the way they are used—doctrine, organization, and purpose; and the will that sustains them in adversity. In the combination of these three lies the true potential of a force, its overall capability."[67] This axiom is translated into doctrine, using 'fighting power' as a substitute for the 'power of a military force.'

In NATO doctrine, fighting power consists of three components: a mental component, a physical component and a conceptual component. The British Doctrine Publication on Land Operations explains the three components clearly:

> [T]he conceptual component is the force's knowledge, understanding and application of doctrine—the ideas behind how to operate and fight—kept relevant by its ability to learn and adapt. The moral component is the force's morale, leadership and ethical conduct: the ability to get people to operate and fight and to do so appropriately. The physical component consists of manpower, equipment, sustainability and readiness, deployability and recovery."[68]

Dutch military doctrine echoes these components in its own doctrine publications.[69]

67 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 240.

68 British Ministry of Defence, Land Operations, UK. Land Warfare Development Centre. 3-3.

69 Landmacht, *Landoperaties Doctrine Publicatie 3.2*.

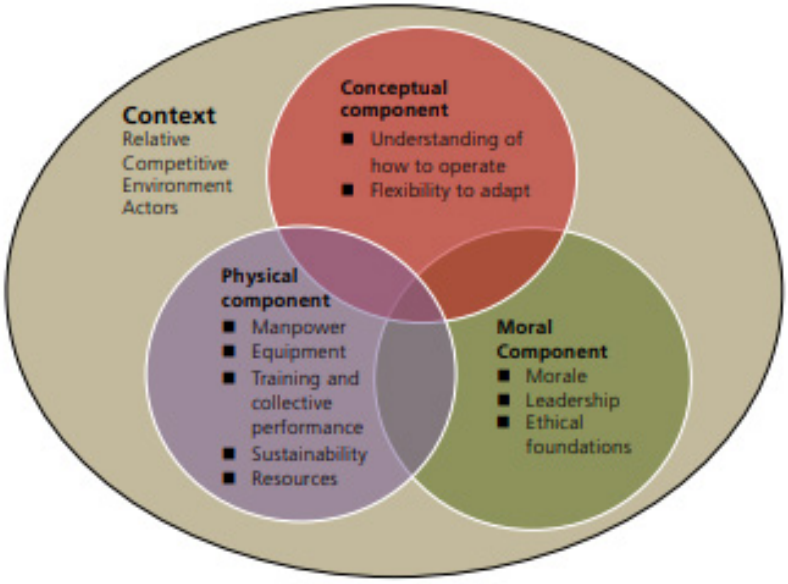

Figure 3: Components of Fighting Power. Source: Land Operations, Land Warfare

As these three components are necessary for any military organisation, it is consistent for the providers of SFA to adhere to these principles when providing assistance. As the next section will show, some military organisations attempt to realise organisational and doctrinal foundations to effectively provide SFA.

As stated in the introduction, SFA-type operations are often categorised under different labels. These labels originate from both scholarly and military writers who use different variables to describe SFA-type activities and, in doing so, generate a plethora of terms and definitions. As doctrine provides us with input for the military actions of which SFA is a component, the understanding of doctrine as a basis for military action is necessary for further academic analysis. Although doctrine does not provides us with an academic source, it influences the outcome of military operations, as well as the scholarly lexicon and improves our understanding of military behaviour. Importantly, a change in doctrine is considered an indicator of organisational learning, and any institutional change as "doctrine reflects learning that militaries have assimilated from their experiences."[70]

A specific form of doctrine are TTPs, the common military acronym for Techniques, Tactics and Procedures. It is a loosely defined and colloquial term commonly linked to the patterns of activities or methods associated with a specific threat actor or group of threat actors. TTPs are also commonly referred to as 'standard operating procedures' (SOPs) or 'skills and drills,'

70 Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, 2.

reiterating the repetitive nature of the action in response to a specific military situation. TTPs might be standard across the army, but in many cases, they are specific to a particular unit, location or campaign. TTPs provide a standardisation which is beneficial regarding the unity of effort and the predictability of the reaction of friendly forces. As such, they are often a result of reviews of previous operations, where a greater need for tactical commonality has been established. TTPs are tactical-level doctrine derivatives, and due to their nature, often susceptible to grassroots adaptation initiatives.

2.5 Types of Organisational Learning

In essence, three related strands of learning in relation to conflict might be distinguished. First, informal adaptation occurs "during deployment at the level of units or national contingents to overcome operational challenges that does [sic] not require organizational resources or attention." Secondly, the formal organisational adaptation, which seeks to "address performance deficiencies with the support of the institutional level and institutional learning that leads to structural changes after the latest war has ended."[71] Lastly, institutional inter-conflict learning occurs when armed forces retain lessons beyond a conflict.

2.5.1 *Informal Organisational Learning in Conflict*

Informal learning occurs when military units or individuals have to cope with a changing operational environment during operations and exercises. The unique geography, demography and disposition of enemy forces in the operational environment give military units an exclusive prospect to adapt, most often at a tempo that cannot be matched by organisational processes.[72] It is irrelevant whether or not the organisation is unwilling or unable to accommodate the fielded unit with additional assets to overcome tactical challenges, as the adaptation is prompted by the operational reality. The lessons learned in this way by military units are ideally shared amongst their peer units or successors in theatre.[73] In contemporary conflict, this often occurs when units are relieved during the conflict, during what is colloquially known as the 'hand-over/take-over' (HOTO) period, or alternatively through communication with the relieving unit prior to the HOTO, or through liaison officers. These frequently include adaptations to low-level tactics that have proven successful in theatre.

Similarly, units adapt by making changes to existing equipment to improve their function during hostilities. Examples include the manufacturing of 'gun trucks' during the Iraq

71 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 3.

72 Ibid., 72.

73 Nina A. Kollars, "War's Horizon: Soldier-led Adaptation in Iraq and Vietnam," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 535.

war by American forces and the Israeli adaptation to Hamas' tunnel warfare in 2014.[74] In contemporary conflicts, troops attempted to improve the protection against IEDs by adding layers of sandbags, water bottles or wooded structures to the flat bottom of vehicles.[75] This makeshift adaptation functioned as a transitional solution as the organisation struggled to keep up with the operational reality and in extension the acquisition of dedicated IED-protected vehicles in a formal implementation of organisational learning.

2.5.2 *Formal Organisational Learning in Conflict*

The second strand of learning is formal organisational learning during conflict, which occurs when adaptations are integrated into the wider organisation for the duration of the conflict.[76] The rapid acquisition of assets following operational requests is an indicator of formal organisational learning. The Dutch Army acquired Bushmaster vehicles during the initial rotations in Uruzgan province, as the threat of improvised explosive devices increased.[77] Similar cases of formal adaptation processes may be found in the rapid introduction of the US Counterinsurgency doctrine, the Field Manual 3-24, after its publication in 2007, in both the Iraq and Afghanistan theatres.[78]

However, the adaptations are limited to time and location, as the lessons are particular to the context of a specific mission or deployment. Using the same example, the Dutch Army struggled to find a use for the acquired Bushmaster vehicles post-Uruzgan, and unwilling to write off the vehicles, the Dutch Army decided to donate all excess assets to form a new 'light' brigade.[79] In a similar vein, the lessons learned during the counterinsurgency campaigns are at risk of being discarded, as many Western Armed Forces again refocus towards regular warfare in light of the growing threats posed by China and Russia.[80] This would reiterate the

74 See: Kollars, "War's Horizon: Soldier-led Adaptation in Iraq and Vietnam"; Raphael D. Marcus, "Learning 'Under Fire': Israel's Improvised Military Adaptation to Hamas Tunnel Warfare," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42, no. 3–4 (2019).

75 Field notes Author 2007.

76 Hoffman, *Learning While Under Fire: Military Change in Wartime*, 208; Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 46. Hoffman and Van der Vorm differ on what they consider the institutionalisation of lessons learned. As Hoffman does not differentiate between formal learning during conflict and the post-conflict period, this dissertation follows Van der Vorm's distinction between formalised learning and the institutionalisation of lessons learned.

77 See: Materieel Projectenoverzicht Prinsjesdag 2009, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/blg-31657.pdf accessed 02/06/2023.

78 David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2020), 101–35.

79 Ivor Wiltenburg, "Het Richten van de Landmacht: Een Assessment van Legervorming en Militair Vermogen met 13 Lichte Brigade als Case," *Militaire Spectator* (2020).

80 Nick Reynolds, "Learning Tactical and Operational Combat Lessons for High-End Warfighting from Counterinsurgency," *The RUSI Journal* 164, no. 7 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1700686, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1700686.

practice of discarding lessons learned after a counterinsurgency, illustrated by the US Army post-Vietnam.[81]

In conclusion, formalised organisational learning requires the support and resources of the military organisation as a whole. Still, after the cessation of hostilities, the adaptations are not integrated into the post-conflict force table, and the experience and acquired knowledge will drain away over time.[82] If the military organisation regards the operational environment as an eccentricity rather than a regularity, no incentives to implement the adaptations into the institution will be present. However, if the military adaptations are considered to be worthwhile to be retained for future challenges, the adaptations are considered to be institutionalised.

2.5.3 Institutionalisation of Inter-conflict Learning

The retention of lessons beyond the scope of a single conflict is considered the institutionalisation of those experiences. In order for this to happen, the strategic outlook of a state must be in line with the organisational effect of the implementation of the lessons learned during the conflict.[83] After all, the conclusion of a conflict does not automatically lead to an incentive to change the military organisation to mirror those experiences, especially in the case of expeditionary warfare. The institutionalisation of lessons is not just the retainment of military assets and personnel that have performed well during the past conflict. Institutionalisation requires the dissemination of knowledge in formal documents such as doctrine publications and evaluations, but also in the curricula of military academies, command and staff colleges and practise and training scenarios."[84]

Moreover, the institutionalisation of lessons learned is found in organisational adaptations to the force structure, in order to better address future challenges. A quintessential example within the context of SFA is the standing up of dedicated, specialised units to perform in the SFA role.

The US experience in SFA-type operations over the past decades has led to the standing up of six dedicated SFA brigades or SFABs.[85] Importantly, besides the need for persistence during partnering for which the brigades were created, the importance of mentor qualities was recognised. In order to work in an SFAB, US personnel will have to be volunteers, and

81 Christopher E. Fowler, *Forgeting Lessons Learned: The United States Army's Inability To Embrace Irregular Warfare*, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, United States (2014).

82 Van der Vorm, *War's Didactics*, 74.

83 Ibid., 75.

84 Ibid., 75–76.

85 US Army website, "Security Force Assistance Brigades." https://www.army.mil/sfab accessed 02/06/2023.

the requirements include experience in the position that is mentored. As such, the mentor of a local forces infantry battalion will have to have experience as a US infantry battalion commander first.[86] The purpose of the SFABs is to guarantee a high standard of mentoring, whilst at the same time shielding other units from the pilfering of highly-qualified personnel that is often requested for SFA-type operations and providing a balance between specialisation and more generic tasks by the rotation of personnel.

2.6 Subconclusion

This dissertation aims to gain a further understanding of how the militaries of the selected cases adapted to the SFA task in their respective Afghan provinces. Military innovation theory provides a framework for analysis for each case, as the theory describes the incentives that provoke change, the factors of influence that affect the process and outcome of the adaptations, as well as a structure to label the different adaptations. By assessing contemporary SFA-type operations through the lens of these theoretical foundations, in combination with the empirical evidence collected for this dissertation, the adaptational process of the British, Dutch and Belgian armed forces to the utilities and challenges of SFA-type operations will be explored.

As this dissertation describes the progress of the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams in Helmand, Uruzgan and Kunduz provinces respectively, the adaptations during each mission will become distinguishable. Military innovation theory provides this dissertation with the theoretical foundation to answer key questions: what were the drivers and shapers that affected adaptation? Which internal and external factors of influence attributed to the observed changes in the operational reality of each OMLT over the duration of the deployment? Lastly, were these adaptations informal or formal, and what lessons have been institutionalised after each state ended its commitment to the ISAF campaign?

To answer these questions, the OMLT deployment of each state will be described in detail. Then, using the manifestations of change as collated by Sinterniklaas, the major changes in each case will be highlighted, answering what manifestations might be distinguished in each case. In the following analysis, the question of why these changes have occurred will be answered, together with the analysis of what lessons learned have been formalised and institutionalised. Importantly, the limitations of this report necessitates a restraint in its analysis of the internal and external factors of influence. Although other factors of influence

86 Lt. Col. Brent Kauffman, "Preparing SFABs for the Complexity of Human Interaction," *Military Review* (2018); Colonel Kurt Taylor and John Amble, "MWI Podcast: Security Force Assistance in an Era of Great-power Competition," *Modern War Institute* (2020), https://mwi.usma.edu/mwi-podcast-security-force-assistance-era-great-power-competition/, accessed 15/03/2021.

are interwoven into the empirical chapters and analysis, the data of the upcoming case studies guided the focus of the framework for analysis towards strategic culture and domestic politics, doctrinal and organisational adaptations and the dissemination and institutionalisation of lessons learned.

Part 2

The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams in Helmand, Uruzgan and Kunduz

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: The OMLTs of Task Force Helmand 2006–2010

3.1 Introduction

The British Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team deployment started during Operation HERRICK 4, between March and October 2006. Operation HERRICK was the code name of the British campaign in Afghanistan, and HERRICK 4 constituted the first deployment of substantial British regular forces into the south of Afghanistan, a result of the expansion of the ISAF mission throughout Afghanistan. Before HERRICK 4, the British effort was focused on the delivery of the Provincial Reconstruction Team based around Mazar-e-Sharif in the north of Afghanistan.[1] However, the early HERRICK Force Elements were dispersed over four different locations, lacking a clear mission statement.[2] With no unifying mission for these Afghanistan Roulement Infantry Battalions (ARIBs), the commanding officer of the second rotation, 2nd Battalion Royal Gurkhas, thus formulated his own mission statement: "The ARIB is to deter terrorism, reassure and support the people of Afghanistan to return to normality after years of war, support the creation of the Afghan National Army and to support the Government of Afghanistan to create a secure environment and reinstate the rule of law." The end state was formulated as "to enable Afghanistan to be a prosperous, democratic and successful country, free from terrorism and conflict."[3] Although this broadly formulated mission statement is not typically within the scope of a single battalion, it indicates the early recognised importance of constructing the nascent Afghan National Army into a coherent force.

The decision to switch to Helmand in 2006 "turned the UK's commitment to Afghanistan from a military operation into a war."[4] Concurrently, when Operation HERRICK was taken to the south of Afghanistan, the necessity of standing up the Afghan Security Forces was also recognised by the ranking British officer of that rotation, the Commanding Officer (CO) of 16 Air Assault Brigade, brigadier Ed Butler. In his mission statement, he assessed that the Brigade's force elements would "[c]onduct security and stabilisation operations within Helmand and the wider RC(SW), jointly with Afghan institutions, other government departments and multi-national partners in order to support Government of Afghanistan and development objectives."[5] As the British forces entered Helmand province, the present

1 Directorate Land Warfare, Operation HERRICK Campaign Study, Warminster 2015. https://books.google.nl/books?id=L_uojwEACAAJ, 1-1.

2 Ibid. 2.

3 2 RGR G3755, 18/03/2005, and 2RGR POR59-3G2 25/10/2005, retrieved from Directorate Land Warfare, Operation HERRICK Campaign Study, Warminster 2015.

4 Ibid., xxxv.

5 16 Air Assault Bde POR, retrieved from Directorate Land Warfare, Operation HERRICK Campaign Study, Warminster 2015.

ANA forces were included in the mission design, commanding an extra effort in the same spirit as the ARIB units, as the Afghan soldiers were judged to need guidance on their path to becoming an independent and professional army. The counterinsurgency campaign in Helmand can therefore not be comprehensively described without expressing the efforts of both the OMLTs and the ANA. Partially filling this hiatus, this chapter aims to propagate the OMLT's preparation and execution from its first inception in 2006 towards the semantic renaming of the OMLT to Brigade Advisory Groups in 2010.

In the 2006–2010 time frame, the OMLTs were mostly formed around a regular British army unit, starting with 7 Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA). 7 RHA was subsequently succeeded by 45 Commando Royal Marines (45 CDO), the Grenadier Guards (GREN GDS), 2 Yorkshire Regiment (2 YORKS), 1 Regiment Royal Irish (1 R IRISH), 1st Battalion The Rifles (1 RIFLES), and the 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (2 MERCIAN), ending with a second OMLT deployment by 2 YORKS in 2009/2010. After this, the OMLTs were changed to Brigade Advisory Groups (BAG), 2 YORKS were succeeded by the 1st Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, 1st Battalion Irish Guards, 3 MERCS, 2 and 3 RIFLES, a second iteration of 1 SCOTS, with 4 RIFLES deployed as the last BAG during HERRICK 18 in 2013.[6]

The British involvement in training up the Afghan National Army has been described as a "continually evolving process," gradually expanding in size and professionalism as operation HERRICK progressed.[7] In line with the recommendations of General McChrystal's Initial Commanders' Assessment in 2009, UK forces in Helmand moved from the OMLT concept to the 'Embedded Partnering' of UK units with Afghan counterparts, usually using the UK 'company' and Afghan 'toli,' each of around 120 men, as the basic building blocks.[8] While the UK retained liaison teams attached to ANA units in Helmand, partnered UK-Afghan 'Combined Forces' have been the UK's principal means of training and mentoring newly raised ANA forces from 2010 onwards.

The way in which a state forms up and deploys its armed forces depends, amongst other variables, on its strategic culture. This chapter will therefore start with a description of British strategic culture, followed by a disquisition on the British political decision-making process and the design of the British armed forces. These sections will elucidate the British road to Helmand, as well as give some insights into the force structure of the Task Force Helmand. Subsequently, the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams of the British during Operation HERRICK will be described in detail and placed into the context, where necessary, of the

6 British Army, Operation Herrick Campaign Study, Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015), 18–20.

7 British Ministry of Defence, *Army Field Manual Tactics for Stability Operations Part 5: Military Support to Capacity Building*.

8 Operations in Afghanistan, Memorandum of the Ministry of Defence, session 2010–2011 see: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmdfence/writev/afghanistan/opa7.htm, accessed 26/08/2020.

progress of the Helmand Campaign. This will commence with the reconstruction of the first British rotation in Helmand province, HERRICK 4, and will end with the British transition to Brigade Advisory Groups after HERRICK 11, ending the British OMLT efforts.

3.1.1 British Strategic Culture

The United Kingdom is a state with global aspirations, although the UK could best be described as possessing only medium economic and military capacity. In the earlier parts of the twentieth century, the UK still represented a global colonial sovereignty; however, after fighting two world wars, followed by the "constraints and threats" during the post-WW2 Cold War, the British consented to their new role in the global periphery.[9] Still, after being usurped by the US as the world's leading global power, the UK reverted to a policy of "punching above its weight" in order to remain relevant and influential on the global stage.[10] To the British, the ability to exert global influence is directly linked to its national interest, with the British National Security Strategy stating that "Britain's national interest requires us to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence.[11] As such, the British have a long history of using the armed forces as a means to attain its foreign policy goals.

According to Paul Williams, the foundations of British foreign policy can be historically and traditionally traces to multilateralism, neo-liberalism and Atlanticism.[12] This is corroborated by the UK government's strategic documents in force. It is in this strategic context that the utility of the UK armed forces is mostly observed.

Although the UK has been involved in singular campaigns, including large-scale international campaigns in the Falkland Islands (1982) as well as extended domestic operations such as during 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland (1960s–1998), it does not aspire to tackle future conflicts singlehandedly. Rather, the UK formally expects future conflicts to be fought in a coalition effort, with the US and France named as preferred partners.[13] Notwithstanding the expectation of coalition warfare, the possibility to engage in military

9 Alister Miskimmon, "Continuity in the Face of Upheaval—British Strategic Culture and the Impact of the Blair Government," *European Security* 13, no. 3 (2004): 276, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830490499975, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830490499975.

10 Ritchie Ovendale, review of *Success and Failure in British Foreign Policy: Evaluating the Record, 1900–2000*, by Peter Mangold, *Albion* 35, no. 2 (2003): 350, https://doi.org/10.2307/4054200.

11 British National Security Strategy 2010, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-national-security-strategy-a-strong-britain-in-an-age-of-uncertainty accessed 05/02/2021.

12 Paul Williams, "Who's Making UK Foreign Policy?," *International Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2004): 912.

13 Government, Short National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, (November, 2015), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf. Accessed 14/09/2021.

action without allied support is still considered a valid option to the British government. The multilateral foundation of British strategy might be found in the premium its government puts on cooperation with multilateral institutions such as NATO and the UN. Besides this multilaterism through institutions, the UK practises multilaterism through a more informal way by engaging in 'coalitions of the willing,' such as in the Afghanistan War.[14]

The second foundation of British foreign policy is the relation with the US, often referred to as the 'special relationship' between the two states.[15] The UK considers the US as vital to its national interest. Not only is the US the world leading economic power as well as the UK's key economic partner, the UK considers the US as the actor that shapes global stability and leads international responses to crises.[16] The US is therefore considered the UK's pre-eminent partner for security, defence, foreign policy and prosperity.[17] The UK-US relationship has become strained in recent years though, with several high profile diplomatic spats.[18]

Although UK-US relations post WW2 have historical precedents in souring, including periods such as the 1956 Suez Crisis and the Vietnam War (1955–1975), the current relationship has been described by Thomas Wright as a "post-war low."[19] The statement by UK defence secretary that "the assumptions of 2010 that we were always going to be part of a US coalition is really just not where we are going to be"[20] is a case in point that the UK is considering the possibility that it has to fight a war without US support. Notwithstanding, the bilateral

14 Williams, "Who's Making UK Foreign Policy?"

15 See: Mirjam Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand* (Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Leiden University, 2015); John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 101; Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, 5.

16 Henrik B. L. Larsen, *NATO's Democratic Retrenchment: Hegemony After the Return of History* (Routledge, 2019), 93.

17 Steve Marsh, "'Global Security: US-UK Relations': Lessons for the Special Relationship?," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2012): 185.

18 These diplomatic spats included leaked emails by the British diplomatic service describing the incumbent administration as "chaotic" and "inept," which resulted in the US president unprecedently labelling the UK ambassador a "pompous fool" and "a very stupid guy," effectively forcing Sir Kim Darroch, the UK ambassador to the US, to resign. This diplomatic row was compounded by incidents such as the American refusal to waive the diplomatic immunity of the wife of an American intelligence officer after a hit-and-run car accident, and extradite her to the UK, as well as disagreement over the Iran nuclear deal and the opposing stance on cooperation with Chinese company Huawei on the 5G network construction in the UK. See: James Landale, "US-UK Relations: Is London Toughening Its Stance with Washington?" *BBC*, 24 January 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51237317. Accessed 21/12/2020.

19 Thomas Wright, "The U.K. Ambassador's Crime Was Stating the Obvious," *The Atlantic*, 10 July 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/message-trump-sent-forcing-out-kim-darroch/593617/.

20 "Ben Wallace: UK 'Must Be Prepared to Fight Wars without US,'" *BBC*, 12 January 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51081861. Accessed 21/12/2020.

relation between the UK and the US remains key to the UK, which not only shares key defence assets with the US—including the F35 jet fighters, its nuclear deterrent delivery system and a reliance on the US for sensitive intelligence through the 'five eyes' intelligence-sharing alliance—but also finds itself somewhat isolated in Europe, due to the UK decision to leave the European Union. The current British administration is therefore treading on eggshells in their communication with the previous administration, well aware of transactional preference towards international relations as well as their lack of consideration for tradition and history.[21]

The last pillar of the UK foreign policy triad, neo-liberalism is discernible in its positions in British foreign and security policy—especially its positions on trade, economic development, and international (development) aid by organisations such as the World Bank, which were notable in subsequent British governments since Thatcher.[22] As Marjam Grandia explained in her dissertation, the Labour governments from 1997 onward were eager to include liberal views as values needed to uphold a stable international community.[23] The statements made by the Labour Party in their 1997 manifesto, on Labour's ambition that Britain was to be "respected in the world for the integrity with which it conducts its foreign relations" and the desire to "restore Britain's pride and influence as a leading force for good in the world" echo in the current strategic papers.[24] The 2015 National Security Review capitalised on this issue, mentioning that the UK will "use our formidable development budget and our soft power to promote British values and to tackle the causes of the security threats we face, not just their consequences. This includes refocusing our aid budget to support fragile and broken states and regions to prevent a conflict—and, crucially, to promote the golden thread of conditions that drive prosperity all across the world: the rule of law, good governance and the growth of democracy."[25]

The UK has used its armed forces extensively in counter-piracy operations, air exclusion, peacekeeping, COIN and other irregular operations and disaster relief. The British extensive use of the military is reflected in for instance its casualties: since the Second World War,

21 "US-UK relations: Strains in the 'Greatest Alliance,'" *Financial Times*, 12 July, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/887e27f2-a486-11e9-974c-ad1c6ab5efd1; John Haltiwanger, "Trump Is Entering Another NATO Summit All Alone, with Even His Ally Boris Johnson Telling Him to Back Off and Keep Quiet," *Business Insider*, 29 November 2019, https://www.businessinsider.nl/trump-enters-nato-summit-friendless-abandoned-even-by-boris-johnson-2019-11?international=true&r=US. Accessed 21/12/2021.

22 Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand*, 102; Martin B. Carstensen and Matthias Matthijs, "Of Paradigms and Power: British Economic Policy Making Since Thatcher," *Governance* 31, no. 3 (2018).

23 Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand*, 102.

24 Labour Party Manifesto 1997, "New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better," Labour Party (1997 London).

25 Government, Short National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom.

only two years have passed without British troops being killed on operations; 1968 and 2016. Undeniably, the UK has frequently demonstrated the alacrity to use diplomatic, economic, but also military means to pursue its ambitions and to show responsibility regarding international security policy. In recent years, however, the gap between the declared ambition and the political authority and material capacity to influence international security appears to be widening.[26] Still, the UK continues to exert influence abroad, with its permanent seat in the UN's Security Council and its nuclear deterrent instruments of power that reflect its global influence.

3.1.2 The British Political Decision-making Process Regarding the Use of the Armed Forces

The United Kingdom uses the Westminster model as its parliamentary system, which includes features such as the majority rule, the absence of a constitution and the prerogative powers of the executive power.[27] Therefore, in the British case, the decision to deploy the Armed Forces in situations of armed conflict is considered a prerogative power.[28] In the event of a declaration of war or the commitment of British forces to military action, constitutional convention requires that authorisation is given by the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Crown.[29] Decisions on military action are taken within the cabinet with advice from, among others, the National Security Council (NSC) and the Chief of the Defence Staff which is subsequently delegated to the British Prime Minister. Accordingly, the Prime Minister thus has the formal authority to deploy British forces to war, without the necessity to either inform the British parliament or seek the approval of the House of Commons. Decisions on military action are taken within the cabinet with advice from, amongst others, the NSC and the Chief of the Defence Staff.[30]

The royal prerogative and lack of involvement by the British parliament has long been criticised for what is considered to be an "absence of democratic accountability of the use of force, in other words, a democratic deficit."[31] Since 2003, a number of governmental referrals to the House of Commons has led to a convention regarding the use of the armed forces in relation to combat operations abroad.[32] As James Strong explains:

26 Paul Cornish, "Strategic Culture in the United Kingdom," In *Strategic Cultures in Europe, Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent*, eds. Heiko Biehl, Bastian Giegerich & Alexandra Jones (Springer VS Wiesbaden; 2013), 362.

27 Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries* (Yale University Press, 2012), 33; Robert A Rhodes, *Beyond Westminster and Whitehall: The Sub-central Governments of Britain* (Taylor & Francis, 1988).

28 C. Mills, *Parliamentary Approval for Military Action*, House of Commons Library (London, 2018).

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand*, 106.

32 Strong, "The War Powers of the British Parliament."

> the War Powers Convention is a tentative constitutional convention that the government will seek the prior approval of the House of Commons before launching military combat operations abroad. It grew out of precedents set in substantive votes approving the invasion of Iraq in 2003, intervention in Libya in 2011 and two rounds of action against Da'esh, in Iraq in 2014 and Syria in 2015, as well as one vote opposing intervention in Syria in 2013.[33]

Importantly, the deployment of Special Forces (SF/SOF), intelligence activities and all military deployment that might be considered under the 'combat operations' threshold are exempt from parliamentary oversight. These would include most SFA-type operations, as training and assistance missions and capacity-building operations are easily narrated as non-combat operations, avoiding scrutiny by the House of Commons. Also, in the case of emergencies, the British governments reserve the right to act first and seek retrospective approval in situations involving imminent threats to national security or humanitarian disaster.[34]

As the United Kingdom does not have a codified constitution, it draws from statute law, common law, works of authority and conventions to act as an uncodified constitution. Conventions are considered to be rules of constitutional practice that are regarded as binding in operation, but not in law.[35] This definition is drawn from the Cabinet Manual, itself a 'work of authority.' Despite the non-legal status of conventions, they are always almost adhered to by politicians. The War Powers convention does allow the British cabinet to bypass parliament on the aforementioned use of SOF, intelligence assets and other deployments short of warfare. As a result, the lack of parliamentary oversight on the use of SOF especially has led to renewed criticism of this 'democratic deficit,' with the British SAS especially considered to have a carte blanche on operations.[36] This indicates that the strategic value placed on partnered operations by the British armed forces, by both SOF as well as regular forces, is not open for parliamentary evaluation and reappraisal. This assessment is compounded by the findings by Grandia concerning other operations, as she stated that "some respondents argued that there seems to be an institutional overreliance on the [British] military [...] the [British] army have been calling the shots when it came to the

33 Ibid.

34 Oxford Research Group, "The War Powers Convention: An Interview with James Strong," 29 May 2018 https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/the-war-powers-convention-an-interview-with-james-strong.

35 Andrew Blick, "The Cabinet Manual and the Codification of Conventions," *Parliamentary Affairs* 67, no. 1 (2014), 192.

36 M. Karlshoej-Pedersen and L. Walpole, *Time for External Oversight of Britain's Special Forces*, Oxford Research Group (London, 2019); Rory Cormac, "Disruption and Deniable Interventionism: Explaining the Appeal of Covert Action and Special Forces in Contemporary British Policy," *International Relations* 31, no. 2 (2017), 182. George Arbuthnott, Jonathan Calvert and David Collins, "Rogue SAS Squad Exposed by Email Trail," *The Times*, 1 August 2020, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rogue-sas-afghanistan-execution-squad-exposed-by-email-trail-7pg3dkdww. Accessed 28/05/2021.

deployment to Helmand. The politicians were standing behind. The tactical structure was dictating the planning process instead of the other way around."[37] Still, lack of knowledge on military operations and processes still allows for senior military personnel to operate rather autonomously, as politicians and senior policymakers are not au fait on military issues.[38]

3.1.3 The British Armed Forces

This section will give a succinct description of the British armed forces. Most importantly, it will give a more elaborate explanation of the branch that provides the vast bulk of SFA, which is the British Army. This has a historical precedent, as tracing back to its colonial days, the British empire has relied on a system of co-optation with local chieftains and other tribal leaders. Moreover, the colonies provided the British Army with a steady flow of indigenous soldiers, used to compensate for the lack of manpower of the British Army and to create 'mass' to conduct the land operations.[39] The current British Army has generally reverted to the use of its citizens for staffing purposes, with notable exceptions being the inclusion of the Nepalese Gurkha regiment in the British forces since the early nineteenth century and the ability for commonwealth nations' citizens to apply for the British forces. Although the British no longer train and equip local forces for service within the British Empire, Britain is still vigorous in Commonwealth states regarding SFA-type operations, as shown by its deployments in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Kenya.[40] Other contemporary SFA-type deployments by the British can be found in South Sudan, as well as Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. The "enabling of indigenous security forces"[41] is considered by the British Army as "second nature, as this capability has been seen in some form in almost all of our campaigns throughout history."[42]

The current British armed forces further consist of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Reminiscent of the former British Empire's colonial heyday, the British have always put a premium on its navy, which includes the British Royal Marines. The value the British put on the Royal Navy is epitomised by its assets. For example, the UK is the only European power with two aircraft carriers. The British global reach is supplemented by modern destroyers and frigates. Furthermore, the British possess a nuclear-powered fleet of hunter-killer submarines, as well as a submarine-based nuclear deterrent in the four ships of the Vanguard Class. The British Royal Air Force is the youngest service in the British armed forces, with the RAF founded in 1919, and is the main provider of air power for the British armed forces.

37 Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand*, 105.

38 Interview Emily Knowles, senior analyst, Special Risks at Control Risks, 14/08/2020.

39 Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, 15.

40 See: Current British deployments, https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/, accessed 16/07/2020.

41 British Ministry of Defence, *Army Field Manual Tactics for Stability Operations Part 5: Military Support to Capacity Building*, 8–6.

42 Ibid, 8–6.

To that end, the backbone of the RAF will be its 157 Eurofighter jets and 138 F35b fighters, with the latter being operated in conjunction with the fleet air arm.[43] Apart from its fighter aircraft, the RAF operated several types of helicopter and cargo aircraft, as well as ten MQ-9 Reaper UAVs.

With the emphasis on sea power, the British army has traditionally been a rather small force, albeit highly trained and professional. Tracing back to 1707, the British army has been involved in all major conflicts of the British Empire since its inception, and after the end of the British Empire in 1997,[44] the conflicts in which the United Kingdom was involved, including the 2001 invasion of Iraq and the Afghanistan conflict from 2003 to this day.

3.2 The Decision Path to Helmand

Over the last couple centuries, the United Kingdom has been no stranger to Afghanistan. Already in the nineteenth century, as part of their efforts to establish control over the region and counteract Russian influence, it had a significant military presence in the country. Indeed, the First Anglo-Afghan War took place in 1839–1842, leading to a British defeat and withdrawal. The Second Anglo-Afghan War took place in 1878–1880 and resulted in the establishment of a British protectorate over Afghanistan.[45] The British involvement in Afghanistan continued until the country's independence in 1919. Although the UK was to some extent involved in supporting the Muhajideen during the 1979–1989 Soviet-Afghan War,[46] its next involvement pertained to supporting the United States following the attacks of 9/11. As the 2001 OEF campaign in Afghanistan led to the quick downfall of the Taliban government, the subsequent (non-envisioned) transition from a counterterrorism effort to a counterinsurgency led to a greater requisite for international troop contributions.[47] Fighting a counterinsurgency necessitates control over the population, and thus controlling the countryside. To this end, ISAF's span of control expanded from the capital city and its immediate surroundings to the entire state.

43 RAF receives Final Eurofighter Typhoon, Janes Defence, see https://www.janes.com/article/91594/raf-receives-final-eurofighter-typhoon, accessed 06/03/2020; Ministry of Defence "UK to Double F-35 Fleet with 17-jet Order," 15 November 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-double-f-35-fleet-with-17-jet-order-defence-secretary-announces.

44 Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781–1997* (Vintage, 2008), 660.

45 For more information on the Anglo-Afghan wars see: Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars* 1839–1919 (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

46 See: L. W. Grau, "The Soviet–Afghan War: A Superpower Mired in the Mountains," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 1 (2004): 129–51.

47 Martijn Kitzen, *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: With Case Studies on Dutch Experiences During the Aceh War (1873–c. 1912) and the Uruzgan Campaign (2006–2010)*, (Nederlandse Defensie Academie, 2016), 358.

In 2004, however, the British were involved in two wars. Besides the war in Afghanistan, the UK was also heavily committed to the war in Iraq. British policymakers aimed to withdraw from the highly unpopular war in Iraq, known as OPERATION TELIC, and replace this operation with a larger military contingent in Afghanistan.[48] In doing so, the unpopular Iraq war could be interchanged with the widely supported Afghanistan operation, whilst simultaneously avoiding any accusations of ally defection from the United States. Initially, the British government had only deployed a relatively small number of troops to Afghanistan's north, in the town of Mazar-e-Sharif.[49] As ISAF aimed to support the Afghan government to expand its influence over the entirety of Afghanistan, ISAF forces gradually took responsibility for the southern provinces of Afghanistan. In 2006, Canadian General David Fraser took command of Regional Command South, the higher ISAF echelon based in Kandahar City.[50] As it were, Canada would become the lead ISAF nation in charge of Kandahar province, the Dutch in Uruzgan province, while the British took charge of Helmand.[51]

As for Helmand, at the start of 2005, 16 Air Assault Brigade (16 AAB) was given the warning order to deploy to the province. The 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, would form the nucleus of the first rotation. This battalion was a subordinate unit of the Brigade and one of its principal combat units. Other elements, such as the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), engineers and fire support elements were also drawn from subsidiaries of the Brigade. The OMLT for this first rotation in Helmand was formed around the command structure of the 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (RHA),[52] also a subsidiary of 16 AAB.

The British operational planning was dubbed the 'Helmand Plan,' drawn up on the basis of civilian and military experts, which aimed to build an Afghan Development Zone in the lozenge of Lashkar Gah, Gereshk, and Camp Bastion.[53] Although this limited and modest goal seemed reasonable and achievable considering the limited manpower available, the

48 For a detailed description of how Great Britain got involved in the ISAF mission, see: Matt Cavanagh, "Ministerial Decision-making in the Run-up to the Helmand Deployment," *The RUSI Journal* 157, no. 2 (2012): 48–54; Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand*; Anthony King "Understanding the Helmand Campaign: British Military Operations in Afghanistan," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)* 86, no. 2 (2010): 311–32; Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, (Random House, 2017).

49 British Army, Operation Herrick Campaign Study, Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015).

50 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's war in Afghanistan*, 169.

51 Robert Egnell "Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan: What Now for British Counterinsurgency?" *International Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2011): 301.

52 The official abbreviation is 7 (Para) RHA; however, for reasons of readability, 7 RHA is used, as is also common within the British army.

53 Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars*, (Yale University Press, 2017), 78; Interview UK CO HTF 4, 17/09/2020.

main concern of the Afghan government was that "the Taliban could not be seen to have control of any part of the province."[54]

In the preparatory phase of the HERRICK campaign, the exact role of the OMLT had been unclear. This was not solely an OMLT issue, as all subsequent HERRICK rotations, including the ground-holding battalions, had to adapt to the intensity of the conflict that 16 AAB experienced.[55] However, despite the fact that the British government did not have a comprehensive understanding of the type of conflict Helmand would present, working alongside indigenous forces would have been a significant part of the campaign either way. After all, training, advising, mentoring local forces are a significant part of all operationalisations of irregular warfare. These operationalisations include stability operations, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency operations.[56]

As such, the British HERRICK 4 OMLT is the starting point of an adaptation process of the British Army on combat mentoring. This professionalisation would pertain to doctrine, pre-deployment training as well as the army force structure. This chapter provides the reconstruction of the HERRICK 4 OMLT endeavours to mentor an indigenous force in Afghanistan. The experiences during this rotation have provided the impetus to adapt the OMLT concept in later rotations, thus providing the foundation of the informal and formal learning processes during the HERRICK campaign, as well as the institutionalisation of the lessons learned during later army reforms post-conflict.

3.2.1 OMLT HERRICK 4: 7th Parachute Regiments Royal Horse Artillery

In late 2005, the assignment to deploy to Helmand was given to 16 Air Assault Brigade, the British high-readiness formation and considered to be a brigade of elite status. It was decided by its commanding officer (CO), Brigadier Butler, that the 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, would form the nucleus of the combat power for HERRICK 4. Other elements in the Helmand Task Force, such as the Provincial Reconstruction Team, engineers and fire support elements were also drawn from subsidiaries of the brigade. The mentoring role during HERRICK 4 OMLT was based around the command structure of 7th Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA), also a subsidiary of 16 AAB and under normal circumstances a combat support unit, providing the brigade with indirect fire support. However, the CO of 7 RHA, Lt. Col. David Hammond, was facing a three-pronged mission statement. First, 7 RHA was tasked to provide a ground-based fire support battery to 3 PARA, which was an organic assignment, as the battalion-sized artillery unit was responsible for providing fire support to the brigade. Second, 7 RHA was tasked to provide leadership and personnel to

54 Ibid., 79.

55 Interview GBR 04, 19/09/2020

56 Kitzen, *Operations in Irregular Warfare*. 2

the 'Bastion Battlegroup,' an ad-hoc unit led by 7 RHA but augmented with other subunits, including a company of the Royal Gurkha Rifles (RGR) Regiment. The Bastion Battlegroup was tasked with the security of Camp Bastion, the large UK base located in the desert of Helmand province, and still under construction in 2006. Third, 7 RHA would provide the command structure for the first UK OMLT, and would as such be responsible for the staffing, training and execution of the OMLT deployment of the first rotation.

Part of an elite light infantry brigade, specialists such as artillerymen within 16 Brigade were considered to be 'paratroopers first, specialists second.' Still, 7 RHA was short on personnel and lacked combat, combat support and combat service support specialists to augment the already understaffed unit, tasked with three disparate assignments. Additional service members were subsequently "collated from different units and regiments via a trawl at the Land Level,"[57] meaning that Army service members could respond to the staffing request if their current occupations and their commanding officers so allowed. Eventually, the 7RHA OMLT consisted of a very disparate group of around eighty-five officers, NCOs and some private soldiers.[58] This included service members from the Territorial Army,[59] Royal Logistic Corps, Royal Signals, Army Air Corps and a variety of other services, including 7 RHA.

Lt. Col. Hammond had to divide his attention over the triptych of tasks, hence the decision was made that the second in command of 7 RHA, Major MacKay, was to be mostly involved in the execution of the pre-deployment training of the OMLT. This would later extend to leading the OMLT operations as well.[60] It proved to be a daunting task, as there was not a comprehensive understanding of the objectives of the OMLT, and many individual augmentees had not reported to the unit yet. A late 2005 reconnaissance by Hammond and Mackay led to some clarification as to the OMLT tasks, and specialists were recruited in order to augment the OMLT with mentoring capability on logistics and combat support. The pre-deployment training was minimal, however, as only a couple of weeks' worth of training was executed with part of the OMLT. This included shooting and some platoon-level training, but also some briefings on Afghanistan and what was known on the Afghan Army. Hammond, a T.E. Lawrence enthusiast, drew from the writings of the famous British officer-author for the OMLTs' conceptual guidance on working with indigenous forces. Still, despite all efforts, a fortnight of training was inadequate to establish standard operation procedures or team

57 Email correspondence UK OMLT mentor 33, 17/07/2020.

58 Ibid.

59 The Territorial Army was until 2014 the designation for the British Army reservist force. Since 2014 it is known as the Army Reserve. The Army Reserve is a part of the military forces of Britain that is made up of people who are not professional soldiers but are given military training for a period of time each year.

60 Interview UK OMLT mentor 35, 29/10/2020.

building, further complicating the mentoring task ahead.[61] The ad-hoc composition of the OMLT is reflected by one of its members, who stated,

> I received no pre-deployment training for this job. I had just returned from a three-month deployment in Norway with 3 Commando Brigade. […] I returned to the UK to immediately embark on my Map Reading Instructors Course. Whilst on course, I received immediate notice of movement. I returned to my unit and deployed to theatre within a week. On arrival to Camp Bastion it became apparent that I was not expected, I was not on their ORBAT.[62]

Although Hammond regarded his soldiers' basic skills as "up for the task," he reflected that "it was a compromise from the off. We did not get the numbers of personnel to adequately staff the mentoring effort."[63]

Importantly, the mentoring task Hammond referred to was not clear from the start. That specific part was added to their mission in Kandahar, where they were briefed by Colonel Knaggs, the commanding officer of the Helmand Task Force (HTF). Mackay recalls that they were met by Knaggs, who informed the OMLT on the importance of their mission, and that it was going to be the main effort of the operation.[64] Although most of the OMLT were pleased to hear that mentoring was considered a prominent task, some of the OMLT were becoming a bit uncomfortable due to the changing nature of their deployment.[65] Before Knaggs' speech, it was understood that the OMLT would perform training duties in an Afghan Army barracks, a long stretch from joining the ANA on combat operations. Doctrinally, combat mentoring, under the 'Military Assistance' moniker, is a special forces prerogative, and special forces receive special training and equipment to mitigate the risk that ensues embedding with indigenous forces.[66] Lacking vehicles, heavy weapons, radios and night vision equipment, the OMLT felt understaffed, undertrained and underequipped for their combat mentoring role. Knaggs' subsequent promise to see to their shortages before fielding the OMLT did not materialise in theatre, angering the OMLT:

61 British Ministry of Defence, Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06, (2007), 7–9.

62 Email correspondence GBR 33, 17/07/2020.

63 Interview UK OMLT mentor 35, 29/10/2020.

64 Interview UK CO HTF 2, 28/10/2020.

65 Ibid.

66 Wiltenburg and Kitzen, "What's in a Name."

> Back at Kandahar, before we deployed to Tombstone,[67] I got given the big war pride speech of Col. Knaggs and he said we'd be—you know, we would not deploy on the ground unless we were fully ready to go with the equipment we require, we were going to be the main effort, his main effort. Well, that was a lie. […] the whole time we were there we didn't get the equipment that we asked for, there wasn't enough of it and so it never arrived.[68]

Presented with this new reality, the OMLT set to train both the Afghans and themselves in theatre. Setting up in Camp Shorabak, the ANA barracks adjacent to Camp Bastion, the OMLT managed to borrow some armoured American HMMWV 4x4 vehicles to supplement their ageing 'Snatch' Land Rovers, designed for urban operations in Northern Ireland. Also, the OMLT was donated a few broken down 'WMIKs,' Land Rovers equipped with a Weapon Mount Installation Kit (WMIK), and a heavy machine gun mount. After repairs, it allowed the OMLT to operate with a greatly improved direct fire support capability by the 4x4s.

Within weeks of deploying, the OMLT were tasked to accompany the ANA on patrols, as there was political pressure from the Afghan Government to get the ANA into the field, on operations, as soon as possible. The 3 PARA Battlegroup was thus augmented with the ANA, who in turn would be mentored by small bands of the OMLT, usually in groups of three or four.[69] Many 3 PARA officers were initially not keen to have ANA soldiers join their ranks. Mackay stated that

> most [3 PARA] people thought that the ANA were unreliable, potentially dangerous and a liability (subsequent events would prove this to be reasonable concerns), and it took a little bit of persuading for 3 PARA officers to accept that they were to have ANA with them on the patrols. Small groups would go out, with a few mentors. The first few times it went fine, it was good publicity, it pleased the governor and the Afghan government in Kabul, and people started to latch on that it was capacity building, part of the strategy, and an important part of the mission in Afghanistan.[70]

The focus, however, quickly shifted from limited patrolling to participating in the escalating insurgency. The initial 'Helmand Plan,' drawn up on the basis of experienced civilian and military experts, aimed to build an Afghan Development Zone in the 'lozenge' of the towns of Lashkar Gah, Gereshk and Camp Bastion.[71] Although this limited and modest goal seems reasonable and achievable considering the limited manpower available, the main concern of

67 FOB Tombstone was the American FOB next to Camp Bastion.

68 Transcription Sgt. Castle, BoI regarding the Death of Capt. J. Phillippson.

69 Dan Collins, *In Foreign Fields: Heroes of Iraq and Afghanistan in Their Own Words* (Monday Books, 2008).

70 Interview UK OMLT mentor 40, 20/01/2021.

71 Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars*, 78.

the Afghan government was that "the Taliban could not be seen to have control of any part of the province."[72] As pressure increased on the Helmand governor to support the Afghan National Police in towns suffering from an increasing Taliban influence, the decision was made to reinforce those locations with British troops. The district centres of Now Zad, Sangin, Kajaki and Musa Qala in the north of Helmand were subsequently reinforced with British forces. This stretched the 650-man strong combat force, as the CO of 3 PARA had to commit almost all of his forces to static locations, forfeiting his ability to manoeuvre. Fixed, the Taliban attempted to overrun the British positions in a series of pitched battles over the 2006 summer that have subsequently been described in detail in a number of publications.[73]

The ANA and the OMLT were heavily involved in the fighting, including in the defence of the forward operating base (FOB) in Sangin, FOB Robinson. Known as 'FOB Rob,' the base was large and difficult to defend, and therefore would consume too much British manpower. This led to an ANA stationing at the FOB from May 2006 onwards, supplementing the defensive effort.

It was in Sangin that the British suffered their first fatality of the campaign with the death of OMLT Captain Jim Phillippson.[74] The subsequent investigation into the death of Phillippson provided a scathing assessment of the OMLT commander leading the QRF, stating that "Phillippson was killed as a result of poor tactical decision making, a lack of SOPs[75] and a lack of equipment."[76] A subsequent investigation absolved the involved Bristow however, reversing the critical assessment of his performance, stating "the events of the night of 11 Jun 06 reflect considerable credit on those involved, especially [censored][77] who showed both tenacity and courage in persisting with his intent."[78] It was established that the OMLT lacked resources and were understaffed. The investigations also indicated the low priority given to the OMLT regarding the distribution of mission-essential equipment such as heavy weapons,

72 Ibid., 79.

73 Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars*; Stuart Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para* (Hachette UK, 2009); Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*; Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*; British Army, Operation Herrick Campaign Study, Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015).

74 Brigadier J. J. S. Bourne-May, *Service Inquiry Into the Death of 555260 Captain JA Philippson, 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (7 Para RHA)*, British Army (Shrewsbury, UK, 2009).

75 Standard Operating Procedures, a form of military standardisation of actions in combat.

76 Defence, Short Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06.

77 The censored name is that of Major (ret.) Jonny Bristow, Royal Regiment of Scotland, part of the HERRICK 4 OMLT as the mentor to the kandak commander.

78 Bourne-May, *Service Inquiry Into the Death of 555260 Captain JA Philippson, 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (7 Para RHA)*.

vehicles and night vision goggles.[79] Although no action was taken after initial reporting that the OMLT were operating under-resourced before any casualties had yet been taken, the death of Philippson catalysed some of the redistribution of assets, including heavy weapons and WMIK Land Rovers, increasing the OMLT's force protection ability during subsequent operations. This elaborates on the events and contexts leading up to the death of Philippson, whose demise led to a flurry of adaptations during later rotations.

Sangin is a rather small town in Helmand Province, located on the Helmand River about 100 km north-east of Lashkar Gah. A centre for the drug trade, and a seat for Taliban resistance, the Afghan Government was distrusted in the Sangin Valley, and Coalition presence was rejected.[80] Indeed, prior to the deployment of the HTF, Sangin had already been recognised as a security threat.[81] Outside of the envisioned lozenge, the town and the Sangin Valley would "likely become a major highway for the Taliban to launch attacks against the troops establishing themselves in the Afghan Development Zone (ADZ)."[82]

Coalition presence was scarce, although a Forward Operating Base was set up by the US Army, called FOB Robinson, a few kilometres south of the town. Close to the Helmand River, FOB Robinson was named after a US Special Forces soldier who was killed near Sangin on 25 March 2006. It was the base from where a US detachment operated from until it was handed over to the British on the 2 June 2006. It had a bad reputation. FOB Robinson was described as "a bleak spot, an enclosed patch of featureless, gritty desert, filled with vehicles, tents and containers. The Americans who set it up called it the Poor Bastards' Club."[83]

Few British troops were available to reinforce the Coalition presence in Sangin, although the necessity to counter the Taliban influence in Sangin was recognised. The CO of 3 PARA, Lt. Col. Stuart Tootal, and the commanding officer of 16 AAB, Brigadier Ed Butler, subsequently sought to establish the 'Sangin Effect' in mid-May 2006. The Sangin Effect is a loosely defined term that implies increasing British influence in an area, although with a minimum of British troops committed. This would allow the British to wield an amount of influence in Sangin, however, without further stretching the limited resources available.[84] So instead

79 British Ministry of Defence, Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06.

80 Phil Weatherill, "NOTE FROM THE FIELD: Targeting the Centre of Gravity: Adapting Stabilisation in Sangin," *The RUSI Journal* 156, no. 4 (2011): 2.

81 Ed Butler, "Setting Ourselves Up for a Fall in Afghanistan: Where Does Accountability Lie for Decision-Making in Helmand in 2005–06?," *The RUSI Journal* 160, no. 1 (2015): 51–52.

82 Butler, "Setting Ourselves Up for a Fall in Afghanistan," 52.

83 Patrick Bishop, *3 Para: Afghanistan, Summer 2006: This Is War* (HarperCollins, 2007), 86.

84 The Sangin Effect is ill-defined. For further reference to the Sangin Effect see: Butler, "Setting Ourselves Up for a Fall in Afghanistan," 52; Bishop, *3 Para: Afghanistan, Summer 2006*, 49, 51; James Pritchard and MLR Smith, "Thompson in Helmand:

of committing a Para company to Sangin, it was decided that the ANA would reinforce FOB Robinson, leaving the British company free to "patrol the area, support the ANA and carry out their own operations."[85]

On 5 May 2006, 7 RHA was given a number of tasks by the CO of the HTF. First, it was ordered to provide one Afghan Army Company to FOB Robinson in support of 3 PARA Battlegroup by 15 May 2006, to enable 3 PARA Battlegroup delivery of the "Sangin Effect with an Afghan 'lead.'"[86] Second, it was ordered to provide a second Afghan company in support of 3 PARA operations by 25 May. Also, 7 RHA was ordered to support HTF operations and to contribute to the intelligence collection plan.[87] The tasks given to 7 RHA concerned Mackay; he shared his concern on the amount of understanding the HTF had regarding ANA operations. He considered that the ANA would need HTF support to sustain the Afghan Army presence in FOB Robinson. Also, both the ANA as well as the OMLT lacked armoured vehicles and crew-served weapon systems to provide security during the road move from Camp Bastion to FOB Robinson. Lastly, although the ANA were battalion-sized on paper, desertion and understaffing meant that the ANA could field little more than a company-sized element to FOB Robinson, even though the ANA Brigade Commander ordered an entire kandak to Sangin.[88]

Nonetheless, it was ordered that the OMLT and the ANA would insert into FOB Robinson, with the convoy under the command of Lt. Col. Hammond, on 21 May 2006. Upon arrival, the ANA would relieve the Afghan Army soldiers already present at FOB Robinson. This contingent originated from a different brigade, stationed in Herat, and was under the auspices of a US Special Forces Embedded Training Team (ETT). This ANA unit had already spent forty days in Sangin, and there was significant pressure from the Afghan chain of command to replace it. Apparently, this ANA detachment was also suffering from desertion, as well as extortion from the local population.[89] On the 23rd, two days later than planned, the convoy conducted its road move from Camp Bastion to Sangin. The road move proved to be "exhausting and incident-filled," as the seventy-six-vehicle convoy was regularly halted by bogged-down vehicles as well as an IED-strike as it was about to enter Sangin. Hammond has few fond memories of the decision and subsequent deployment of the ANA kandak to FOB Robinson:

Comparing Theory to Practice in British Counter-insurgency Operations in Afghanistan," *Civil Wars* 12, no. 1–2 (2010): 71; Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's war in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 173.

85 Bishop, *3 Para: Afghanistan, Summer 2006*, 51.

86 British Ministry of Defence, Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06. 11.

87 Ibid., 11.

88 Ibid., 12.

89 Ibid., 12.

> We were ordered to deploy a kandak that was simply not ready in my view, who had just got out of training, forward to occupy Sangin, because the government was losing its traction. This place, FOB Robinson, was an enormous FOB, which was completely indefensible, and that's where we relieved a whole bunch of reservist US Special Forces. To get there, we conducted a convoy operation with elements drawn from across the force, American, British, and so on, just to put a kandak up the road for a RIP, with raw Afghan troops. It was a bloody long day. My vehicle drove through a gap, two behind mine a vehicle went up, a Ford Ranger full of Afghan soldiers. I can still recall, as a commanding officer, putting pressure on the wound of one of the Afghan wounded soldiers. Subsequently, the mine strike was misinterpreted as an attack from a local village by the ANA, and so we had to stop the ANA, who were high as a kite on hash, from razing the place.[90]

The next morning, Hammond was contacted by Knaggs whilst in FOB Robinson, and in the subsequent conversation, Hammond was ordered to establish a military presence in Sangin immediately. Intelligence indicated that the anti-coalition militia was concentrating at three locations and that the town of Sangin might fall to the Taliban if no action was taken. Hammond decided to lead a reconnaissance in force to Sangin, which was supported by the Patrols Platoon of 16 AAB, also subordinated to Hammond during the convoy, and a number of US soldiers in HMMWVs. Fire support would be provided by three Light Guns of I battery, a subsidiary of 7 RHA and also stationed at FOB Robinson.[91] Hammond decided to take the ANA company from the Heratian brigade, which was due to be relieved, as he considered his own ANA unit to be not ready for an aggressive reconnaissance. The ANA hiatus in training and equipment was well-known to the HTF, but still it was decided that "despite the shortfalls in equipment and training, the ANA would be sent to FOB Robinson."[92]

Although the operation did not find a significant build-up of Taliban forces, the patrol was engaged three times, which were considered rather minor engagements. However, in one of the exchanges, an ANA soldier accidentally shot a child, which did not improve the already dour relations between the government forces and the local populace.[93] The incidents during this patrol, in combination with the intelligence that was already received, further indicated the dangerous operational environment in the Sangin valley. In the week prior, a joint four-vehice patrol consisting of ANA soldiers, their US ETT and a few French Special Forces were

90 Interview UK OMLT mentor 35, 29/10/2020.

91 British Ministry of Defence, Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06, 12.

92 Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para*.

93 Leo Docherty, *Desert of Death: A Soldier's Journey from Iraq to Afghanistan* (Faber & Faber, 2007); Bristow, JDM Witness Statement, 2008.

ambushed along a six km stretch of road connecting Kajaki with Sangin.[94] The mutilated bodies of the two Frenchmen and nine ANA soldiers were delivered by locals at FOB Robinson on 21 May, the day after the ambush.[95]

In order to reinforce the British presence in Sangin, a platoon of the Royal Irish, and later the Royal Gurkha Regiment was detached from the Bastion Battlegroup and sent to Sangin to man a platoon house near the town itself.[96] Together with the OMLT and the ANA, the British would maintain a presence and influence "as required."[97] The OMLT and the ANA would in the following period conduct regular patrols to the British-manned platoon house to resupply the little base with water, ammunition and rations. Also, these patrols would add to the Afghan Army's military presence in Sangin. An Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Troop for 18 UAV Battery (18 UAV Bt) was also stationed at FOB Robinson, operating Desert Hawk UAVs, which were equipped with cameras to provide the coalition forces with a degree of situational awareness. A last reinforcement consisted of ten Engineers of 51 Squadron Royal Engineers (51 Sqn RE), who flew into FOB Robinson on 8 June, in order to improve the perimeter defences. The defences were fragile, and it had been an ongoing concern of the OMLT since arrival. The defence of FOB Robinson was a concern, as the FOBs was large, and the US-funded militia who was guarding the FOB took its leave as the British were not willing or able to pay for their services.[98] Moreover, the ANA contingent was rather small, leaving few ANA soldiers available for patrolling or other tasks than manning the sangars.[99] Together with the systemic unwillingness of the ANA to conduct a regular patrol scheme, very few ANA would actually patrol the streets of Sangin in 2006, often only contributing only six to eight soldiers to a patrol.

After Hammond returned to Bastion, the commanding officer of the infantry OMLT was Major Bristow, an individual augmentee to the OMLT and originally from the Scots Guards Regiment. Bristow had command experience as a company commander in the British Army, and was the senior kandak mentor, tasked with the mentoring of the kandak commander. In FOB Robinson, he was in charge of the day-to-day tactical control of the OMLT and reported directly to Hammond. The other British service members were not under his command, but he exerted what the Army call 'tactical control,' which comprises of the detailed and usually

94 https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/missions-achevees/operation-pamir-2001-2014/in-memoriam/in-memoriam accessed 25/02/2021; Bishop, *3 Para: Afghanistan, Summer 2006*, 52. Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para*. Tootal remembers three French service members being killed; the actual number was two.

95 Bristow, JDM Witness Statement, 2008.

96 Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para*.

97 Defence, Short Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06, 13.

98 Docherty, *Desert of Death: A Soldier's Journey from Iraq to Afghanistan*.

99 A sangar is British military slang for a guard tower.

local direction and control of movements or manoeuvres necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned.[100] Bristow had no command or control over the US or Afghan forces, but would confer with them for their mutual interests. Although this is not an optimal situation, it was very common in Afghanistan when service members from different states were deployed within a single FOB.

In the afternoon of 11 June, the UAV troop reported that a Desert Hawk UAV had gone down on the far side of the Helmand River. Considered a useful asset, and unwilling to let the UAV to fall in enemy hands, Bristow retasked a patrol to recover the UAV. The patrol consisted of a combination of British service members from the OMLT, the UAV battery and ten to twelve soldiers from the RGR, totalling about twenty British soldiers in four 'Snatch' Land Rovers and one WMIK.[101] Added to this patrol were twelve ANA soldiers in two Ford Ranger trucks.[102] The patrol was under the overall command of an OMLT NCO and was known under the callsign 74H. Leaving FOB Robinson around 1800, the patrol drove towards a crossing point over the Helmand River, where part of the patrol dismounted. On foot, the British soldiers crossed the river and patrolled the area in search of the crashed UAV. The ANA and a few of the British soldiers stayed with the vehicle, effectively splitting the patrol into two parts. Unable to locate the UAV, a Sangin local informed the patrol that it had already been retrieved by "some guys in a pick-up."[103] With reports coming in that Taliban forces were massing in Sangin and planning for an attack, the patrol returned to the vehicles and started the move back to FOB Robinson via the same route as the way up. At 2012, the patrol was contacted by Taliban forces with small arms fire and RPGs, and the contact report was sent to the operations room (ops) in FOB Robinson. During the initial engagement, one British service member was seriously wounded by a round to the chest. Unable to break contact, several vehicles were disabled by enemy fire. 74H was fixed by the enemy who requested assistance to break off the contact and to evacuate the wounded soldier to the hospital at Bastion.

At FOB Robinson, Bristow was quickly informed about the contact, and in response to the request for support by the patrol, he assembled a Quick Reaction Force (QRF). To Bristow's knowledge, the situation of the patrol was "extremely tenuous," so he mustered as large a

100 NATO AAP, "NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French)," (NATO Standardization Agency (NSA), NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 2008).

101 The exact number of British and Afghan personnel on this patrol is hard to assess, as the two most authoritative documents on the topic, the two official inquiries into the death of Captain Philippson, contradict each other here. Interviewees have also not been able to confirm. See: British Ministry of Defence, Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06, 14; Bourne-May, *Service Inquiry into the Death of 555260 Captain JA Philippson, 7th Parachute Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery (7 Para RHA)*, 9.

102 The number of ANA soldiers are validated by the sources available.

103 British Ministry of Defence, Convening Order for Board of Inquiry: Death of Cap JA Phillippson RA 555260 on 11 Jun 06, 15.

force as possible, approximately forty to fifty men. Knowing that the Taliban were observing FOB Robinson, he anticipated that a sizeable QRF reinforcing the contacted patrol would encourage the Taliban to break the contact, allowing the QRF to retrieve the wounded soldier and return to FOB Robinson. Bristow was aware that 74H had crossed the river, and as such the patrol was limited in its ability to manoeuvre as it had the river to its back. Also, 74H was not staffed and equipped for close combat—a significant element of the patrol consisted of combat support/combat service support personnel—and the ANA were, as stated before, both underequipped and undertrained. Therefore, Bristow assumed that the patrol was in danger to be overrun, or at least to suffer more casualties as the contact protracted. At FOB Robinson, Bristow scrambled men from the OMLT, the ANA, 51 PARA Sqn RE and the Afghan Army, and quickly briefed them. The QRF would consist of two WMIKs, three Snatch Land Rovers, and two HMMWVs.

The top priority for Bristow was to support 74H in a speedy fashion, and in the rush to exit FOB Robinson, some mistakes were made. One of the HMMWVs got stuck in barbed wire at the main gate, and its occupants were still in the possession of the keys of two of the Snatch Land Rovers. Untangling the vehicle and returning to the Snatch Land Rovers with the keys took some time, and thus three of the vehicles ended up separated from the rest of the QRF. Although Bristow noticed the HMMWV was stuck, he wasn't at the time aware that the two Snatch Land Rovers were still at the FOB. Nonetheless, the QRF pushed quickly towards the contacted patrol, leaving the FOB at around 2030h. It took about half an hour to drive towards the patrol, as it was now fully dark; however, with a full moon there was ambient light to support vision. Unable to continue by vehicle, the QRF dismounted. Bristow put the patrol in an order of movement and ordered one person from each vehicle to stay with the vehicles. The route would be alongside a dirt track, described as "little more than a footpath, bordered intermittently by mud walls, trees or open scrubland Drainage ditches ran parallel."[104] Taking point, Bristow subsequently led the QRF towards 74H, patrolling westwards. Proceeding cautiously, the QRF moved for about 300 m in a staggered formation before they stopped an Afghan local on a motorbike who was driving towards them. Although no useful information was unearthed in the subsequent interrogation—the local Afghan claimed to have no knowledge on any Taliban activity, despite coming from the direction of the contact—the ANA attached to the patrol returned to their vehicles after they had continued the interrogation as the QRF pushed further west, at that time unbeknown to the British. The QRF continued, and after another 300 m, Bristow observed about a dozen armed men about 30 m in front of him and alerted the QRF via his Personal Role Radio (PRR). The QRF went down, taking firing positions along the track they were moving on, still in a staggered formation. Bristow verbally challenged the group and quickly fired off a few rounds with his rifle. The contacted Taliban returned with a barrage of fire. The weight of

104 Ibid., 18.

fire that the Taliban were able to put down on the QRF was far greater than the QRF was able to return, as the QRF was not deployed in the direction of the contact, and due to the heavy barrage were fixed in their positions. It was in this initial exchange of fire that one of the OMLT officers, captain Jim Philippson, was hit in the head, killing him at around 2145 hours. In the subsequent confusion, the entire QRF took cover in a drainage ditch to their left. Unable to deploy to meet the enemy up front, and already sustaining a casualty, Bristow ordered a withdrawal through the ditch back to the east. The machine gunner of the QRF, further down the order of movement, was ordered up to engage the enemy and suppress their fire and ability to move. Still under raking fire, the QRF had to guide Philippson's body through a sewerage tunnel intersecting the ditch, which took both time and effort. Bristow disregarded demands to leave the body by a senior NCO of 51 Sqn RE, and the QRF proceeded to retreat eastwards, carrying along the body of Phillipson, using a smoke grenade to obscure its movement. Most of the 51 Sqn RE had already progressed to the vehicles, leaving the retrieval of Philippson's body to the other members of the QRF. Upon arrival at the vehicles, the QRF loaded Philippson's body onto one of the HMMWS and subsequently returned to FOB Robinson.

At FOB Robinson, the body of Philippson was unloaded; however, 74H was still in contact, and the casualty that had been sustained urgently needed evacuation. Bristow assembled a second QRF to extract the wounded soldier, but by now most of the 51 Sqn RE were unwilling to join the second QRF. The second QRF was subsequently reinforced with a number of 18 UAV Bt's men. In their second attempt to marry up with the fixed patrol, the QRF was again contacted by the Taliban, seriously wounding one of the 18 UAV Bt's NCOs. Still, the QRF was able to join the ranks with 74H. Eventually, a Medevac helicopter was dispatched from Bastion, evacuating both wounded. Bristow, who had been asking for additional support from the 3 PARA Battlegroup, as well as additional ammunition, was thoroughly displeased as the incoming helicopters did not carry either, and the joined-up force went firm during the night. The next morning, B Company, 3 PARA, was flown in to escort both 74H as well as the QRF back to FOB Robinson, although by then the contact had petered out, and the return was uneventful.

After the incident, the ANA and the OMLT would stay in Sangin, although eventually, the HTF had to reinforce the Sangin Valley with a full company, taking over FOB Robinson and the Sangin district centre. The 3 PARA subunit would be in Sangin for the rest of the deployment, mostly in a pitched battle against Taliban forces.[105]

The HERRICK 4 OMLT was the first of its kind, and during the execution of the deployment, a number of lessons were identified, which formed the basis of adaptation later in the

105 Bishop, *3 Para: Afghanistan, Summer 2006*, 108–20.

campaign. These lessons revolve around several observations. The first of these observations is the gargantuan gap in military capability between the ANSF and the British Army. This gap includes equipment, but also leadership and individual military skills. The second observation is the absence of oversight and guidance with regard to the OMLT. The operational and tactical end state of the OMLT efforts were unknown to the participants, and this led to the appraisal of efforts at an individual level, not necessarily in line with the HTF, the ANA or indeed the Battlegroup. Lastly, the HERRICK 4 OMLT was redirected from their initial assignment, resulting in a disparity between tasks, staffing and equipment. Translated into the fundamentals of military operation, the principles of war as described in the British Army Doctrine, these observations translate into a lack of unity of command, unity of effort and lack of security.

The HERRICK 4 OMLT had thus been set up with severe deficiencies. The most pressing issues included the lack of unity of effort, and the lack of unity of command and security, which were in part the result of the deviation from the initial task of the OMLT. The former is exemplified by the ANA, who were especially reluctant to close in with the Taliban forces on several occasions. This left the ANP and the British mentors exposed to the Taliban who were able to concentrate on the exposed elements. During both the operations in Sangin, as well as during Operation SARWE—a later operation near Garmsir in the south of Helmand—the OMLT held no formal command relationship over the Afghan forces or any of the British forces that were committed to the same patrols. Senior Afghan officers also outranked the British officers, removing any authority the British officers might derive from holding a higher rank. This led to prolonged and heated discussions between the British and the ANA regarding their combat efforts. Moreover, the OMLT had no authority to task the supporting forces, who remained under higher command during the operations. In the six-month tour, the OMLT would have to provide their own security, which especially left the Garmsir operation spread thin as they had very little redundancy, and were almost completely reliant on air power for support. An irregularity within the HTF, the OMLT perceived little support from the Battlegroup or the HTF staff.

Having identified the conceptual and organisational deficiencies of the OMLT during Herrick 4, the tactical decision-making of the British commanders should be reviewed in this light. Bristow attempted to circumvent the command and control issues by leading from the front, taking point to support a patrol in contact. With few reinforcements available, every effort was made to reach the objectives using the means at the commander's disposal. The British approach to mentoring thus quickly changed from 'leading from the back' to 'leading from the front' to essentially doing it yourself.

The lessons identified by the combat mentors in 2006 were implemented in later rotations, which arrived in Helmand with better equipment, and were formed around the command

structure of an infantry battalion, rather than a combat support unit. Moreover, the place of the combat mentor shifted from the front, to the back, and in the later HERRICK rotations, to the side in an observing and advisory role.

3.2.2 OMLT HERRICK 5: 45 Royal Marine Commando.

The successors of 16 AAB were drawn from the other high-readiness force of the British Armed Forces; 3 Commando Brigade (3 Cdo), the main manoeuvre formation of the Royal Marines. For this rotation, the recommendations made by 7 RHA to ensure that the OMLT would be formed around an infantry battalion, including its equipment table, were followed. The commanding officer of 3 Cdo, then Brigadier Jerry Thomas, had to decide which of his battalions would be assigned the ground-holding role and the mentoring tasks respectively. As 3 PARA encountered unexpectedly stiff resistance from Taliban forces and it became clear to 3 Cdo that Operation Herrick would constitute heavy fighting as 3 Cdo's pre-deployment training progressed, the decision was highly important to those involved. The two battalions involved, 42 Commando and 45 Commando, were both keen to perform the ground-holding role, as it was perceived that fighting the Taliban would be a more glamourous deployment than mentoring the nascent Afghan National Security Forces.[106] As it were, 42 Commando was assigned the ground-holding role, to the resentment of 45. 45 Commando officers commented that "42 got the warfighting role, 45 got the babysitting role," and "being a minder was not what many in the unit had envisaged themselves doing on operations."[107] Thomas however had several reasons for his choice. The commanding officer of 45 had been switched to Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Dewar in April 2006, and as such he was a recent addition to the brigade. Moreover, Dewar was considered by Thomas to be more culturally aware and possess more soft skills than the commanding officer of 42 Commando, who had earned his stripes as a combat officer, and was known for his offensive mindset.[108] Also, 42 Commando was quartered in Plymouth, England, in the same barracks as HQ 3 Cdo. 45 Commando, on the other hand, was quartered in Arbroath, Scotland, making it easier for the CO of 42 Commando to step forward to the CO of 3 Cdo to present his battalion as ready for combat. Dewar, however conscious on the importance of mentorship during counterinsurgency operations, also recognised that the OMLT job was not looked at favourably by his men, as he considered that everybody wanted to fight, and not to be included in the OMLT. The OMLT was considered a sideline job.[109]

106 Interview UK CO OMLT 28, 28/08/2020.

107 Interview UK Marine OMLT 50, 03/03/2021; P. Gadie, "COIN Operations in Kandahar and Helmand – A Multi-National Template?," *Globe and Laurel* (July/August 2007): 275.

108 Interview UK CO OMLT 28, 28/08/2020; Interview UK CO HTF 4, 17/09/2020.

109 Interview UK CO OMLT 28, 28/08/2020.

Unsure on the role of the OMLT, 45 Commando continued its pre-deployment training in preparation of their HERRICK 5 deployment. Early expectations included "images of Lawrence of Arabia-style operations with battle-hardened Afghan hill tribesmen";[110] however, most officers concluded that "none of us was sure what is meant [to be an OMLT], but it did not take too much effort to work out that is was going to be something different."[111] As little institutional knowledge was present on the details of the OMLT work, 45 Commando re-orbatted to its best knowledge, detaching two of its companies to the HTF, as well as its reconnaissance troop. The skeleton staff would then reorganise into four OMLTs, each assigned to mentor an Afghan kandak: three Infantry kandaks and a Logistics kandak, as well as a force protection element.[112]

In order to make sure that the HOTO between 7 RHA and 45 Cdo would progress smoothly, a small vanguard was deployed prior to the main body of 45 Cdo. However, the small detachment first had to pick up a new ANA battalion from the Kabul Military Training Centre in Kabul. After it was decided that 470 Afghan officers and men would be made available for duty in Helmand, the newly christened 3rd kandak of the 3rd Brigade, 205 Corps would be transferred to Camp Bastion via air transport. At Bastion, the vanguard had a few days with the men from the 7 RHA OMLT to gain some "ground truths on how things were working before the main body arrived."[113] It was decided that the first 45 Cdo OMLT team, OMLT A, would relieve the 7 RHA OMLT at the various location, which at the time included Now Zad, Kajaki, Sangin, FOB Robinson, Gereshk, Lashkar Ghar as well as the Laskhar Ghar Mobile Operations Group.[114] The Mobile Operations Group (MOG) were part of 3 Cdo's campaign plan, as Brigadier Thomas intended to "unfix the north and manoeuvre to threaten, disrupt and interdict the enemy." Therefore, 3 Cdo created several MOGs. A MOG would consist of "250-strong flying columns in 40 vehicles (a mix of Vikings and Land Rovers)—which were tasked with seeking out and engaging the Taliban."[115] 3 Cdo had drawn a parallel with its core competency of amphibious warfare by conceiving the Helmand desert as a 'sea,' through which MOGs could "roam wide and hunt down the enemy."[116]

110 L. Stallard, "Op Herrick and the RMR," *Globe and Laurel* (March/April 2007): 6–97.

111 S. Kelly, "Logistic Company meets CSS kandak," *Globe and Laurel* (January/February 2007).

112 D. Thornton, "The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team," *Globe and Laurel* (July/August 2006); E. Reed, "The Blind Leading the Blind," *Globe and Laurel* (March/April 2007): 97.

113 GBR 50, "OMLT A," *Globe and Laurel* (November/December (2006).

114 GBR 50, "OMLT A," 429.

115 Theo Farrell, "Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006–2009," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 576.

116 Farrell, "Improving in War," 576.

Parallel to the rapid deployment of OMLT A to the different locations in Helmand, the OMLT B and C detachments started in Shorabak, in an attempt to organise the Afghan Army, as nobody seemed to have a grasp of the location of personnel, weapons and equipment. One NCO commented that "most people will be familiar with the expression 'in the right place, at the right time, with the right equipment,' and it can be said that all three of these principles can be applied to the ANA and the interpreters, but definitely not at the same time. So the next few weeks were spent trying to get men and equipment in the same place at something like the right time."[117]

The Royal Marines set up a training cycle for the ANA including marksmanship, driving, signals and mine awareness, although it turned out to be a frustrating effort at times as Ramadan affected the "already limited" work rate, and "no patching was required" at the firing range, indicating low marksmanship skills.[118] As the first reports came in from OMLT A of combat and casualties, the OMLT B and C detachments were also quick to integrate individual team training for the OMLT itself, including care under fire and calling in air and casualty evacuation. OMLTs B and C would only spend a few weeks in Shorabak, as the tactical situation demanded the OMLTs to deploy to the various combat outposts in Helmand. Already after six weeks, the opportunity arose for OMLT B to attach themselves to a MOG, heading for Garmsir.[119] In the south of the province, the MOG would conduct a routing of joint UK/ANA patrols, supporting ANSF forces in conducting vehicle checkpoints, village clearances and some deliberate operations.[120]

An outstanding operation for the HERRICK 5 OMLT was Operation Baaz Tsuka, in which the ANA battalion that had arrived in Helmand was ordered to take part in a large Canadian-led clearing operation in Kandahar province. As the OMLT accompanied the Afghan Forces, the Royal Marines conducted a road move to Kandahar to join the US 1st Battalion, 3rd American Special Forces Group (Army) to support the clearing operation.[121] During the road move, the ANA/OMLT were engaged by Taliban forces repeatedly, and as they arrived in Kandahar, the US SF detachment was highly reluctant to engage with the ANA forces, emphasising the importance of the ability to liaise between the forces. Still, after a week-long battle, a large area had been cleared of Taliban presence, and over eighty enemies were confirmed dead, with no losses to coalition troops or the ANA. Upon return, the ANA battalion was immediately reassigned to the ADZ in Lashkar Ghar.

117 Sergeant Hernamen, "OMLT B," *Globe and Laurel* (November/December 2006).

118 Hernamen, "OMLT B," 429.

119 Corporal Harris, "OMLT Mobile Outreach Group, the Short-Range, Non-sustainable Desert Group," *Globe and Laurel* (January/February 2007).

120 Harris, "OMLT Mobile Outreach Group, the Short-Range, Non-sustainable Desert Group," 12.

121 Gadie, "COIN Operations in Kandahar and Helmand," 275.

Although the ANA commitment did result in some operational accomplishments, the OMLT deployment was frustrating for many Royal Marine officers and men. The commanding officer of the OMLT, Lieutenant Colonel Dewar, was frustrated by the lack of strategic importance given to the development of the Afghan armed forces.[122] Similarly, Brigadier Thomas remembered that he "would see CO OMLT and would walk out of the meeting with bleeding ears, and all he could report was a litany of problems. No uniforms, no disciple, payment issues, no ammunition, corruption, food issues. The OMLT job wasn't just teaching the Afghans how to be good soldiers, it was also a cultural ethos problem. The officers were institutionally corrupt, stealing ammo from the Army and selling it to the Taliban."[123] The sentiment was shared by subordinate soldiers, as the British elite soldiers had trouble dealing with the lower standards and corruption of the ANA:

> My faith in the ANA became stretched to breaking point when one of the ANA commanders proceeded to try and strike a deal with the local Taliban. Food and safe passage in return for British night vision gear and weapons. Needless to say, he was quickly removed. […] As it is now at the five-month point of the tour, I can say on reflection that this has been a hoofing. If at times very frustrating deployment. Time and again, the ANA seem to try their best to rub their mentors up the wrong way, even when performing the simplest soldiering jobs. However, patience is a virtue and with time the OMLT had made progress in helping their planning and execution of operations. Many years of mentoring lay ahead, but for now a start has been made and when this is added to the Afghan willingness to fight the Taliban it makes for a healthy one too.[124]

In conclusion, the Royal Marines had experienced an unusual tour, performing a task that was perceived as less glamourous than the ground-holding 42 Commando had been assigned to. The ANA was growing quickly in numbers, but the quality of soldiering was still well below what professional soldiers would consider acceptable. Moreover, the HERRICK 5 deployment was still quite focused on the British doing the fighting, and the Afghans were considered to be more of a nuisance than an asset.[125] Tellingly, the Operation Glacier series—a sequence of sizable operations in Helmand initiated and executed by 3 Cdo—had scant ANA participation.[126] As a result, the relationship between the Afghan Brigadier and senior British leadership had some room for improvement, as the ANA Brigadier considered the Afghanistan War to be an Afghan fight and he was at times at odds with the British

122 Interview UK CO OMLT 28, 28/08/2020.

123 Interview UK CO HTF 4, 17/09/2020.

124 Stallard, "Op Herrick and the RMR."

125 Interview UK CO OMLT 28, 28/08/2020; Interview UK OMLT mentor 50, 03/03/2021.

126 Ewen Southby-Tailyour, "Commando Brigade: Helmand," *Afghanistan Sometimes the Best*.

approach.[127] Also, no mutual trust was yet present between the ANA troops and the Royal Marines, especially between 42 Commando and the Afghan forces. Still, as 45 Commando prepared to transfer the OMLT responsibilities to the Grenadier Guards, the incumbent OMLT generally agreed that although frustrating, a base had been laid down for the Grenadier Guards to build on, as some improvement had been made. A Royal Marine officer observed that "the (ANA) Brigade now has a rudimentary understanding of the American Estimate process, a working Ops room and even a couple more maps. Unquestionably, there is a long way still to go, but the OMLT will be handling on an ANA Brigade that has made substantial progress since our arrival."[128]

3.2.3 OMLT HERRICK 6: 1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards

45 Cdo's successors were the 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards regiment, who had just returned from an impromptu deployment to Iraq for Operation TELIC, and as a result, were quite unexpectant of the OMLT deployment in 2007.[129] As a consequence, the "the battalions preparation was severely restricted [because of the unscheduled tour in Iraq] and had a very limited period of six months to transition into 12 Mechanised Brigade—the brigade the HERRICK 6 deployment was formed around—and prepare for the OMLT role. As the Grenadier Guards battalion had a reduced use for its private soldiers—the OMLT needed experienced NCOs and officers to mentor the ANA—the battalion reorganised the men into three OMLT companies: The Queen's Company OMLT, No. 2 Company OMLT and Inkerman Company OMLT. The soldiers not needed in the OMLT force table were transformed into a fourth rifle company, No 3. Company Group and the Brigade Reconnaissance Force were reinforced with Grenadier Guard service members.[130] The CO of the Grenadier Guards had intended to use this fourth company for "mobile reconnaissance or counter-attack force if the situation so demanded"; however, this fourth company was usurped by the CO of the Helmand Task Force and subordinated to a ground-holding battalion.[131] This withheld the CO of its own manoeuvre capacity within the OMLT battlegroup, having to rely more on the ground-holding Battalions to reinforce the OMLT/ANA when needed.

The CO stated that he reorganised the battalion "much like the New Zealand and UK Special Air Service had in Malaya, Borneo, Radfan, etc."[132] As such, the companies assigned for OMLT duties were smaller, but NCO-heavy, as that was considered necessary to work with the ANA. As it were, each ANA kandak was mentored by a thirty-eight-strong OMLT company, with

127 Interview UK CO OMLT 28, 28/08/2020; Interview UK OMLT mentor 50, 03/03/2021.

128 Reed, "The Blind Leading the Blind," 96.

129 Email correspondence GBR OMLT officer 29.

130 A. Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015* (Nine Elms Books Ltd, 2019), 144–87.

131 Email correspondence UK CO OMLT 25, 20/09/2020; Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 171.

132 Email correspondence UK CO OMLT 25, 20/09/2020.

the Combat Support and Combat Service Support kandaks assigned a forty- and forty-two-men strong OMLT respectively. Lastly, thirty-five officers and NCOs would mentor the ANA Brigade staff.[133]

Even though the OMLT was entering its third rotation, the OMLT concept had not yet found its footing in the pre-deployment mission-specific training. A section in Patrick Hennessey's book on his OMLT experiences whilst preparing for deployment to Helmand as a Grenadier Guard officer gives a good impression of the rather improvised nature of the third rotation of British OMLTs:

> In the UK on pre-deployment training, we had no Afghans to train with, so laughably, worryingly, we couldn't train at all. Initially, we just had to pretend; we'd push out on patrols on across the training area and get told off for driving too quickly because we weren't allowing for the imaginary six ANA vehicles we were meant to pretend were following our own. We knew that the language barrier was going to be a massive problem, so everyone took an aptitude test, and the bright ones went on intensive Dari and Pashtun courses—but the courses clashed with training, so we didn't see them again till we got to Helmand and, in the meantime, a pretend interpreter had to pretend to talk to the pretend Afghans. When we finally got some demo troops they were cheerful cheeky Yorkshire lads from the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, who had obviously just finished playing Iraqis for a previous exercise and spent the whole week pretending to be Jaish al-Mahdi, running around the training area in tracksuits and dis-dashes shouting 'Ali Baba.' It would have been funny if it wasn't so surreal; British soldiers pretending to be Afghan soldiers but who'd spent so long pretending to be Iraqi insurgents that they kept forgetting whether they were meant to pretend to be fighting us or fighting for us. On Salisbury Plain […] we were allocated a company of Gurkhas to 'play' the ANA. This was an improvement of some sort; the […] Gurkhas had all been instructed not to respond to any orders given in English, to pretend they couldn't understand until whatever had been said was translated by a sergeant. The problem was that the Gurkhas are just too damn good at soldiering; it's second nature to them and, try as they might, they just couldn't do it badly.[134]

Moreover, the OMLT was also not prioritised by 12 Brigade, as according to the Grenadier Guards CO,

> the Brigade didn't really know what to do with us as they were more concerned with fighting the Taliban than building or integrating the ANA. […] An example would be that during the large set-piece finale to the Brigade exercise at the last big Orders Group, I had got frustrated,

133 Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 142.

134 Patrick Hennessey, *Kandak: Fighting with Afghans* (Penguin UK, 2012), 31–32.

> but asked calmly at the end during questions what they wanted the OMLT and ANA to do as they had been left out of the plan completely.[135]

The second-tier nature of the OMLT within 12 Brigade was translated into how the ANA and OMLTs were treated by the ground-holding battalions and the HTF staff. The OMLT would have to actually spend time explaining why the ANA should be included in operations.[136]

Moreover, Hennessey observed that the OMLT role was disregarded by the Grenadier Guards themselves prior to the deployment. Most in the battalion were not keen on the experimental role in a broken-up setting, adhering to different chains of command. The idiosyncrasies of the ANA were by now well known in Britain, and as such working with the ANA, considered maverick and dangerous, was not considered favourably.[137] The ground-holding role on the contrary was considered more glamorous and worthwhile.

Moreover, the exact nature of the OMLT role was uncertain. Officers of the Grenadier Guards observed a void in the tactical know-how of the in-country (Afghanistan) OMLT, which was considered to be uncertain and ever-changing.[138] Although the Grenadier Guards did contact 7 RHA and 45 Cdo in order to absorb their experiences, the biannual change in campaign plan in combination with the growth of the ANA in Helmand made for a changed environment in every respect.

The CO of the Grenadier Guards aimed to deviate from his predecessors' approach in that he decided to change the way the British and the ANA would partner. Where in his perception 7 RHA and 45 Cdo had limited the integration by setting up a training camp for the ANA and subsequently sending them out on operations with a few operational attachments from the 3 PARA or 42 Cdo combat group, he aimed to allocate an OMLT company to an ANA battalion from the moment of arrival in Helmand province, and then have them stay together during training, fighting and recuperation throughout the tour.[139] In his view, this would prevent the unwanted situation that had occurred during the previous tours the British and Afghan soldiers would only meet at the start of the operation. The influx of more ANA personnel in the execution of the HERRICK 6 OMLT allowed for this approach, even though the ANA Brigades' remained "historically undermanned," partly due to desertion.[140]

135 Email correspondence UK OMLT CO 25, 20/09/2020.

136 Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 138.

137 Interview UK OMLT mentor 37, 23/07/2021; Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 138.

138 Email correspondence UK OMLT mentor 29, 09/11/2020.

139 Email correspondence UK CO OMLT 25, 20/09/2020; Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 141.

140 Interview UK OMLT mentor 37, 23/07/2021.

Also, the Grenadier Guards attempted to deviate from "reporting how many Taliban we had killed" to other measurements of success, focused on observations concerning the quality of life of the Helmandi population, including healthcare, education and economic progress.[141] These attempts to focus on a more population-centric line of operations were conducted as 12 Brigade was conducting a series of clearing operations against Taliban-held areas. These operations were later described by Brigadier Lorimer, the CO of the HTF as "mowing the lawn," signalling the repetitive nature of these operations.[142] In order to maintain a permanent presence in the cleared areas, the ANA and OMLT were ordered to occupy a number of combat outposts that were constructed in the aftermath of the fighting.[143]

Thus, as Lorimer carefully avoided the British forces to become fixed like during HERRICK 4, it left the ANA, and by extension, the OMLT, in static locations as the patrol bases were constructed. This led the OMLT and ANA to become stretched: the OMLT was "always short on vehicles" which restricted their movements, and mentoring was done during the fighting, rather than "from a distance."[144] Although this was considered effective, it led to a high attrition rate, and patrols were conducted on minimum manning throughout the rest of the tour. Indicative of the operational stretch is a quote in the Grenadier Guards' Account of Operations: "not only did the OMLTs have to defend their bases but also had to conduct regular patrols with the ANA and the British Company. This meant a 24-hour cycle of activity with little sleep. For example, due to high threat levels, the six-man OMLT in PB Tangiers was required to conduct its own sentry duty at night since the ANA could not be relied on to stay awake."[145] Again, with the lack of resources and the isolated position the OMLT found itself in, it was perceived that the OMLT/ANA were not seen as a priority.[146]

Still, the ANA/OMLT achieved a milestone during HERRICK 6: during one of the larger clearing operations, dubbed Operation Silicon, from 29 April to 6 May 2007, the ANA operated independently, with only the British mentoring team to support their efforts. With companies of the Royal Anglians on the ANA flanks, the OMLT again had to split its efforts between mentoring the ANA and liaising with the British forces in order to avoid any blue-on-blue incidents. Operation Silicon aimed to clear the Taliban from the Lower

141 Email correspondence UK CO OMLT 25, 20/09/2020.

142 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's war in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 205; Anthony King, "Understanding the Helmand Campaign: British Military Operations in Afghanistan," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 86, no. 2 (2010): 317, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40664069.

143 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 203; Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 166.

144 Email correspondence UK OMLT mentor 29, 09/11/2020.

145 Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 156.

146 Email correspondence UK OMLT mentor 29, 09/11/2020.

Sangin Valley from the town of Gareshk towards Sangin itself. In the end, the 1st kandak was assigned to assist in the clearing, despite half of the kandak's personnel having deserted or was otherwise not present.[147] Despite the OMLT's best intentions, the collaboration between the ANA and the British Forces remained strained. One British OMLT company commander observed the absence of his Afghan peer during combat and remarked that "as the ANA commander managed to locate himself to the safer rear areas most of the time, the British had to command the ANA."[148] Indeed, most British officers not directly attached to the OMLT still had significant reservations with regard to the ANA's loyalty, soldiering skills and command and control.[149]

By the end of the tour, the Grenadier Guards OMLT had participated in multiple larger Task Force-led operations and conducted a plethora of foot patrols from the combat outposts and patrol bases that had been established in the wake of the larger clearing operations. The incumbents handed over to their successors of 2 YORKS in September 2007. Concurrently, Brigadier Lorimer handed over command of HTF to the CO of 52 Brigade.

3.2.4 OMLT HERRICK 7: 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment

The British fourth rotation in Helmand was structured around the staff of 52 Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Andrew Mackay. 52 Brigade was a 'type B' Brigade, indicating that the Brigade was not intended to be deployed, but solely held a regional responsibility in the sense that the Brigade provided logistical and administrative support to five regimental battalions in Britain.[150] Over the next year, Mackay saw his Brigade staff grow from fifteen personnel at the time of the decision to make 52 Brigade deployable, to 175 by the time the Brigade reached the theatre.[151] Ultimately, the British would deploy 7,750 personnel in Helmand for HERRICK 7, about 1,250 more than during the sixth iteration.

Diverting from the policy of his predecessors, Mackay's approach focused on winning over the local population, instead of defeating the insurgency. This approach was based on MacKay's understanding of the British campaign in Malaya, but also on the ideas put forward in the latest American Field Manual on Counterinsurgency, FM 3-24. The driving force behind FM 3-24, US General David Petraeus, had been Mackay's superior officer in Iraq, and as such

147 Patrick Hennessey, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* (Penguin UK, 2009).

148 Ben Anderson, *No WorseEenemy: The Inside Story of the Chaotic Struggle for Afghanistan* (Oneworld Publications, 2011), 41–42.

149 Anderson, *No Worse Eenemy: The Inside Story of the Chaotic Struggle for Afghanistan*, 21, 25–26; Email correspondence UK 09/11/2020; Email correspondence UK CO OMLT 20/09/2020; Hennessey, *Kandak: Fighting with Afghans*, 252–54; Ogden, *Grenadier Guards, an Account of Operations 1996–2015*, 138.

150 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 207.

151 Andrew MacKay, "Post-deployment Interview CO HERRICK 7," interview by Brigadier (Ret.) I. A. Johnstone, 2008.

Mackay had the opportunity to receive a pre-publication copy of the manual in 2006.[152] Impressed with the US ongoing debate on COIN, which included the classical COIN theorists but also the input of neo-classical COIN scholars such as David Kilcullen and John Nagl, Mackay implemented the ideas in the FM he felt was useful in the Afghan context, discarding the parts he considered were less useful.[153] These included the aim to use a minimal amount of force, a focus on the development of the ANSF and most importantly, the recognition that the insurgents did not have to be defeated, but rather had to be made insignificant by gaining the population's support.[154]

Important to the OMLT, it was also the first time that a Task Force Helmand CO prioritised the role of the OMLT and the ANA within the campaign plan. For HERRICK 7, the OMLT had formed around the Second Battalion, the Yorkshire Regiment, or 2 YORKS. 2 YORKS commanding officer Lt. Col. Simon Downey recalled that "he (Mackay) had spent a lot of his career on thinking on how to mentor indigenous forces. He was committed to how you could deliver a COIN approach through those indigenous forces.[155] MacKay was convinced that the right way to operate in Helmand was to deviate from his direct predecessor. "[2 YORKS had to function] as a partner of the ANA and deliver a solution through our presence."[156] To that end, Mackay formulated 2 YORKS' orders to "train, mentor and strike in support of 3/205 Brigade to deliver this Brigade as an operationally proven, self-supporting combined arms brigade."[157] The purpose of this was to do this through a "proper COIN approach" where 2 YORKS would empower and enable indigenous forces.[158]

With the Helmand OMLT in its fourth iteration, 2 YORKS could draw on the experiences of both the Paras as well as the Marines, with both units back in the UK as the Grenadier Guards were in theatre. Moreover, 2 YORKS' leadership visited the incumbent OMLT in Helmand, and used that experience to put together a pre-deployment training programme themselves, and tried to make that bespoke within the standard preparation package in which 52 Brig was deployed. This included centralised lectures by Lt. Col. Tootal, and representatives from 45 Cdo.[159] Still, the CO of 2 YORKS had some difficulty in gaining full situational awareness with regard to the ground truth in Afghanistan during the pre-deployment phase. A formal

152 Interview UK CO HTF 2, 28/10/2020; Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 211.

153 Interview UK CO HTF 2, 28/10/2020.

154 A. D. MacKay, "Counterinsurgency in Helmand; Task Force Operational Design," 2007, Lashkar Gah.

155 Interview UK CO OMLT 1, 11/09/2020.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

158 MacKay, "Counterinsurgency in Helmand; Task Force Operational Design," 1; Interview UK CO OMLT 1, 11/09/2020.

159 P. M. J. Cowell, "Training For OMLT Team on OP HERRICK 6," *Infantryman* (2007), 83. NB: Although the author of this article was training for HERRICK 7, the title of the article refers mistakenly to HERRICK 6.

way by which info was coming out of the theatre in a way that it could be understood was still largely absent, and the understanding of in-theatre dynamics regularly was built around a person's network, specifically with regards to "whom you knew who was out there."[160] Based on 2 YORKS' understanding of its future role as an OMLT, supplemented by knowledge on COIN by both the classical theorists as well as contemporary writings such as the FM 3-24, 2 YORKS developed its own rudimentary conceptualisation of OMLT-type work, using a stick person—aptly named 'Ali the Afghan'—as a metaphor. Using this metaphor, the head represented the British understanding and approach of the Afghan context and the Afghan perception of leadership. The arms symbolised a carrot and stick, with the stick referring to all types of operations, both kinetic and non-kinetic, with the target on the horizon, being the future improvements to Afghan society, represented by the carrot. The body stood for the core of the issue: maintaining consent and legitimacy, understanding local issues and developing indigenous forces. Lastly, the legs represented the OMLT and other security sector reform initiatives; it was used to "get things moving."[161]

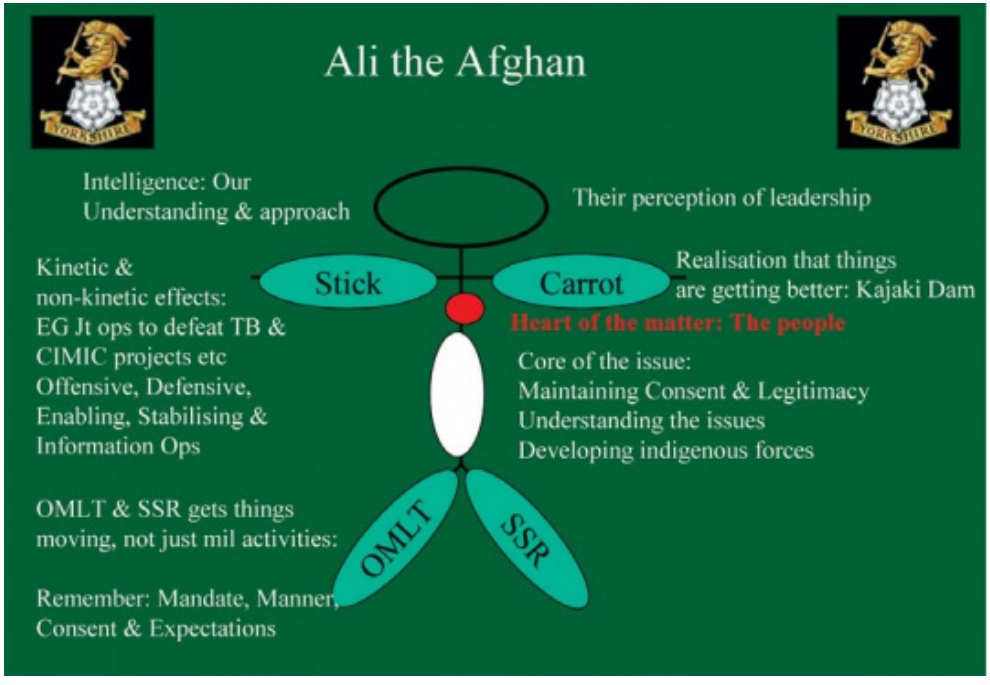

Figure 1: Conceptualisation of the OMLT role by 2 YORKS, HERRICK 7. Source: Cowell, P. M. J."Training For OMLT Team on OP HERRICK 6," Infantryman (2007).

160 Interview UK CO OMLT 1, 11/09/2020.

161 Cowell, "Training For OMLT Team on OP HERRICK 6," 82.

As 2 YORKS reorganised to a similar force structure as the incumbent Grenadier Guards, the informal network of the CO and others indeed proved valuable. In order to augment his Battalion and to enable bespoke training, the CO contacted his network, including officers who commanded the Para Battalions and Marine Commandos, as equipment—such as radios, vehicles and weapon systems—was available with those units. Under a gentleman's agreement, equipment was lent out, so 2 YORKS could start training. As the Battalion "needed to be skilled on a range of different equipment, including sat phones, specialist vehicles and specialist weapons," and none were available during the preparation phase, lending equipment was considered necessary.[162] After several months of training, the CO felt that 2 YORKS had reached an acceptable level of training, however mostly as a result of intra-battalion initiatives, and a distinct focus on soldier skills, including marksmanship, physical fitness and care under fire.[163] By this time, the British Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG)—the British organisation charged with the delivery of pre-operational deployment training to all Army and Royal Marine Units—had begun to adapt to the realities of the War in Afghanistan.[164] As a result, some bespoke OMLT training package was delivered by OPTAG; however, it occurred after 2 YORKS had already conducted a significant amount of self-generated training, and as such, it was considered an overdue effort.[165] Similar to the Grenadier Guards in their preparation for HERRICK 6, 2 YORKS were also allotted a platoon of Gurkha Rifles in a role-playing fashion, generating the same limited results as its predecessors, but the necessity of high-quality role play was again stressed by 2 YORKS to OPTAG.[166]

Upon arrival, HERRICK 7 inherited from 12 Brigade a province that was ravished by a series of clearing operations as described in the preceding sections. Mackay observed that "half of it [the province] was trashed, [...] Now Zad had become a ghost town, and [...] Sangin was a disaster, as the town centre had been destroyed by British artillery and NATO air power."[167] In line with his conviction that the population was the 'prize,' MacKay ordered a series of changes regarding the British approach, including the distinct focus on non-violent influence, with the introduction of Non-Kinetic Effect Teams (NKETs) on the company level. Also, instead of rotating British companies through the "rash of patrol bases and forward operating bases" that by then had been created, it was decided that the British Battlegroups and companies would be assigned to a specific location where they would stay for the entire

162 Ibid., 83.

163 Ibid., 83.

164 Sergio Catignani, "Coping with Knowledge: Organizational Learning in the British Army?," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014), 47.

165 Cowell, "Training For OMLT Team on OP HERRICK 6," 84.

166 Ibid., 83.

167 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 209.

duration of the tour.[168] Although this was already attempted by earlier OMLT rotations, this now became common practice for the ground-holding battalions. Several FOB locations, deemed too far from the local population to be effective, were relocated, such as FOB Arnhem in the Gereshk district, which was relocated into the green zone and renamed FOB Gibraltar by its first occupants, a Royal Marines detachment.[169]

The pinnacle of HERRICK 7 was the retaking of the Helmand town of Musa Qala. During HERRICK 4, the town of Musa Qala had been occupied by British force elements who were part of the 3 PARA Battlegroup.[170] However, as the British forces became stretched during the summer of 2006, an initiative from Musa Qula's elders to take security in their own hands—renouncing both Taliban and British influence—under the condition of a British (and Taliban) withdrawal from the city was eagerly accepted by Butler and Tootal. However, the status of Musa Qala as a civitas libera would not last, as the Taliban were quick to reestablish predominance over this important crossroads in the drug trade. Ever since, Musa Qala had been a thorn in the British side as it symbolised the British military impotency in Helmand. Although recapturing Musa Qala was not a HERRICK 7 objective a priori, a defecting Taliban medium-level commander by the name of Mullah Salaam provided the impetus to recapture Musa Qala.[171]

In the weeks preceding the recapture, British forces began to apply pressure on Taliban forces in and near Musa Qala. Patrols were operating progressively closer to the town, and Mackay assembled more than 2,000 troops for the final assault which began on 7 December 2007. Following Mackay's intent regarding using as little violence as possible, the British tightened the vice around Musa Qala by concentrating around the town, however keeping the northern approach open to allow enemy forces to withdraw, rather than inciting them to put up a fight to the death in an urbanised environment. Mackay's intent was to "begin wearing the Taliban down, dislocate them, punch them hard when they ventured out, lower their morale and begin to separate out the tier one—the key leaders and more ideologically driven—and the tier two—the guns for hire, not in for the long haul."[172] To further pressure

168 Ibid., 211.

169 Interview CO HTF 2 28/10/2020

170 Importantly, these force elements did not only included members from the Parachute Regiment, but also from subordinated units, including the Royal Irish and Danish infantrymen. Source: Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para*.

171 For a more detailed account of the recapture of Musa Qula, see: Stephen Grey, *Operation Snakebite: The Explosive True Story of an Afghan Desert Siege* (Penguin UK, 2010).

172 P. Hurst and J. Starkey, "The Taking of Musa Qala," *The Scotsman*, 17/12/2007, see: https://web.archive.org/web/20110605001254/http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/afghanistan/The-taking-of-Musa-Qala.3595363.jp, accessed 20/07/2021.

the Taliban, Task Force Helmand had ISAF's reserve battalion, the Theatre Task Force 'Task Force Fury,' at its disposal. This battalion of airborne US soldiers was nearing the end of its tour and had a reputation of professional hard-hitting soldiers after eleven months of fighting, predominantly in Helmand Province.[173] TF Fury provided Mackay thus with the extra firepower and an element of surprise—TF Fury could be inserted in its entirety by helicopter—in order to break the Taliban's will to stand and fight for Musa Qala.

In line with his views on the standing of the ANA, Mackay broke with tradition, as he included the ANA Brigade's leadership in the planning process to retake Musa Qala at the earliest opportunity. Previously, the ANA were considered a liability to operational security, and as such was informed as late as possible, if at all. Mackay decided to trade any OPSEC (Operational Security) concerns with achieving the integration between the ISAF and the Afghan forces. The one bit of information that Mackay kept from the ANA was the precise landing point and approach that Task Force Fury's planned airborne assault took, but the ANA still knew that an airborne assault would be integral to the overall plan.[174] Although the vast bulk of planning was conducted by the British, and the planning process was fairly well advanced by the time the ANA was included, the inclusion of the ANA was considered relevant, and pertinent, and it resulted in considered concessions to ANA opinion.[175] Besides further integrating the Afghan forces, and by proxy the 2 YORKS OMLT as well, Mackay had put great effort into the manner and method of the liberation of Musa Qala. While the term 'Afghanisation' was used prior, Mackay understood the clumsiness of the term but also acknowledged the need for the ANA to be integrated more fully, to be provided with more authority and to shoulder more responsibility.[176] So, lacking a better term, an 'Afghan Focus' was implemented, aiming to increase the level of Afghan ownership of the security situation of Helmand, but also breaking with the predisposition that working with the ANA was an OMLT effort. Rather, supporting the ANSF would be something every British servicemember should feel responsible for.[177] For 2 YORKS, this meant that they would serve at the periphery of the operation to retake Musa Qala, as for all intents and purposes, the ANA was not considered capable to dislodge the Taliban from their fortified positions in Musa Qala.[178] However, after a joint and combined effort by mostly the American and British forces, the ANA were ordered to march into the centre of Musa Qala first, without a large ISAF presence,

173 Grey, *Operation Snakebite: The Explosive True Story of an Afghan Desert Siege*, 16. Interview UK CO HTF 2 28/10/2020

174 Ibid.

175 James Bryden, "Operational Mentoring During HERRICK 7," *British Army Review* 4.1 (2015): 80.

176 MacKay, "Counterinsurgency in Helmand; Task Force Operational Design," 2.

177 Ibid., 2–3; Bryden, "Operational Mentoring During HERRICK 7," 76.

178 Bryden, "Operational Mentoring During HERRICK 7," 78.

in order to claim the reoccupation of the town as an Afghan victory and presenting it as such in the national and international media.[179]

This plan was executed from 6 December onwards, with TF Fury airlifted to the north of Musa Qala and British and Afghan forces pushing in from other directions. Although the Taliban put up some initial resistance, the house-to-house fighting that was feared would be necessary to retake the town was avoided as the Taliban withdrew or blended into the local population. After ISAF shaped the environment by coercing or eliminating most Taliban fighters from the battlefield, the ANA was indeed able to occupy Musa Qala, presenting the Afghan government and ISAF with a high-profile media opportunity to exploit.

In the aftermath of the retaking of Musa Qala, it was decided that the ANA would stay responsible for the security in the Musa Qala area, and do so without a large ISAF presence to directly support them. As such, the Musa Qala area became the first Afghan-held area of operations in Helmand. To the OMLT—who would stay with the ANA Battalion—the establishment of this area of operations indicated a transition of 'security lead' to the ANA, and as such a major step forward, and in line with earlier progress regarding the ANA's closer involvement during the planning phase and greater independency regarding the execution of operations.

Many positives were indeed observed regarding the ANA as an increasingly professional force. The 2 YORKS OMLT conducted live firing close-quarter drills with the ANA, up to battalion level. Although it was noticed that these exercises would not constitute what the SASC[180] would call 'safe,' huge advantages in a very short time were observed.[181] However, the duality of the ANA became adamant as morale sunk after a few days in the Helmand desert. One officer recalled that the "ANA began acting up. They were scared, ill-disciplined and unused to surviving in the desert. The enemy began to take an interest, 107 mm rockets landing around the leaguer—the ANA jumping into our shell scrapes as they hadn't bothered to dig their own, despite our best efforts to mentor them. Our real problems started when the ANA bread ran out. This sounds trivial to professional soldiers—but a large stretch from being able to operate independently."

After the retaking of Musa Qala, the ANA and OMLT was again involved in a plethora of smaller and larger operations, mostly from the patrol bases and FOBs that had been constructed during the past two years. Although the Musa Qala district would remain rather calm for the

179 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 221.

180 Small Arms School Corps.

181 "2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment," *The Yorkshire Regiment Journal* (2007): 48.

duration of the deployment, the Sangin and Upper Garesh Valley remained a hotly contested area.[182]

3.2.5 OMLT HERRICK 8: 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment

Herrick 8 saw the return of 16 Air Assault brigade as the leading formation, by now under the leadership of Brigadier Carleton-Smith, who would become the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) of the British Army a decade later. Subordinated to his command to mentor the ANA was the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment (1 R IRISH) under the command of Lt. Col. Edmund Freely. The battalion already had first-hand experience in Helmand province, as three of its platoons had been attached to 3 PARA during HERRICK IV.[183] The ground-holding battlegroups were formed around two of the PARA battalions (2 PARA and 3 PARA[184]), and the 2nd and 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland.[185] The OMLT Battlegroup was provided by 16 AAB's CO with the missions statement to "train, mentor and strike in support of the ANA 3/205 Brigade ANA, both provincially and regionally, in order to enable the continued progress towards 3/205 Brigade becoming a self-sufficient sustainable and operationally proven all arms Brigade."[186] The OMLT reorganised itself into four mentor teams: each to be attached to an ANA kandak. As such, the CO of a mentor team (Major) would command three to four subteams (who would be attached to the ANA companies).[187] As a mentor team relied heavily on the officers and NCOs, the surplus private soldiers were reorganised into an additional ground-holding company destined for the Sangin area.[188] Again, this decision left the OMLT CO bereft of organic manoeuvre capacity.

In preparation, 1 R IRISH had to complete the by-now standard pre-deployment package for all 16 AAB Battlegroups. A long exercise in Kenya was part of the pre-deployment training (PDT), although little OMLT-specific training was conducted. However, the OMLT BG conducted a "limited amount of both Dari and Pashto training" in order to be better suited to interact with its future Afghan interlocutors.[189] The late addendum of a fifth kandak necessitated 1 R IRISH to hastily form up a fifth OMLT team. This team "had a large proportion of reinforcing

182 Interview UK Army officer 44, 25/11/2020.

183 For an in depth presentation of the 1 R IRISH regiment during HERRICK 4, see: Bishop, *3 Para: Afghanistan, Summer 2006*; Tootal, *Danger Close: The True Story of Helmand from the Leader of 3 Para*.

184 Formally, 3 PARA was under command of RC/S, but de facto was supporting HTF operations during its deployment.

185 British Army, Operation Herrick Campaign Study, Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015).

186 Cartwright, "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op HERRICK 8," *British Army Review* 146 (2009).

187 Email Correspondence UK Army officer 38, 12/08/2020.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid., email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020.

personal from other [...] units," including territorial army personnel.[190] As this last team was put together in an ad-hoc fashion, its personnel was as involved in PDT as possible, ranging from a full six months to none whatsoever. One OMLT member commented that "my preparation for my deployment on Herrick 8 was non-existent. I was commissioned from the ranks and became a Captain on the 2nd of April and deployed to Afghanistan on the 3rd. I was attached to the Royal Irish Regiment and I had had no contact with them before my tour. Fortunately, I had spent several years on operations, my last in Iraq, training Iraqi police in Basra."[191] Another officer commented that the "training received was not particularly well-tailored to the OMLT role."[192] The challenges of the late integration of an additional team were recognised by the CO, as the reminisced that the "taking on of mixed background augmentees very late on [caused a challenge] in FORGEN and FORPREP[193] cycles."[194] Although Freely expressed himself rather politically, some of his subordinates were more outspoken on the selection of Territorial Army soldiers and other late augmentees. Cartwright reflected that "[mentoring] requires good quality soldiers to perform this task and the will to make it happen. Soldiers need to be chosen carefully and brought together into teams at least a year before deployment (or six months having done the required individual skills training).[195] One interviewee considered his team to be "a mismatch of everyone who was spare, wastes and strays in one basket."[196]

Freely considered the integration between the OMLT and its mentees to be of paramount importance. Therefore, Freely advocated bringing over the ANA Brigade's CO, Brigadier General Mohayedin over to the UK together with his subordinate officers to "win and retain their trust and confidence from the earliest."[197] Freely had assessed that "over a six-month tour, he would not have the luxury of using the first two months to win [Mohayedin's] trust, so I made the strong case to invest in the relationship already in PDT."[198] As a result, the OMLT BG were a known entity that could pick up from the established introductions in

190 Email correspondence with UK Army officer 45, 15/10/2020; Cartwright, "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op HERRICK 8"; Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 234.

191 Email correspondence with UK Army officer 45, 15/10/2020.

192 Email correspondence Army officer 38 12/08/2020.

193 Force Generation and Force Preparation.

194 Email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020.

195 Cartwright, "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op HERRICK 8," 36.

196 Interview UK Army officer 52 11/11/2020.

197 Email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020.

198 Ibid.

PDT. Or, as Freely put it, he had "studied and then exploited the Afghan hospitality code of *Pashtunwali*."[199]

During the HERRICK 8 rotation, the OMLT performed operations in support of the Helmand scheme of manoeuvre, mostly following 16 AAB's lead. These operations included the large-scale operation OQAB STERGA, which aim was to clear the Helmand River valley of Taliban presence between Garesh and Sangin. Also, the British Task Force Helmand conducted an operation—the much-maligned operation OQAB TSUKA—which aimed to insert a new turbine into the well-known Kajaki Dam power station. During this operation, the ANA and OMLT supported 3 PARA Battlegroup from FOB Zeebrugge near Kajaki in this prestige operation for 16 AAB.[200] Besides these large taskforce-led operations, the OMLT supported routine security and liaison patrols, in which small OMLT teams of four to six service members would accompany ANA platoon-sized patrols to engage the local populace and gather intelligence. As the British forces were scattered over a large amount of FOBs and PBs in Helmand, often small groups of six to eight OMLT members supported the ANA contingent present in one of those bases.[201]

Despite Freely's attempts to build rapport from an early moment, the cooperation between the ANA and the HERRICK 8 OMLT was troubled. Although the Afghan soldiers were praised for their short decision-action cycle, agility and resistance to hardship by their British mentors, one officer stated that the ANA were "lazy and lacked any get-up and go. We made a rod for our own back by allowing them to get away with it, to be honest, we should have stepped back a little more and let them take the lead instead of taking on all of the planning of operations."[202] Another officer commented that " they [the ANA] struggled to plan, integrate support capabilities and ensure sustainment—and tended to be impulsive. I often wonder whether the fact that we—the OMLT—did all this for them meant that they didn't feel they should worry too much. Their informal structure meant that they suffered from poor discipline—which often translated into sub-standard conduct in the field, and high absentee rates.[203] Additionally, the ANA leadership was "mercurial at all levels. At times, the ANA were compliant, appreciative and even reliable, while at other times the ANA were erratic, extreme, brutal and dangerous, causing fractures in the relationship."[204]

199 Richard Doherty, *Helmand Mission: With the Royal Irish Battlegroup in Afghanistan 2008* (Casemate Publishers, 2010). Chapter 2 eBook.

200 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 239–44.

201 See: "Spoken From The Front: Real Voices From the Battlefields of Afghanistan," Operation Herrick 8: https://erenow.net/ww/spoken-from-the-front/6.php, accessed 31/01/2023.

202 Email correspondence with UK Army officer 45, 15/10/2020.

203 Email correspondence Army officer 38 12/08/2020.

204 Email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020.

As the OMLT struggled with ill-motivated and skills-deprived Afghan troops, the integration of the ANA into 16 AAB's scheme of manoeuvre was also suboptimal. To some, it seemed that the mentoring/partnering mission was a "sideshow to operations by the UK Brigade—which was often reflected in its resourcing."[205] Freely described it as "in effect we had two chains of command to satisfy. The first was the UK 16 Air Asslt Bde chain which wished to harness and synchronise the operational output capability of the ANA Bde to reinforce and support the UK Bde scheme of manoeuvre. Separate to this—and completely unrelated—was the US C-STCA (Support & Training Command AFG) capability development and Capacity Building a chain of command that set objectives for the training and development of the ANA.[206] Balancing the two missions was a challenge."[207] In other words, Freely assessed that the Capacity Building of the Afghan National Army did not hold pre-eminence within the Task Force Helmand, rather utilising the ANA as a form of force multiplier for the HTF's own scheme of manoeuvre.[208] Indeed, in Farrell's reconstruction of 16 AAB's tour in Helmand, HTF was described as under pressure from the American ISAF commander General McNeill to forcefully oust the Taliban from parts of Helmand, rather than focus on the amelioration of the Afghan National Army.[209] An intervention by American Marines in Helmand was perceived as embarrassing for the British elite light infantry regiment, and subsequently, the HTF made a serious effort not to be shown up by the US Marines again.[210]

As the HTF focused on kinetic operations, the dispersed OMLT largely remained confined to the FOBs and patrol bases and its immediate surroundings. However, the OMLTs were not able to lift the ANA troops to a higher level of soldiering, much to the frustration of several of the interviewees. Remarkably, soldiers involved in the HERRICK 8 rotation both reported ANA progress, whilst simultaneously making highly disparaging remarks on ANA professionalism. In his aide-memoire to the Task Force, Brigadier Carleton-Smith praised the raising level of confidence and ability of the ANA and lauded the success of ANA training.[211] Several interviewees also attested that the ANA improved during the deployment[212]; however, most sources gave made remarks on ANA military performances, which included accusations

205 Email correspondence Army officer 38 12/08/2020.

206 T. A. Forrest, "OMLT – The Complexities of the Chains of Command," *Infantryman*, 108–9.

207 Email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020.

208 For a full understanding of the complexities of the command and control structure surrounding the OMLT Battlegroup, see: Forrest, "OMLT – The Complexities of the Chains of Command."

209 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain'sWar in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 236.

210 Ibid., 237.

211 M. A. P. Carleton-Smith, "Operation Herrick 8 Operational Guide," Chapter 7.

212 Cartwright, "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op HERRICK 8"; Email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020. Forrest, "OMLT – The Complexities of the Chains of Command," 110.

of murder,[213] laziness, inept leadership and lack of initiative.[214] Moreover, although some effort was made to school the OMLT members on basic Dari and Pashtu, the OMLT was still heavily reliant on local translators. This interface between the OMLT and its interlocutors is absolutely vital in effective mentoring. In his article on the deployment, James Cartwright both stated the importance of local interpreters, as well as the indifference with which they were employed:

> The arrangements with interpreters on Op Herrick 8 were weak. Interpreters are as important as the mentors' tongues; they're vital. Interpreters were kept in wooden sheds just outside the British Camp and often farmed out to British mentors seemingly at random. Continuity between mentors and interpreters must be improved, and training needs to be given to the interpreters in several military matters. A good interpreter is more than the mentor's voice, he is a moral and a cultural guide, a companion, a go-between, an acquirer of goods, an extra pair of eyes on patrol, (potentially) another soldier, and a friend. I would sooner have a good interpreter than a single member of force protection.[215]

In November 2008, 1 R IRISH handed the OMLT tasks over to its successors, the 1st Battalion The Rifles Regiment (1 RIFLES). During the latter phases of the HERRICK 8 deployment, Freely recalled making an effort to pave the way for The Rifles, as he "viewed [the] HOTO as an influence operation. I sought to convince the ANA leadership that they were going to get a much better service from (1 RIFLES commanding officer) Joe Cavanagh and the Rifles than us. I also ensured that my team supported Joe's preparations, recces and training to the fullest extent and we ensured that OMLT AOR and BG assessreps and situational awareness were shared for the months preceding deployment so that their Comd team could be completely read into the local atmospherics and relationship dynamics."[216]

3.2.6 OMLT HERRICK 9: 1st Battalion The Rifles Regiment

The Rifles Regiment was only formed in 2007 through the amalgamation of several smaller regiments within the British Army as a result of a 2004 Army reorganisation. The 2008 OMLT assignment was thus the first major deployment for a Rifles regiment battalion, with the 1st Battalion (1 RIFLES) assigned for the OMLT task. In August the battalion had moved from the north of England to its new permanent barracks in Chepstow.

213 Email correspondence with UK CO OMLT 34, 05/11/2020; Doug Beattie and Philip Gomm, *Task Force Helmand: A Soldier's Story of Life, Death and Combat on the Afghan Front Line* (Pocket Books, 2009), 249.

214 Cartwright, "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op HERRICK 8." Email correspondence UK Army officer 45, 15/10/2020; Email correspondence Army officer 38 12/08/2020.

215 Cartwright, "Operational Mentor and Liaison Team Op HERRICK 8," 35.

216 Email correspondence UK CO OMLT 34, 04/11/2020.

Under another reorganisation, 1 RIFLES had been attached to 3 Commando Brigade as a light role infantry battalion, which made 3 Cdo Brigade a square brigade. In preparation for HERRICK 9, 1 RIFLES attended a field training exercise in Belize for seven weeks in order to conduct conventional light role training as a battlegroup with associated commando engineers and gunners. The aim of the exercise was to train and practice warfighting in a hostile and alien environment, including tracking, medical trauma training, demolitions and riverine operations.[217] On its return to the UK, 1 RIFLES was formally given the role as OMLT for HERRICK 9.[218] As a result, the latter part of 2008 was mostly spent with getting soldiers on individual courses to be qualified on various vehicles and equipment to become trained instructors in preparation for the upcoming Afghanistan OMLT deployment.[219]

As 1 RIFLES had been given the OMLT task, the pre-deployment training was rerouted to a more specific OMLT track. In camp, the battalion conducted Pashtu language training for those with aptitude, cultural awareness briefings and training for all roles: specific satcom courses, week-long team medics courses for all OMLT members, role-specific serials such as how to conduct a Shura meeting, how to set up landing sites for CASEVAC, and constant counter-IED drills.[220]

During collective training with the rest of 3 Cdo Brigade, the OMLT appointees conducted role-specific OMLT training focusing on the eight-man OMLT team, rather than the company and battalion manoeuvre and attacks that the Commando manoeuvre units were conducting on the live firing areas.[221]

Like its predecessors, 1 RIFLES hosted twelve senior officers from the ANA Brigade to whom they would be attached. The Afghan officers were invited to see the British exercise and were hosted for a formal dinner in the battalion's barracks, and were also "hosted on a goodwill tour of England's cultural delights."[222]

The Commando Brigade units that were to be deployed (42 and 45 Commandos) had each already completed one tour in Afghan since, so as the new entrant to the brigade, and as a newly formed unit, 1 RIFLES was given the OMLT task. The Brigade Commander thus passed on the opportunity to reassign 45 Commando as the OMLT, considering the experience of that unit as an OMLT during HERRICK 5. Nonetheless, the officers and NCOs of 1 RIFLES were

217 The Rifles Regiment, *The Chronicle* (2008), 19.

218 Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020.

219 Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020.

220 The Rifles Regiment, *The Chronicle* (2008), 21.

221 Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020.

222 Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020; The Rifles Regiment, *The Chronicle* (2008) 22.

quite content with their assignment, notwithstanding lesser status of the OMLT within the British Army.[223] Likewise, the surplus private soldiers were reassigned to different tasks. One platoon was sent to Kabul to protect the main UK base, and another went to Camp Bastion to provide Force Protection.[224]

With the organisation structure developing over the summer of 2008, 1 RIFLES outfitted four OMLT teams. Like its predecessors, the number of teams was increased by one as the battalion was initially under the assumption that it would only mentor three kandaks and the Brigade HQ. The 4th ANA kandak—mirroring earlier rotations—would be drawn from various service members who were banded together and were subsequently incorporated into the unit as "E Company."[225]

Moreover, the OMLT battlegroup made an effort to further specialise the ANA by augmenting the OMLT HQ with specific individuals from other units to deliver logistics, equipment support, signals, and fires expertise in order to mentor the Brigade HQ. These augmentees were known as "team zero."[226] Some officers were part of team zero as well as part of a regular kandak OMLT, leading to conflicts of interest when the kandak was deployed on operations, as reporting to two different echelons is quite an impossible task.

On operations, the 1 RIFLES rotation suffered a total of eight KIA, which is indicative of the intensity of the COIN operation in Helmand during HERRICK 9.[227] As per normal, the OMLT was scattered around the province, with teams attached to ANA subunits in Musa Qaleh, Sangin, Hereshk, Nad Ali and Garmsir districts. Despite the casualties, the 1 RIFLES regiment generally reported favourable on the ANA capacity, especially praising the Afghan's loyalty, bravery, and ability to quickly manoeuvre and fix the Taliban with direct fire.[228] The subsequent allocation of indirect fire and airpower was outside of the ANA company and thus British liaisons were needed to cover this capability.[229] The necessity of a liaison presence, however, was also described by members of 1 RIFLES' A-coy, who in the regimental gazette elaborated on the painful process of "herding" the ANA towards professional military behaviour.[230] One officer stated that "though the ANA soldiers are on the whole brave men

223 C. E. D. Grist, "Command, Control, Conversation and Cultural Understanding: C4 Operational Mentoring Liaison Team (OMLT) Style," *Infantryman* (2009), 87.

224 Regimental Journal the Rifles Regiment, 26–27; Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020.

225 Ibid, 21.

226 Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020.

227 Regimental Journal the Rifles Regiment, 24.

228 D. Holloway, "On Loan with the OMLT," *The Bugle* Spring (2009), 31.

229 M. Endersby, *The Bugle* (Spring), 32.

230 A. Coy, Musa Qaleh to Shorbal to Nad-e' Ali, "Wheat Convoy to Sangin," 25.

they, as an Army, lack the sophistication to deconflict with ISAF or bring inorganic firepower to bear."[231] The small size of the OMLT teams meant that on the remote outposts, the OMLT had little guidance from the OMLT Battlegroup, and was mostly in direct contact with the nearest British regular company. As the smaller outposts were only manned by the OMLT and the ANA, the danger of being overrun by the Taliban was present, although this never materialised during the entirety of operation HERRICK. Thus, being responsible for one's own security, scheme of manoeuvre and mentoring efforts, the individual experiences of each team greatly differed. Still, the perceived responsibility and flexibility needed to perform as an OMLT cause one officer to reflect on the OMLT skill set as follows:

> A Mentor is twice the soldier; fully able mentally and physically to conduct warfighting operations, and have the maturity, resolute professionalism, courageous restraint, selflessness, perseverance, intelligence, guile, confidence and sense of humour required to be a successful mentor. Most of our patrols conducted, at some point, full-scale air-land integrated operations but unsupported by ANA and with only eight teammates—fighting withdrawals, CASEVAC under fire, assaults, clearance patrols and advances. Working with indigenous forces does not mean you scale back your professionalism, it means you have to work even harder to stay safe, be effective, and take the fight to the enemy.

In my experience, only good soldiers made good mentors, and the best mentors were the best soldiers.[232]

3.2.7 OMLT HERRICK 10: 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment

The Mercian Regiment—like the Rifles—is another regiment in the British Army that was constructed after the British Army reforms in 2004, by merging three single-battalion regiments.[233] As of 2021, the 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (2 MERCS) also ceased to exist due to further amalgamations within the service. Mid 2008, however, whilst in the process of recuperating from a tour in Helmand during HERRICK 6 as a ground-holding battalion, the battalion was again called upon, this time to fulfil the OMLT role.[234] The Task Force Helmand CO for HERRICK 10, Brigadier Radford, judged that due to their previous tour in Helmand, 2 MERCS have had important experience in dealing with the ANA, and therefore the best choice for the OMLT role. Its task would be to improve the ANA's effectiveness through training and mentoring, as well as enable the efficient employment and integration of Afghan forces

231 D. Holloway, *The Bugle* (Spring), 31.

232 Interview UK OMLT mentor 49, 27/10/2020.

233 Jamie Barlow, "How 4000 Army Cuts Will Affect Regiment Linked to the Legendary Sherwood Foresters," *The Nottingham Post*, 14 April 2021, https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/how-4000-army-cuts-affect-5295504.

234 Email correspondence UK CO BAG 19, 13/01/2021.

into a complex field of battle and thereby increase the brigade's effectiveness. 2 MERCS' commanding officer, Lt. Col. Banton, considered the latter to be the most important for this deployment.[235]

Notably, 2 MERCIAN was directed to provide three significant force elements besides the OMLT: one rifle company was detached to operate as the Brigade Reconnaissance force (directed from brigade HQ), with two rifle companies (A and B) were detached and allocated to be the ground-holding companies for a battlegroup formed around a light cavalry unit (the Light Dragoons). Lastly, a single infantry was assigned to operate as a convoy protection force for the logistic regiment.[236]

As a result, the OMLT had to be formed around the battalion HQ and support company, with individual augmentees making up the rest of the OMLT organisation. Thus, of the circa 450 personnel in the OMLT BG I, only 180 were originating from the Mercian Regiment, with the remainder made up of soldiers contributed by all the other units in the brigade. The gaps in the organisation were filled by a trawl across the army ultimately leading to reinforcements from forty-three different units.[237] As a result, little time was available for team-building efforts, also least because "some units in the brigade selfishly retained as many people as they could, for as long as they could, to furnish their own sub-units first rather than spreading their assets."[238] Moreover, many of those force-generated to the OMLT were not voluntary and were disgruntled that their own battalions had seemingly sent them away to work elsewhere.[239] Also, several of the individual augmentees were not considered to be first-rate soldiers, but indeed the leftovers from other units from within the Brigade.

Eventually, some OMLT members would not report to the OMLT HQ until the first week in Helmand. Individual augmentees thus reviewed the pre-deployment training as "an accumulation of practices adapted/modified from conventional warfare into a few contained weekly packages. [Apart from] the addition of country/cultural specifics, there didn't seem to be any scenario building or training geared around working with the ANA/ANP."[240] Although some individuals received language training, most commonly a ten-week survival course in Dari, some OMLT members had received an eighteen-month course in order to become

235 Ibid.

236 Ibid.

237 S. Chaney, "OP HERRICK 10 Attached to the Light Dragoons / 2 Mercian Battle Group," *CHESHIRE (EARL OF CHESTER'S) YEOMANRY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER*,18–19; Email correspondence Banton.

238 Email correspondence UK CO BAG 19, 13/01/2021.

239 Ibid.

240 Interview UK OMLT mentor 21, 17/01/2021.

proficient in the Afghan language.[241] However, the OMLT, notwithstanding the nature of their profession in Afghanistan, did not have any priority in claiming the language courses over other British units.[242]

Upon arrival in Afghanistan, the 2 MERCS OMLT did receive a four-day in-theatre training package in Camp Tombstone, providing some remedial instruction on the ANA organisation, personal skills needed and specific medical training. Additional weapons training was also included, as was a counter-IED lane. Additionally, the RSOI (Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration) package as provided by 1 RIFLES was considered excellent and comprehensive.[243]

Operationally, the OMLTs were deployed across Helmand and embedded with the ANA battalions. The OMLTs enabled multiple battalion-sized operations and ANA brigade-level operations. Operations worth mentioning include Operation ZAFAR, which aimed to clear the Taliban from several villages near Lashkar Gah and Operation Panchai Palang in June 2009.[244] The latter involved Afghan, British and American troops and aimed the removal of Taliban forces from an area north of Lashkar Gah, ahead of the presidential elections of that year.[245] From ANA patrol bases across Helmand, the OMLT deployed for myriad local area patrols. These local patrols were part of the routine, which further included the manning of camp security and infrequent informal training.[246] Direct command and control proved to be a daunting task, as the Mercian OMLT was spread out to more than twenty locations within Helmand province.[247]

As a result of General McChrystal's directive, the British forces very much aimed to increase the level of partnering, which culminated in battalion-sized operations with either the Afghans—with support of the OMLT—supporting the British Battlegroup or vice-versa.[248] As a number of Mercians were veterans of the HERRICK 6 campaign, it was noted that during the latter stages of HERRICK 10 a somewhat coherent strategy was developed in response to a "now desperate need to get out of an unwinnable war."[249] According to the CO, the HERRICK

241 Interview UK OMLT mentor 22, 17/02/2021.

242 Ibid.

243 Weblog Lieutenant Colonel Simon Banton, part 1, 06/04/2009.

244 Jeffrey A. Dressler, "Securing Helmand," *Institute for the Study of War, Afghanistan Report* 2 (2009), 34–38.

245 Mercians in Afghanistan timeline, see: "Mercians in Afghanistan Timeline," *News BBC*, 20 October 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/herefordandworcester/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8316000/8316110.stm.

246 Interview UK OMLT mentor 21, 17/01/2021.

247 Weblog Lieutenant Colonel Simon Banton, part 1, 06/04/2009.

248 Interview UK OMLT mentor 22, 17/02/2021.

249 Email correspondence UK CO BAG 19, 13/01/2021.

6 strategy had been an absolute shambles, and it was evident that "the UK Army had lost the plot—such was the cowboy nature of our [OMLT] operations. Standards were allowed to slip, we allowed soldiers to wear rag-tag uniforms, long hair and stupid beards."[250] Banton assessed that even ANA Brigadier General Muhayadin—already working with his 7th British OMLT mentor—was clear that we had looked foolish and unprofessional during that phase.

Wrapping up its second deployment in two years, the 2 MERCS OMLT prepared to hand over to 2 YORKS as the command of the HTF was transferred from 19 Light Brigade to 11 Light Brigade on 10 October 2009.

3.2.8 Operation ENTIRETY

Banton's observation that the British campaign in Helmand province was not going well was shared by senior British policy makers and military staff. The Chief of the General Staff (CGS) of the British Army, General David Richards, initiated a "comprehensive institutional change programme" to place the Army on a "war footing," dubbed Operation ENTIRERY, in order to counter the lack of progress in Helmand counterinsurgency campaign.[251] The stated objective of Operation Entirety was to meet the CGS inent to ensure that Land Forces are resourced, structured and prepared—conceptually, morally and physically—for success in Afghanistan and then other subsequent hybrid operations."[252] Therefore, Operation ENTIRERY revolved around the tenet to change the way that the British Army's units were prepared for the War in Afghanistan, rebalancing the pre-deployment training and addressing the issues the Army had with institutionalising the lessons learned during the HERRICK campaign so far. In effect, the British Army in particular repositioned Operation HERRICK from a temporary and evanescing operation to its main effort. Indeed, the counterinsurgency efforts were a far cry from mechanised formations that were deemed necessary to see off Russian invading forces in a Cold War-era setting, and thus Operation ENTIRERY was set up as a temporary effort, which would be both reversible and rather short-term (one to five years) if geopolitical events so demanded.[253] Inspired by the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), ENTIRETY aimed to accommodate "force development, capability development, training, equipment, doctrine and lessons under one [...] organization."[254] The forthcoming section of Force Development and Training (FDT), commanded by three-star general Sir Paul Newton, set out to "deliver improvements in the preparation and execution of the Helmand

250 Ibid.

251 British Army, "Operation Herrick Campaign Study," Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015), xxxv.

252 Army Briefing Note 32/09: "Operation ENTIRETY – The Execution of Campaign Footing," dated 24/6/09.

253 British Army, "Operation Herrick Campaign Study," Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare (2015), xxxvii.

254 Ibid., xxxix.

Campaign."[255] As Newton held an extensive mandate, the effects of ENTIRETY started to show in all aspects of the Helmand campaign, albeit that the majority of its improvements would show after the second iteration of 2 YORKS as an OMLT, with the entrée of 1 SCOTS as the first BAG.[256]

3.2.9 OMLT HERRICK 11: 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment II

HERRICK 11 saw the return of 2 YORKS in the OMLT role, as the battalion had been assigned to mentor the ANA as part of the newly formed 11 Light Brigade under Brigadier Cowen. Although Downey had been replaced by David Colthup as the CO of 2 YORKS by Lt. Col. David Colthup, the battalion's previous deployment had been less than two years in the past, and as such plenty of residual experience was present within the unit.[257] Nonetheless, Colthup had only recently been appointed CO of the battalion—he took command in September 2008, and Downey had been a strong advocate for the role of the ANA and the OMLT, believing in its strategic value of a well-developed Afghan National Army.[258] Moreover, the two senior officers elaborately spoke on the merits and challenges of the OMLT job at hand. Although reassigning 2 YORKS as an OMLT Battlegroup made sense considering its past experience, 2 YORKS had been transferred to another brigade since its participation in HERRICK 7, and being part of the OMLT was still considered a less glamourous job than fighting the insurgency as a ground-holding battalion. One senior officer commented that considering the status of other battalion commanders in the brigade—being considered raising stars within the Army—and the late entry of 2 YORKS within 11 Light Brigade, the OMLT job was pushed down to 2 YORKS.[259]

The pre-deployment training, however, was starting to experience the positives of Operation ENTIRETY. Although the training was still focused on the ground-holding units, training facilities had improved—an 'Afghan village' had been constructed in Tethford, and the Afghan diaspora in Britain had been mobilised to act as local Helmandi's, thus creating a true Afghan vibe whilst patrolling.[260] The 400x400 m Afghan village was thus considered very useful for training, and "flooding the village with the Afghan diaspora added a sense

255 Martijn van der Vorm, *The Crubicle of War: Dutch and British Military Learning Processess in and beyond Southern Afghanistan* (Leiden University, 2023), 290.

256 Interview UK CO BAG 7, 15/12/2020.

257 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021; I. Atkins, "OMLT Mentoring: A Platoon Commander's Observations"; 3 Rifles BATTLE GROUP Battlenotes OP HERRICK 11, 173.

258 Interview UK OMLT mentor 43, 09/11/2020; Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021.

259 Ibid.

260 Interview UK OMLT mentor 44, 25/11/2020.

of realism and depth."[261] Still, Colthup felt that his battalion was used to train up the other battalions in the brigade, rather than being the focus of attention in its future role.[262]

Mentoring-wise, OPTAG had attempted to lessen the dependence on local interpreters, as some private soldiers had been sent to a thirty-week Pashtu course. Although the concept of advanced language training for individual soldiers had been grasped by OPTAG, the simple fact that the ANA spoke Dari, not Pashtu, and the lack of military slang offered during the course made it a rather futile effort.[263] Still, for the CO the language training stood out as a distinct improvement over earlier tours. Tellingly, Colthup considered the PDT to be an aggressive improvement, with OPTAG "getting it better each time. Improvement was continuous."[264] The OMLT predecessors of the 1 RIFLES battalion assisted 2 YORKS with its PDT, and although the knowledge was considered to be somewhat outdated it still was "really important" in preparing for the deployment.[265]

Within its area of operations, 2 YORKS had to mentor six ANA kandaks, to which the stripped-down companies of the battalion were attached to the three infantry kandaks of the ANA brigade. The C-coy, partnered with one of the battalions of the 2nd brigade of 205 corps, was also camped within the Helmand borders, in Lashkah Gah. The ANA CS and CSS kandaks were also overseen by the HQ of 2 YORKS, although it was staffed by the usual diverse mix of cap badges.[266]

Upon arrival, 2 YORKS received the customary RSOI package, which, depending on the unit, was considered "smooth and excellent" for the battalion HQ, and "not great" for some of the units located further from the main British base.[267] After scattering over the myriad of patrol bases of Helmand, each OMLT team delivered its mentoring and liaising depending on the situation of that particular patch of land. One factor of influence, however, impacted the HERRICK 11 tour of 2 YORKS. On 30 August of 2009, General Stanley McChrystal had issued his initial assessment as COMISAF. In this document, he made explicit statements regarding ISAF's approach and attitude towards the ANA. McCrystal stated that

> [s]uccess will require trust-based, expanded partnering with the ANSF with assigned relationships at all echelons to improve effectiveness of the ANSF. Neither the ANA nor

261 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021.

262 Ibid.

263 The Yorkshire Regiment Journal, OMLT Amber 10, Battle Group North (3 RIFLES) Sangin, 32.

264 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021.

265 Ibid.

266 The Yorkshire Regiment Journal, OMLT Amber 50, Combat Support, 37.

267 Interview UK OMLT mentor 43, 09/11/2020.

> the ANP is sufficiently effective. ISAF must place far more emphasis on ANSF development in every aspect of daily operations. ISAF will integrate headquarters and enablers with ANA units to execute a full partnership, with the shared goal of working together to bring security to the Afghan people. ISAF units will physically co-locate with the ANSF, establish the same battle rhythm, and plan and execute operations together. This initiative will increase ANSF force quality and accelerate their ownership of Afghanistan's security.[268]

McCrystal's assessment was clear, and Colthup recognised that 2 YORKS was at the forefront of the concept of embedded partnering and that 2 YORKS would have to assist in developing the concept and facilitate the transition towards a fully mutual area of operations.[269] At the HTF level, Brigadier Cowan had recognised the impact of McCrystal's directive. In an interview, he stated that "McCrystal [had] introduced his partnering directive, which in essence meant a twinning process with every [British] company, twinning with every unit. It was actually about living with them. The units would move in together. That is a fundamentally different prospect."[270]

The ground truth, however, was different. During the summer of 2009, Sangin had been the focal point of the Taliban, which had resulted in some very heavy fighting, killing dozens of British and Afghan soldiers. The arrival of 3 RIFLES as a ground-holding Battlegroup in Sangin brought in a fresh unit and new leadership, the area was still laced with improvised explosives, and the ANA had little incentive to patrol at all, let alone in a partnered fashion with the British. One officer commented that "I inherited a PB where the ANA did not want to venture more than three hundred meters from the gate. They did not proactively begin any work themselves and relied totally on ISAF to complete everything for them. The did not plan any patrols themselves. […] The ANA were not competent enough to ensure there was security for the local national in and around Pylae.[271] This sentiment was echoed along the OMLT Battlegroup.[272] Moreover, the new directive complicated joint patrolling. While the combination of British OMLT members and ANA was a common occurrence, the introduction of a platoon or company of equal numbers added a third player on the field, which invariably reduced the OMLT from its de facto leadership role to that of a liaison, as the British and

268 S. A. McChrystal, *COMISAF'S INITIAL ASSESSMENT*, Headquarters ISAF (Kabul, 2009), 2–15.

269 The Yorkshire Regiment Journal, Battalion Headquarters, 27.

270 Interview UK CO TFU 17, 24/02/2021.

271 G. Fearnley, "What Are the Similarities and Differences between Coproate [sic] and Military Mentoring," 3 RIFLES Battle Notes, 180.

272 B. Obese-Jecty, "What Factors Need to be Addressed in Order to Ensure Embedded Partnering Success at the Command Level?," 3 RIFLES Battle Notes, 166; Interview UK OMLT mentor 44, 25/11/2020.

Afghan subunits were not equipped to interact with each other.[273] Lastly, serious trust issues still existed between the British ground-holding battalions and the Afghan soldiers. One officer commented that "it has been seen on a number of occasions, from Battlegroup headquarters down to the individual soldier, that the ANA is still viewed with suspicion as to their level of competence by those outside of their immediate proximity."[274]

The hasty implementation of the partnering directive led to a degree of scepticism and ambivalence amongst the OMLTs. And as the partnering directive found little fertile ground in Sangin, the British focus had shifted to central Helmand. British Major General Nick Carter, by now the CO of RC/S, had issued the order for Operation MOSHTARAK in January 2010. As it were, Operation MOSHTARAK was another direct result of McCrystal's initial commander's assessment as he considered it of paramount importance to reverse the insurgent's momentum through military operations in order to buy time for the invariably slower improvements in governance."[275] Operation MOSHTARAK (which roughly translates to 'together' in Dari), aimed to clear the Taliban from its strongholds in Marjah, central Helmand. However, Carter had to avoid alienating the local populace by using excessive amounts of force—the new policy of courageous restraint was being implemented—and the bloody losses of the British Army in the summer were not to be increased to avoid losing British popular support.[276]

Operation MOSHTARAK would be the largest operation in Afghanistan up to that point, and the US surge of troops meant that Carter had ample personnel and material to his disposition. Still, MOSHTARAK was meant to be an Afghan-led operation, in order to adhere to Karzai's and McCrystal's intent to show Afghan leadership and responsibility with regard to the counterinsurgency. To that end, seven kandaks from neighbouring provinces were moved to Helmand.[277] This included a kandak from Uruzgan, which is also described in the chapter on the Netherlands' OMLT. Considering the involvement of the ANA in the operation, the British OMLT naturally was highly involved in the execution. Still, the British and US had bypassed the ANA formations in both planning and executing the operation, citing the ANA's lack of competence, relegating the operation to a US/UK get-together.[278]

273 N. Parkinson, "Embedded Partnering and the Role of the OMLT," 3 RIFLES Battle Notes, 175–79; Interview UK OMLT mentor 44, 25/11/2020; Interview UK OMLT mentor 36, 20/12/2020.

274 B. Obese-Jecty, "What Factors Need to be Addressed in Order to Ensure Embedded Partnering Success at the Command Level?," 3 RIFLES Battle Notes, 168.

275 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 287–88.

276 Ibid. , 304.

277 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021.

278 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 322–24.

However, the surge of US troops in Helmand, in combination with the influx of ANA kandaks and the subsequent creation of a second ANA brigade in Helmand under command of the XO of the incumbent ANA formation, caused friction on all levels.[279] In an attempt to adhere to McCrystal's partnering directive, it was attempted to co-locate the brigade HQs of the British and Afghan brigades, which was quickly abandoned as the ANA brigadier Sharin Shah simply left for his previous HQ.[280] According to senior OMLT officers, the reshuffling of units and introduction of the US Marine Corps in the command and control mix led to "a real mess," just prior to Operation MOSHTARAK.[281] After several delays and reconfigurations, Operation MOSHTARAK succeeded in pushing the Taliban out of its strongholds in Marjah, central Helmand, although the ANA leadership in operation was in name only.[282] Thus, operation MOSHTARAK highlighted ISAF unwillingness and the ANA's inability to lead large-scale operations. Moreover, the partnering directive caused friction as the ANA and ISAF units were not prepared to jointly execute operations, exposing the ANA efforts as a reiteration of the 'Afghan face' concept of earlier rotations.

With the conclusion of operation MOSHTARAK, the OMLT's rotation of 2 YORKS also drew to an end. However, instead of transferring to yet another OMLT battlegroup, the 2 YORKS OMLT handed over to a 'Brigade Advisory Group,' or BAG. BAGs were the symptomatic nomenclature of the mentoring of Afghan forces following the partnering directive of McCrystal, intending to reinforce the policy change by changing the categorisation of the mentoring effort.[283] The 1st battalion, the Royal Regiment of Scotland, would be the first BAG, whose tasks would include smoothing out the wrinkles caused by the abrupt change to partnering. During the latter phase of 2 YORKS' tenure, it was envisioned the binational interactions between the British and Afghan forces would be between the commanding officers of the ground-holding battalions and the ANA kandaks, making the OMLTs redundant.[284] However, the difference between the OMLT and the BAG would be predominantly semantic, with 1 SCOTS taking over 2 YORKS' tasks mostly unaffected.

3.3 Subconclusion

As the British Army entered Helmand, its main focus had been on the lozenge between Lashkar Gah, Gereshk, and Camp Bastion. However, all units deployed over the summer of 2006 outside of Camp Bastion were exposed to the Taliban's efforts to drive the British

279 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021, Interview UK CO TFU 17, 24/02/2021.

280 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021.

281 Ibid. .

282 Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, 322.

283 Interview UK CO OMLT 26, 21/01/2021; interview UK OMLT mentor 44, 25/11/2020.

284 Interview UK CO TFU 17, 24/02/2021.

from its platoon house-based patrol bases, leading to a series of pitched battles and an overstretched battlegroup. As the Task Force Helmand was quick to incorporate the available manpower of the Afghan National Army in the defence of several districts in the province, the OMLT and ANA quickly found their place in the British-led campaign. However, the initial British OMLT had to find its way into the operational reality of a counterinsurgency campaign that resembled conventional warfighting rather than Malaya. Looking back at four years of mentoring the ANA, this conclusion will reflect on the staffing, preparation and execution of the British OMLT deployment, whilst highlighting the uniquely British aspects of mentoring during OPERATION HERRICK.

At the start of HERRICK 4, the initial OMLT, unsure about its task and purpose, had a false start. 7 RHA was ordered to fulfil a triptych of tasks, including mentoring the ANA. As it were, the OMLT was insufficiently equipped—both physically as well as psychologically—and its members were drawn from a host of different units as 7 RHA simply did not have enough personnel in its ranks to independently staff the OMLT. This affected the unity within the team, as the late entry of so many individuals prevented any pre-deployment cohesion building. Already in the second iteration, the OMLT adapted to be formed around a regular battalion (or commando in the case of the Royal Marines), with individual augmentees filling up any gaps within the order of battle (ORBAT) rather than providing the foundation of the ORBAT. This initial adaptation would endure, with each consecutive OMLT iteration being formed around an existing infantry battalion structure. This adaptation had an additional advantage as the OMLTs could use their own weapons and equipment. Although it was not always sufficient, it formed a foundation from which further equipment could be transferred to.

As the ANA's presence increased over the years, so did the demand for mentoring capacity. Early OMLT-assigned battalions were mostly able to marry up skeleton companies to Afghan kandaks, but as the number of kandaks surpassed the number of regular companies in a battalion more augmentees had to be taken in. Moreover, as a regular infantry battalion did not have the capability to technically mentor combat support and combat service support battalions, this capability also had to be drawn externally. As this chapter describes, the unity of effort of the OMLTs suffered from the intake of individual augmentees, as often the very late addition of service members of varied quality did little to ensure a strong communal basis and direction, often associated with military effectiveness. The inability to glue together before deployment was frequently cited as undesirable; however, it was not corrected during the described period.

Also, the first fatality of the campaign, suffered by the OMLT during HERRICK 4, laid bare a number of shortcomings regarding the staffing and equipment of the OMLT. The death of the officer—thoroughly investigated by the Army, although not without controversy—acted as a catalyst to quickly change the force structure of the OMLTs and also acted as an incentive

to better arm and equip the mentor teams. This process, however, was not yet completed for another year, with the OMLTs having to resort to augmenting its equipment through borrowing and scavenging.

The pre-deployment training of the British OMLTs showed a marked improvement during the seven rotations. Initially, the PDT, especially OMLT-specific, could be considered rudimentary at best. Combat training and marksmanship had been the bread and butter of the British infantry for decades and needed little remedial action. However, the British OMLTs did not participate in the NATO-led OMLT training exercises in Hohenfels or Bydgoszcz like the Netherlands or Belgium and had to resort to adjusting the existing HTF-PDT to a more OMLT-bespoke FTX. The initially flawed training—for instance, the OMLTs were stripped of their privates and put through a round-robin which was designed for fully staffed company-level subunits—were ironed out as the operation progressed. Another example is the mobilisation of the Afghan diaspora to act as local Afghans, a vast improvement to the initial attempts to practice mentoring using British Army musicians as extras. Also, the OMLTs started to take advantage of the short- and long-term language training in Dari and Pashto that became available during later rotations. Although this did not make local interpreters redundant, it did make rapport-building efforts easier as well as offering the mentors the possibility to convey simple tactical instructions during combat.

The necessity of building rapport is a quintessential aspect of capacity-building missions, especially during prolonged campaigns such as COIN. The research for this chapter indicated that knowledge of counterinsurgency was quite common amongst the senior officers of the OMLTs, who referred to classical counterinsurgency theorists as an influence on the execution of the deployment. Many British officers indeed made a serious effort to bond and build rapport with their Afghan counterparts, regularly citing T.E. Lawrence as an inspiration. Standing out as an example, the British invited senior Afghan officers over to the United Kingdom from HERRICK 8 onwards in order to build rapport with their Afghan interlocutors pre-deployment, overcoming some staunch institutional bureaucracy. A good relationship was considered paramount, as the British could not fall back on external sources of authority such as rank or experience. Rank especially was an important aspect; as mentioned previously in the chapter, the British OMLT mentored via a 'one-up' approach, resulting in a series of young lieutenant colonels having to mentor the brigadier general commanding the ANA Brigade. As the British officers were mostly aware that their tenure was—in the eye of the Afghans—a passing event, and that a certain amount of humility was fitting, few OMLT COs reported issues with the Afghan Brigade commander. Still, especially on the lower tactical levels, the age and lack of experience of younger officers caused some friction with the Afghan soldiers on remote outposts.

Operationally, the ANA/OMLT were quickly absorbed into the lower tactical level, frequently to man the increasing number of combat outposts and patrol bases. As manning an outpost could be tedious, on many smaller outposts the four to six man OMLTs had every volition to independently decide on their scheme of operations, which included basic training, manning the sangars as well as patrolling the immediate area of the posts, when and if the Afghan soldiers were willing to do so. During larger operations, Afghan soldiers were often flaunted as the 'Afghan face of operations,' though positioning the ANA as the leading entity of the counterinsurgency did not come to fruition. British military leadership was indeed reluctant to put the ANA at the forefront of the campaign, the ANA being subservient in the planning and execution of all major operations. The lack of ascendancy of the ANA was mirrored by the OMLTs, with many interviewees referring to the less glamorous nature of the mentorship tasks, as ground-holding battalions held prevalence, especially career-wise.

General Mackay, commanding HERRICK 7, was the first officer to attempt to increase the ANA's significance in the campaign, as he endeavoured to frame the retaking of the Helmand town of Musa Qula as an Afghan-led victory. However, his bid to put the Afghans at the forefront of operations miscarried as the nascent Afghan forces were unable to coherently organise themselves in a credible formation capable of independently retaking a major Taliban stronghold. Indeed, the Afghan front only deceived the most casual of observers. Later, in both 2008 and 2009, top-down instructions by both McKiernan and McCrystal attempted to force the issue of Afghan parity; however, the Afghan Army remained plagued by individual and collective military haplessness, corruption and desertion, affecting the ANA to mature into an independent security institution as well frustrating all rotations of mentors.

During the four years of mentoring as an OMLT, the status of the mentoring tasks improved, together with the outfitting and pre-deployment training. Especially after the kick-off of Operation ENTIRETY during the penultimate OMLT rotation, the preparation of the OMLTs started to improve, and although ENTIRETY started to yield some effects during 2 YORKS second tenure, only the Brigade Advisory Groups, the first of which would succeed 2 YORKS and be staffed by 1 SCOTS, would fully benefit from this change of direction of the British Army. Still, the Afghan institutional inertia, in combination with a meandering campaign planning by a series of Brigadiers commanding the Task Force, prevented the OMLT and ANA to make progress that endured. The subsequent BAGs would remain to mentor the Afghan Army until October 2013, leaving ample opportunity for further research and academic scrutiny.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: The OMLTs of Task Force Uruzgan 2006–2010

4.1 Introduction

In the past decade, the Dutch armed forces have been increasingly deployed abroad to train, advise and assist foreign security forces, rather than to fight.[1] This policy change has its roots in the recent past. Fifteen years of counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, in combination with decades of budget cuts, have led to a severe decrease in Dutch military capacity and capability.[2] The Dutch Army, in 2020, was unable to sustain a larger permanent deployment than company-sized. Moreover, it is politically unpalatable to get drawn into another 'endless war' or otherwise prolonged military commitment without the possibility to withdraw. The consequences of the alliance defection in 2010, when the Dutch opted not to extend their military presence in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, are too fresh in Dutch parliamentary memory.[3] Still, as the Dutch foster their relationship with international organisations such as NATO and the EU, as well as their principal ally the United States, military participation is an important foreign policy exponent.[4] Following an international trend, the Dutch found a way to show its international commitment, whilst at the same time keeping the political, budgetary and physical risks to a minimum in security force assistance missions. Parliamentarians repeatedly stress the need for the Netherlands to take up on its international responsibility by participating in military deployments, although that international responsibility is most often not further specified.[5]

Contrary to expectations, the recent and extensive criticism on the effectiveness of SFA (or the lack thereof) has not reduced any Dutch enthusiasm in SFA. The Dutch have been involved in a plethora of SFA-type operations.[6] In fact, SFA-type operations form the majority of

1 Wiltenburg, "Security Force Assistance: Practised but not Substantiated."

2 M. Bentinck, "Why the Dutch Military Punches Below Its Weight," Carnegie Europe, (2018), https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/75484.

3 Massie, "Why Democratic Allies Defect Prematurely: Canadian and Dutch Unilateral Pullouts from the War in Afghanistan."

4 Dutch Government White Paper, "Working Worldwide for the Security of the Netherlands: An Integrated International Security Strategy 2018–2022," https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2018/03/20/working-worldwide-for-the-security-of-the-netherlands-an-integrated-international-security-strategy-2018-2022; Interview A. Bosman, 04/06/2020; Interview H. Bruins Slot 12/06/2020.

5 Interview A. Bosman, 04/06/2020; H. Bruins Slot, 12/06/2020.

6 These include the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team missions in Afghanistan (OMLT, 2006–2010), the Capacity Building Mission in Iraq (CBMI, 2014–current), the training missions as part of the European Battlegroup (EUBG), the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA, 2004–current) and the special forces' 'Flintlock' exercises (2005–current), https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/exercises/flintlock; Dutch Ministry of Defence, Overview of the Current Missions Abroad, https://english.defensie.nl/topics/missions-abroad/current-missions, accessed 07/11/2019.

international interventions the Netherlands are currently involved in. Historically, SFA has not been practiced on a large scale by the Dutch since the use of small cadres of Dutch forces to control the Dutch East-Indies colonies through a system of co-optation. On a small scale, Dutch forces have been involved in SFA-type operations in Papua-New Guinea, training a local militia in preparation to an Indonesian intervention (1961–1963) and Iraq, training Iraqi policemen (2003–2005.[7] Also, Dutch Special Forces have been involved in Military Assistance missions such as the yearly Flintlock exercises in Africa and elsewhere.[8] The renewed use of the military for training, advising and assisting foreign security forces is remarkable. However, in contrast with the political enthusiasm for SFA-type operations, little discourse on SFA is currently present in both the Dutch armed forces or politics.[9] This is noteworthy, as the Dutch experiences in SFA over the last decades have yielded much experience and knowledge on the topic, apparently without being institutionalised in the military or even a debate on the practice.[10] This chapter elaborates on the place of SFA in the Dutch strategic culture, the strategic value of SFA-type operations and the means that have been allocated to execute Dutch SFA-type operations in the past decade.

4.1.1 Dutch Strategic Culture

The Netherlands[11] is a geographically small state, but in possession of a strong economy and a well-developed diplomatic network. Surrounded by medium powers such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany, the Netherlands is embedded in a circle of larger friendly states, and as such perceive little to no territorial threat. In attaining political aims and defending national interest, the Netherlands generally prefer to use diplomacy and economic development as instruments, relative to the use of the military.[12]

Dutch strategic culture revolves around two tenets, an Atlanticist and a continental European approach. As Korteweg elaborates, both approaches are exponents of Western liberal thinking and constitute "different strains of liberal interventionism, however they accord a different

7 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate, "Missie in Al Muthanna," *De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in Irak* 2005 (2003); C. van Bruggen, *'Verget ons niet' Het Papoea Vrijwilligers Korps (1961–1963)* (Aspekt, 2011).

8 As Dutch SoF operations are mostly classified, this dissertation does not further elaborate on the location and nature of Dutch SoF Military Assistance.

9 Wiltenburg, "Security Force Assistance: Practised but not Substantiated." 92.

10 Ibid., 92.

11 The Kingdom of the Netherlands consists of the Netherlands and the islands of St. Maarten, Aruba and Curacao in the Caribbean. Here, any reference to 'the Netherlands' refers to the country of the Netherlands, rather than the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

12 Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe*, 262.

role to the application of military force."[13] The Atlanticist tenet is based on the US leadership of the Western world, together with capitalism, freedom and democracy. Alternatively, the continental European tenet is more focused towards the European model of cooperation and integration which foster economic prosperity.[14] The continental-European approach is represented in the Dutch preference to utilise the armed forces to project stability and to promote the international rule of law.[15] Secondly, the Atlanticist approach constitutes the use of the military as a power instrument and as an opportunity to increase political relevance and is represented by the willingness to contribute to hazardous military operations such as the Dutch mission in Uruzgan, Afghanistan.[16] In the decision-making process preceding the utilisation of its military forces, the Netherlands dither on these two tenets.

The Netherlands deem NATO the cornerstone of their security strategy, and therefore have a strong incentive to align with the US, the largest contributor to the alliance.[17] Displaying solidarity with the US and NATO, the Dutch are ready to deploy forces for the aforementioned hazardous operations abroad. Still, the Netherlands usually demand that these operations are legitimate and have an international mandate. Moreover, the Netherlands military contributions are usually embedded within a larger civil-military operation in order to promote security, stability and the international rule of law.[18] This bipolar approach allows the Dutch military to conduct operations with states that prefer a more military-focused approach to international conflict such as the US, and states that prefer a less-bellicose approach towards conflict resolution such as Germany. The strategic dithering between these two tenets, however, does appear somewhat schizophrenic in balancing between the European and the Anglo-Saxon powerhouses.[19]

Still, in line with other European states, the Netherlands have a preference to use the military for rather less violent stability operations, peacebuilding missions and other

13 Arie Rem Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991–2008)* (Leiden University Press, 2011).

14 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 366.

15 Ibid. 366.

16 Ibid., 223.

17 Wiltenburg and Van der Vorm, "Small State Strategic Thinking"; Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 223.

18 Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken, Europese Defensiesamenwerking Soevereiniteit en Handelingsvermogen, Den Haag, 2012, https://www.adviesraadinternationalevraagstukken.nl/binaries/adviesraadinternationalevraagstukken/documenten/publicaties/2012/01/27/europese-defensiesamenwerking/Europese_defensiesamenwerking_AIV-advies-78_201201.pdf.

19 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 217.

deployments to support the international rule of law.[20] As Korteweg states: "Core elements of Dutch strategic culture are emphasizing stability through stimulating institution building, embracing pacifism while shunning power politics, and achieving security ends by being virtuous instead of militarily victorious."[21] This is a consequence of the complex decision-making process that preludes military deployments, considering the fragmented multi-party parliament that needs to support any deployment in majority. Noll and Moelker explain that the nature of the Dutch political system and the necessity for political coalitions make it complex for a government to act on its own ambitions, as some political parties might support peace-building and reconstruction efforts, but oppose more kinetic military involvement.[22] This process thus leads to the use of euphemisms for warfare as political parties across the entire political spectrum must be appeased in order to gain their support. This is illustrated by describing the post-WW2 colonial wars in the Dutch East Indies as 'police actions' (*politionele acties*), and the use of the phrase '*opbouwmissie*,' or reconstruction mission, for the Dutch counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan.[23] Also, during the Dutchbat deployments in Srebrenica, arguably one of the darkest days of the Dutch armed forces post-WW2, it was decided that Dutch armoured infantry vehicles bearing a 25 mm cannon would be too aggressive-looking, so instead it was opted to only equip the Dutch YPR-type vehicles with a heavy machine gun.[24] Contemporarily, parliamentary reluctance to engage in kinetic military actions has led increasingly to parliamentary micro-management and excessive national caveats.[25] Illustrative of the top-down implemented frustration to the Dutch military efforts is the Dutch mission in Kunduz province, during which national caveats led to an utter unworkable situation.[26]

After the Dutch participation in the Iraq war in 2003–2005, the Dutch promoted the 'Dutch Approach,' a "vaguely defined idea of a better, subtle, comprehensive and culturally aware national approach—a national way of war."[27] The 'Dutch Approach' would constitute of a

20 Ibid., 223.

21 Ibid., 222.

22 Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe*.

23 Korteweg, *The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally*, 239.

24 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal "Kamerstuk 28506," 27 January 2003, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-28506-5.html. Accessed 23/09/2021.

25 See: Stephen Saideman and David P. Auerswald, *Comparing Caveats: Understanding the Sources of National Restrictions upon NATO's Mission in Afghanistan*, International Studies Quarterly (2012) 56, 67–84.

26 These caveats included limitations on the geographic dispersion of the trainees, as well as limiting their operational tasks. All in all, this has proven to be an utterly unworkable situation. For a full disclosure, see: Buitenlandse Zaken, "Op Zoek Naar Draagvlak: de Geïntegreerde Politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan."

27 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, "The Use and Abuse of the 'Dutch Approach'to Counter-Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 6 (2013).

less violent and population centric way of operations, and offer a separate option to the more kinetic oriented US approach. The 'Dutch Approach' was subsequently propagated to the Dutch parliament to promote the controversial deployment to Uruzgan province, Afghanistan between 2006 and 2010. Although now in disuse, the 'Dutch Approach' adequately describes the Dutch strategic culture in showing the willingness to participate, even in combat, but reluctance in promoting the use of force if not absolutely necessary, instead focusing the integration of diplomacy and development into their approach.

As a small state with large interests in the international community, Dutch strategic culture reflects these international interests its international security policy. In 2013, the main strategic interests were described as the defence of the territory of both the Kingdom of the Netherlands as well as allied states, a well-functioning international order and economic security.[28] The 2018 Defence white paper reiterated these strategic pillars, albeit in slightly different terms: to remain secure in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Europe, to foster security in Europe's neighbouring regions and to secure connections to and from the Netherlands.[29]

In order to meet these stated strategic interests, the Dutch contribute and have contributed to many international missions, both SFA-type as well as others.[30] As the Dutch recognise the limits of the size of its armed forces, the common policy is not to engage in military operations in isolation, but always in a coalition of states.[31] Contributing to international missions is important for the Netherlands for two main reasons. In the first place, it fosters their relationship with the US, the hegemonic Western military power and the Netherlands' main ally since World War 2.[32] As accusations of freeriding under the US security umbrella have increased both in frequency as well as severity over the last decade, the Dutch endeavour to regularly contribute to the NATO alliance by other means such as participation in international missions, whilst simultaneously avoiding increasing the defence budget

28 International Security Strategy: A Secure Netherlands in a Secure World https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/documents/policy-notes/2013/06/21/international-security-strategy/ivs-engels.pdf, 1.

29 Dutch Ministry of Defense, "2018 Defence White Paper: Investing in our People, Capabilities and Visibility," (The Hague 2018), 7.

30 Defensie, "Current Missions," https://english.defensie.nl/topics/missions-abroad/current-missions.

31 Koninklijke Landmacht, "Veiligheid is vooruitzien," https://www.defensie.nl/binaries/defensie/documenten/publicaties/2018/11/05/toekomstvisie-koninklijke-landmacht/Veiligheid+is+vooruitzien.+De+toekomstvisie+Koninklijke+Landmacht.pdf.

32 Dick Zandee, "Dutch Security and Defence: From Atlantis to Europa?," *Militaire Spectator*, 8 January 2019, https://spectator.clingendael.org/nl/publicatie/dutch-security-and-defence-atlantis-europa.

beyond the public approval threshold.[33] As such, over the last fifteen years, the Dutch contributed heavily, relative to its size, to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, providing not only a substantial military delegation but also adding legitimacy to both wars by its substantial involvement.[34]

The second reason for participation is because the Dutch government greatly values international rule of law.[35] The promotion of the international rule of law is one of the constitutional reasons for the use of the armed forces, the other constitutional proclaimed purposes being the territorial defence of both the Dutch kingdom and its allies, as well protection of the interests of the Kingdom.[36] The use for the armed forces for the promotion of international rule of law and other, mostly humanitarian, reasons is moreover better accepted by the Dutch populace than more violent interventions.[37]

However, the recent Dutch policy on using the armed forces -including its deployment to Afghanistan- contains two important constraints. In the first place, Dutch military deployments are formally capped in both time and size. The number of personnel allocated to a deployment, as well as the period they are to be deployed, are agreed on by the government and parliament.[38] Although not bound to by law, it has become custom to gauge every military deployment over a framework that includes the necessity of the mission, the size and scope, consequences for army readiness and several other military and political factors. Usually, the period for deployments is set on two years or less, albeit with the possibility for extension. The limited time and scope of military mission leads to the second constraint in Dutch military strategy: the results of interventions are stated as a relative towards the outset of the deployment, as the mission end state of recent interventions has not been reached within the allotted timeframe. This leads to statements such as "the security in

33 Jo Jakobsen, "Is European NATO Really Free-riding? Patterns of Material and Non-material Burden-sharing after the Cold War," *European Security* 27, no. 4 (2018): 490, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1515072.

34 Olivier Schmitt, "More Allies, Weaker Missions? How Junior Partners Contribute to Multinational Military Pperations," *Contemporary Security Policy* 40, no. 1 (2019): 77, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2018.1501999.

35 Toespraak van minister Grapperhaus aan de Károli Gáspár Universiteit https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/toespraken/2019/02/22/speech-by-the-minister-of-justice-ferdinand-grapperhaus-at-karoli-gaspar-university-budapest-21-february-2019. Accessed 14/02/2020

36 The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands 2008, https://www.government.nl/documents/regulations/2012/10/18/the-constitution-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands-2008, article 97.

37 Matt Bassford et al., *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Netherlands Armed Forces*, (RAND Corporation, 2010), 29–30.

38 For a full description on the formal parliamentary proceedings of Dutch military deployments see: https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmj1ey0/vjgsnjbbhxye.

Afghanistan has been improved since the commencement of the mission," etc.[39] The fact that the relative improvements can be adduced are forthcoming of the vague and relative grounds for participation as stated by the government.

Furthermore, the government of the Netherlands is careful to avoid ownership of the problem the intervention seeks to solve, and instead focuses on themes such as "solidarity with the alliance," "limit illegal immigration," "prevent terrorism," and "improve international cooperation."[40] Although this is understandable considering the size of the country, this limited approach has led in recent years to criticism from several scholars in the Netherlands. These critics have alleged the Dutch government of "strategic illiteracy," "strategic vagueness," and bemoaned the demise of military strategy in the Dutch political discourse.[41] This scholarly criticism was seconded by senior army officers, even to the extent that the Dutch commanding officer in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, noted that the strategy for the International Security Assistance Force mission in Uruzgan was in effect a grassroots process, and no strategy was present when the first Task Force arrived in Afghanistan.[42]

In a similar vein, the 2018 narrative for the recent Dutch deployment to the Capacity Building Mission in Iraq indicated that the deployment was to "improve the international rule of law," and to "contribute to de-escalating the regional situation."[43] In conformation with the above, the mission was capped in both personnel as well as time, limiting the deployment to a year, six F-16 combat aircraft, and trainers for Kurdish *Peshmerga* and Iraqi troops.

Military strategy is intended to achieve political ends through the employment of (primarily) military means. For the Dutch armed forces, it is impossible to produce the desired political output when that output is unknown, or at best relative to the situation at the beginning of the mission. And even so, measuring success would be considerably in the eye of the beholder. Dutch military deployments are therefore not a product of sound military strategy, but rather

39 See: https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-27925-611.html (official correspondence from the Minister of Defence to the Dutch Parliament 11/09/2017).

40 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Wereldwijd voor een Veilig Nederland - Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie 2018-2022 https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2018/03/20/working-worldwide-for-the-security-of-the-netherlands-an-integrated-international-security-strategy-2018-2022, 19–20.

41 Martijn Kitzen and Floor Thönissen, "Strategische vaagheid: Hoe het gebrek aan strategische visie het lerend vermogen van de Koninklijke Landmacht beperkt," *Militaire Spectator* 187, no. 4 (2018), 206–23; Hermanus Amersfoort, "Nederland, de weg kwijt: Over de teloorgang van de militaire strategie en de noodzaak van geschiedenis," *Militaire Spectator* 185, no. 5 (2016). IGBM Duyvesteyn, "Strategisch analfabetisme: de kunst van strategisch denken in moderne militaire operaties," (2013).

42 Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 167.

43 Defence and Development Ministers of Foreign Affairs, "Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme," *Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal* (2018).

an outcome of policy. The policy on which the deployment is based is openly stated in formal parliamentary documents. The Dutch policy goals would include being a "reliable partner," doing a "fair share" concerning military missions abroad and showing "commitment."[44] To participate, bounded in time and effort, seems to be the dominant 'Dutch' verb in regard to military interventions.

This is not so say that the Dutch government is unaware or ignorant of current international affairs. The Dutch minister of defence acknowledges the need for a "strategic military intervention" in Afghanistan, the threat from Russia and jihadists and the increasing geopolitical instability.[45] However, it appears that the Dutch government generally wants to avoid any form of lasting commitment to these issues. Rather, it is restating the desire for international cooperation and comprehensive conflict resolution. The abrupt withdrawal of the Dutch mission in the Afghan province of Uruzgan and the subsequent deployment to Kunduz province (2011–2013) form a case in point. The 2010 withdrawal from Uruzgan was a result of partisan politics within the coalition government rather than strategic considerations.[46] After this alliance defection, the Netherlands desired to make amends to the international coalition for Afghanistan in order to repair some of the damage the sudden withdrawal from Uruzgan had caused to the reputation of a reliable ally.[47] After much political handwringing, the flawed "integrated police training mission" to Kunduz province was agreed upon.[48]

As a small state, the Netherlands puts a premium on international cooperation, coalition efforts and alliance adherence.[49] This portends the dearth of independent grand strategic

44 Ministers of Foreign Affairs, "Bestrijding Internationaal Terrorisme," 2.

45 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal "Kamerstuk 27925," 13 September 2017, 10, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-27925-611.html (official correspondence from the Minister of Defence to the Dutch Parliament 11/09/2017); Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, "Kamerstuk 29521," 27 August 2018, 2, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-29521-363.html (official correspondence from the Minister of Defence to the Dutch Parliament).

46 See: Reed Stevenson and Aaron Gray-Block, "Dutch Government Falls over Afghan Troop Mission," *Reuters*, 20 February 2010, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-dutch-government/dutch-cabinet-falls-over-afghanistan-media-idUSTRE61J0FS20100220.

47 Massie, "Why Democratic Allies Defect Prematurely: Canadian and Dutch Unilateral Pullouts from the War in Afghanistan," 99–100.

48 See: Richard Weitz "The Netherlands and Afghanistan: NATO Solidarity vs. War Wariness," *World Politics Review*, 25 January 2011,https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/7669/the-netherlands-and-afghanistan-nato-solidarity-vs-war-wariness.

49 Dutch Government White Paper, "Working Worldwide for the Security of the Netherlands: An Integrated International Security Strategy 2018–2022," https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2018/03/20/working-worldwide-for-the-security-of-the-netherlands-an-integrated-international-security-strategy-2018-2022.

formulation, and indeed the Dutch rather delegate this to either their hegemonic ally or international institutions such as the EU or NATO. Although this is reasonable considering the lack of independent power instruments in possession of the Netherlands, it does position them in a supportive role during military interventions. As the Netherlands are not aspiring another leading role after the 2006–2010 ISAF deployment in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, this fits into the current Dutch security and foreign policy.[50]

Therefore, SFA-type operations are suited for Dutch policy makers. SFA-type operations allow for tailor-made participation, capped both in personnel and time. Also, the perceived low-cost and low-risk attributes of these missions allow for a positive strategic narrative to the populace, as training, advising and assisting are generally better appreciated than high-risk combat operations.[51] Being in a supporting role, the criticism of a 'too technical approach' towards SFA does not affect Dutch policy makers, but rather the missions' principal initiators. Instead, this limited and technical approach does fit the Netherlands, as this allows smaller training missions, with a distinct focus on short-term tactical improvements by the training audience.

While this explains why Dutch foreign policy is comfortable to settle for SFA-type operations, it does not expound on any reasons why the Dutch armed forces do not push back on a military activity with a chequered success record. To appreciate this, one must consider the state of the Dutch armed forces after years of financial neglect.

4.1.2 The Dutch Political Decision-making Process

With regards to the deployment of the state's armed forces, the Dutch constitution dictates that "[t]here shall be armed forces for the defence and protection of the interests of the Kingdom, and in order to maintain and promote the international legal order."[52] Moreover, the same article reads that the Dutch government shall have supreme authority over the armed forces. Within the society, the government consists of the King and his ministers. However, one must consider the mostly ceremonial status of the Dutch monarch, thus the prerogative of deploying the Dutch armed forces lies with the Cabinet. The Dutch House of Representatives, the lower house of the bicameral parliament of the Dutch state (the other house being the Senate), is the state's main legislative body, and one of its main tasks is to review the actions of the entire cabinet (the ministers and secretaries of state), which includes de facto the government.

50 Ibid.

51 Bassford et al., *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Netherlands Armed Forces*.

52 Article 97 Dutch constitution, https://www.government.nl/documents/regulations/2012/10/18/the-constitution-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands-2008 accessed 20/05/2022.

In order to review any deployment of the armed forces, the Dutch constitution demands that the government informs the States General (the States General consist of both the House of Representatives as well as the Senate) in advance if the armed forces are to be deployed. This includes the deployment of forces in order to maintain or promote the international legal order and the provision of humanitarian aid in the event of armed conflict. The Dutch government informs both houses by means of a so-called Article 100-letter.[53] Article 100 refers to the article in the Dutch constitution, which was amended in 2000 after Parliament wished for more parliamentary control on the deployment of the armed forces. Although formally the House of Representatives does not have to consent, it has become common practice for any deployment to have at least a majority in the lower house. Naturally, some events prohibit informing Parliament before the actual deployment, in which case both houses have to be informed at the earliest opportunity.

4.1.3 The Dutch Armed Forces Structure

The Dutch armed forces consist of four branches: the Royal Netherlands Navy (RNLN), including the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps (RNLMC), the Royal Dutch Air Force (RNLAF) and the Royal Dutch Army (RNLA). The Royal Dutch Marechaussee, the military police corps, was separated from the Dutch Army and formed into a separate branch in 1998.[54] The Dutch armed forces are small, but consist of high-tech assets across all branches. The Dutch armed forces are an all-volunteer force, which together with high standards in mandatory schooling leads to a highly educated, professional force.

The Royal Netherlands Navy's fleet is based in Den Helder, and maintains a force of frigates and submarines. Due to the landlocked nature of Afghanistan, the Dutch Royal Navy did not significantly contribute to the Uruzgan deployment. However, besides its floating assets, the Navy operated two battalion-sized Marine infantry units, which are considered an elite fighting force. The Dutch Marines contributed both to the Battle groups, adding company-sized elements to the stretched Army battalions, as well as staffing sections of the Operation Mentoring and Liaison Teams. Also, the Royal Dutch Marines operate a special forces element that was regularly deployed to Afghanistan, mostly jointly with the Army SF-group.[55]

The RNLAF consists of a fleet of sixty-one updated, but ageing F-16 fighters that are generally being replaced by forty-five F-35 fighters. Besides the fighter aircraft, the RNLAF has the disposal of medium and light transport helicopters, and twenty-six AH-64D Apache combat

53 Article 100 Dutch constitution. https://www.government.nl/documents/regulations/2012/10/18/the-constitution-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands-2008 accessed 20/05/2022.

54 Koninklijke Marechaussee, "Geschiedenis Marechaussee," https://www.defensie.nl/organisatie/marechaussee/geschiedenis.

55 Ten Cate and Van Der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'*, 230.

helicopters to support the RNLA's Air-assault brigade. Although most states subordinate transport and combat helicopters under the land component of the armed forces, the Dutch have opted to have the RNLAF operate these aircraft, arguably to maintain enough mass to justify the RNLAF as a separate branch. The RNLAF also has four C-130 cargo aircraft and two KDC-10 tanker aircraft, the latter also being replaced due to their age. All of the assets mentioned above were used to provide air power to the Dutch Task Force in Uruzgan.

The RNLA consists of three combat brigades and one support brigade, each equipped for a different role. These brigades have withered under the aforementioned budget cuts, with four of its armoured battalions sold off between 2010–2015. This has left the Dutch Army in 2022 with a mechanised, motorised and air assault brigade for combat operations, which have integrated in German divisions wherever possible.[56] In 2006, however, the Dutch Army combat brigades comprised of a light (air-assault) capacity and a mechanised (two brigades) capacity. However, both mechanised brigades of the Dutch land forces only possessed two combat battalions, which is widely considered to be short of the necessary combat power of a brigade, and short of the NATO requirements for combat brigades.[57] As such, it is recognised that the Dutch Army had lost its ability to fight in a conventional war and that the army was not able to fulfil its constitutional task of defending the national and allied territory.[58] However, in a bid for relevancy, the Dutch Army elected to staff the Task Force Uruzgan and its subsidiaries.

Since the end of the Cold War, successive Dutch administrations have reduced funding to the armed forces, as it was perceived that with the end of the Warsaw Pact, a large standing army was no longer necessary. Instead, the Dutch armed forces refocused on peace and stabilisation missions, with counterinsurgency later added to the repertoire of operations. The Dutch armed forces were supposed to function like a proverbial Swiss army knife, with all kinds of functions present in a single package. This approach has left the Dutch military with multiple functionalities, but lacks the ability to continue operations, as most functionalities have been limited to (or below) the bare minimum.[59] Dutch military ambitions have simultaneously declined since the end of the Cold War. In 2006 the Dutch military ambition

56 The mechanized brigade has integrated into the German 1st Armoured division, and the Air Assault brigade has integrated into the German high readiness brigade (Division Schnelle Kräfte).

57 Ivor Wiltenburg, "Het Richten van de Landmacht: Een Assessment van Legervorming en Militair Vermogen met 13 Lichte Brigade als Case."

58 Emilie van Outeren, "Grondwettelijke Taak Defensie Staat op het Spel," *NRC Handelsblad*, 19 May 2016 (Constitutional Tasks of the Army at Risk), https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/05/19/grondwettelijke-taak-defensie-staat-op-het-spel-1622681-a875662; Wiltenburg, "Het Richten van de Landmacht"; Interview Andre Bosman, MP VVD 04-06-2020.

59 Defensie.nl: Nieuwe Commandant voor de Landmacht, https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2019/08/28/nieuwe-commandant-voor-de-landmacht.

included the simultaneous deployment of four battalion-sized elements for a period of three years, as well as a brigade-sized formation in a combat role for a period of one year. In 2018, the Dutch military was only to deploy a battalion-sized element long term, complemented with a battalion and a brigade-sized element short-term.[60] In reality, however, even this level of ambition was and is not attainable by the Dutch Army after years of financial deprivation.

The Dutch Army thus found itself in somewhat of an ambiguous operational environment. Expectations from NATO, the US and the EU include fully equipped combat formations, but concurrent policy makers are not keen to deploy or equip these in a combat role.[61] Deployments are inherently expensive, and invariably lead to additional wear and tear, as well as a fallback in combat readiness after deployment. Rather, the Dutch armed forces prefer to use the time and resources to prepare the formations for future use and to keep the emphasis on the 'combat' theme in training.[62] Whilst the Dutch forces still possess state-of-the-art equipment, the retrenchments have led to a substantial loss in both capacity and capability. However, the aggression by states such as Russia, China and Iran have provided a sincere incentive to increase defence spending.[63] Furthermore, American ire on the unwillingness of many NATO-members, including the Netherlands, to spend 2 per cent of their BPM on defence has further pressured an increase in the Dutch defence budget.[64] The recent increases in budget were primarily used to procure conventional systems in order to restore the manoeuvre warfare capabilities. This repairing of lost capabilities and capacities was much needed, exemplified by signals from both inside as well as outside the Dutch Army. Recently, a NATO review on the Dutch defence capabilities and capacities by NATO's Policy and Planning Committee was highly critical, citing the mismatch between Dutch and NATO priorities and lack of heavy manoeuvre capability for the Dutch Army especially.[65] For the Dutch Army, this denotes amends to the capability and combat capacity of its three

60 A. Bijleveld-Schouten, Defensienota 2018 - investeren in onze mensen, slagkracht en zichtbaarheid, https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2018Z05368&did=2018D21622

61 Lt. Gen. Wijnen, CiC Dutch Army, Vredesmissies Zijn Geen Toverdrank (Peacemissions Are not a Magic Potion), Ministry of Defence, https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2018/05/30/luitenant-generaal-wijnen-%E2%80%9Cvredesmissies-zijn-geen-toverdrank%E2%80%9D.

62 Martin van der Vorm and Ivor Wiltenburg, "Building without Foundation, the Conceptual Discrepancy of Security Force Assistance," conference paper, Bristol, 2019.

63 MIVD, Vooruitziend Vermogen voor Vrede en Veiligheid, openbaar jaarverslag, 2018 (Dutch Military Intelligence Agency, Foresight into Peace and Security, Public Report, 2018).

64 "Dutch Must Do More to Meet NATO Spending Targets," *Dutchnews.nl*, 29 May 2019, https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2019/05/dutch-must-do-more-to-meet-nato-spending-targets-us-ambassador/.

65 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, NAVO-Veiligheid- Defence Planning Capability Review 2019/20: bespreking van Nederlandse defensieplannen: "More Needs to be Done, and with Greater Priority," Den Haag, 2020.

combat brigades.[66] However, slow economic recovery in combination with the COVID-19 outbreak has led to a slowing down of investments for the Dutch armed forces.[67] With the Dutch armed forces not capable of sustaining any sizable deployment in the near future, the Dutch Army will most likely only participate in smaller missions, like the enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania or SFA-type operations. The participation in smaller missions in a SFA context have several benefits to the Dutch Army. In the first place, it shows the necessity of its forces, countering the 'use it or lose it' tendency as felt by senior policy makers.[68] Also, SFA missions are used as an incentive for Dutch service members to maintain their employment in the Dutch Army, providing them with a 'unique experience' and is often considered an informal reward to be selected for an SFA mission.[69]

4.2 The Decision Path to Uruzgan

In December 2005, Dutch parliament was informed by the Dutch government about the upcoming mission to Uruzgan.[70] The Dutch contribution to ISAF Stage 3 (Southern Afghanistan) was mandated in order to improve the stability and security, to increase support of the local population for the Afghan authorities, and to decrease the support to the Taliban and associated armed groups.[71]

The initial NATO campaign plan for ISAF, approved in 2004 by the North Atlantic Council (NAC), focused on the ISAF deployments in the North and West of Afghanistan. For these areas, the 2004 campaign plan was deemed still sufficient. In relation to the 2006 extension of the ISAF mission in the south and later the east of Afghanistan, where the security situation was less permissive compared to the other parts of the country, it was assessed imperative to adjust the campaign plan. This adjusted campaign plan had been approved by the NAC in 2005 and would be implemented in 2006. The overall goal of the ISAF deployment remained unaltered: assisting the Afghan government by improving stability and security. However, the adjusted campaign plan would allow ISAF, including the Dutch forces, to operate in a more robust way if the situation so demanded. This would include the "execution of

66 Wiltenburg, "Het Richten van de Landmacht.

67 NAVO-Veiligheid-Defence Planning Capability Review 2019/20: Bespreking van Nederlandse defensieplannen: "More Needs to be Done, and with Greater Priority," 10/07/2020.

68 Interview Dutch former member of parliament 132, 04/06/2020; Interview Dutch Army commander 134, 10/07/2020.

69 Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019.

70 For further reading regarding the political process leading to the Dutch participation to the ISAF mission in Uruzgan, see: Grandia, *Deadly Embrace: The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand*; Lenny J. Hazelbag, "Political Decision Making of the Mission in Uruzgan, a Aeconstruction," *Complex Operations: Studies on Lebanon (2006) and Afghanistan (2006–present)* (2009).

71 Paul Ducheine and Eric Pouw, "Legitimizing the Use of Force: Legal Bases for Operations Enduring Freedom and ISAF," in *Mission Uruzgan* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

offensive operations against armed opponents when deemed necessary in order to improve the local security situation."[72] It was assessed that the improvement of good governance, efficient host nation security forces and the implementation of the rule of law would form important parts of this operation. To this end, Dutch ISAF personnel would also be tasked with "enabling rebuilding activities and conducting CIMIC and reconstruction activities."[73]

The integration of efforts between the Afghan security services and the Dutch Army efforts was emphasised in the letter to Dutch Parliament. The Dutch concept of operations recognised a population-centric approach for the Dutch military presence as key to a successful mission. To this end, the Dutch would "show respect for all parts of the population, have an open attitude, and conduct 'presence patrols' and have extensive contact with the population."[74] Any patrols and possible offensive operations would, in principle, always be conducted in close cooperation with the Afghan security forces.[75]

After the Dutch government had communicated its intent in taking part in the extension of the ISAF campaign earlier in 2005,[76] several reconnaissance detachments travelled to Uruzgan province for a fact-finding mission. The first, a four-man strong contingent of a *National Intelligence Support Team* (NIST), arrived in the provincial capital Tarin Kowt on 11 May 2005. Its objective was to gather data on the terrain, the people, the Afghan government structures and coalition forces already present in the area. The report produced by this reconnaissance party stated that in Uruzgan, the security situation was deteriorating.[77] A subsequent fact-finding mission by Dutch Special Operations Forces (SOF) reiterated this message. The commandos scouted the area together with Australian and US SOF already in Uruzgan, and concluded that the main effort would be combating the Taliban, and that little reconstruction had taken place. In fact, the detachment of the "Korps Commandotroepen" (KCT), as the main exponent of Dutch SOF capacity, stated that Uruzgan was "Taliban's home turf" and that serious fighting would have to precede stabilising and securing the province.[78] Notwithstanding this assessment, the Dutch government would ultimately decide positively to the deployment, although a significant effort was made to convince predominantly progressive political parties that the focus would lie on reconstruction efforts that would be made to improve the lives of the people in Uruzgan. The political discussion regarding the dichotomy between a 'reconstruction mission' and a 'combat mission' would be a recurring

72 Parliamentary Papers II, 2005–06, 27925, 193; 13.

73 Ibid., 3.

74 Ibid., 14.

75 Ibid., 14.

76 Parliamentary Papers II, 2004–05, 27925, 158.

77 Ten Cate and Van Der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: Dutch Special Forces in Action in the 'New World Disorder'*, 230.

78 Ibid, 231.

event over the next few years, although both terms are non-existent within the Dutch military discourse and doctrine.[79]

After a Deployment Task Force paved the way in the first half of 2006, the first Task Force Uruzgan (TFU), under command of Colonel Theo Vleugels, started operations in Uruzgan in August 2006. In this period, the TFU intended to pursue a classical counterinsurgency campaign, based on the ideas of theorists such as David Galula, Frank Kitson and Robert Thomson.[80] The 'clear-hold-build' adage, which was often used, has its roots in Thomson's writings.[81] It denotes that the counterinsurgency force would have to first 'clear' an area of insurgents, followed by a period of 'holding' the area using armed force, which was to be used to 'build' the relationship between the local populace and the government. The latter aspect was executed in multiple ways, and it was commonly known as 'winning hearts and minds' (WHAM). Indeed, all classical COIN-theorists stressed the importance of the local population, as without local support an insurgency would have little chance of succeeding.

Two Afghan Development Zones (ADZ) were identified around the main Uruzgan towns of Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood. TFU 1 intended to establish a strong foothold in these areas, gradually expanding their influence in the spirit of French general Hubert Lyautey's theories (1854–1934), for which he used the metaphor of a *tache d'huile*.[82] Early attempts by the TFU to win the hearts and minds of the local population included plans to stay and live with the local population, which would include 'platoon houses' in the populated green zone.[83] For tactical reasons however—being close to the population would mean a high risk of close combat with infiltrating ACM, and thus casualties—these platoon houses were relocated to the high grounds further out, resulting in the patrol bases (PB) of Poentjak (Derashan Valley) and Volendam (north of Deh Rawood), which were rather ineffective due to the distance from the local population.[84]

79 Kitzen et al., "Soft Power, the Hard Way"; Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, 170, 176; Parliamentary Papers II, 27925, 203; Hans van Griensven "It's All about the Afghan People: Eén jaar 1 (NLD/AUS) 'Task Force Uruzgan,'" *Atlantisch Perspectief* 31, No. 6 (2007): 4–10.

80 For further reading on this subject see: Frank Kitson, "Low Intensity Operations," *Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-keeping, London* (1971); Leroy Thompson, *Counter Insurgency Manual* (Frontline Books, 2002); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006); Ralph Coenen, "Counterinsurgency Operaties: Geen Succesvol Optreden Zonder Gedegen Kennis." *Carré* (2007): 18-20.

81 For a comparison of classical counterinsurgency theorists see: M. Huizing, "Basisprincipes van klassieke counterinsurgency," *Militaire Spectator* 181, no. 2 (2012): 44–58.

82 A. C. Tjepkema, "Lyautey en de inktvlek," *Militaire Spectator* 177, no. 12 (2008).

83 P. van der Sar, "Kick the Enemy Where It Hurts Most," *Carre*, no. 1 (2007).

84 Interview P. van der Sar by Martijn Kitzen, 28/09/2009.

In the period 2006–2010, the Dutch Army deployed Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams, or OMLTs in Afghanistan. This was a direct result of the expansion of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation into the south of Afghanistan. In December 2005, the Dutch parliament was informed by the Dutch government per an Article 100-letter about the upcoming mission to Uruzgan. The mission was mandated in order to improve the stability and security, increasing support of the local population for the Afghan authorities, and to decrease the support to the Taliban and associated groups.[85]

The integration of efforts between the Afghan security services and the Dutch Army efforts was emphasised in the letter to parliament. The Dutch concept of operations recognised the support of the population for the Dutch military presence as key to a successful mission. To this end, the Dutch patrol would "show respect for all layers of the population, have an open attitude, and conduct 'presence patrols' and have extensive contact with the population."[86] Any patrols and possible offensive operations would, in principle, always be conducted in close cooperation with the Afghan security forces.[87]

With the implementation of the new campaign plan, more emphasis was thus placed with the reinforcement of the Afghan security services, both the Afghan National Army as well as the different Afghan Police institutions. In the letter to parliament, the ANA would be supported by a single Dutch OMLT, who would educate, monitor and mentor the ANA-battalions.[88] With the addition of the Dutch OMLT to the ISAF campaign, a two-year effort was initiated to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Army in the Uruzgan and Kandahar provinces.[89] This period, totalling four years of Dutch SFA-experience, is best explained in two parts. The first three OMLTs were small units of maximal twenty-four personnel, led by a major, with little oversight from either TFU or BG and with a distinct focus on small unit tactics. Later, when the importance of the SFA-operation sank in, the Dutch OMLT expanded to a broader organisation, with a full colonel in charge. Besides small-unit tactics, the SFA-effort was also eventually expanded towards combat support and combat service support activities. This section will first describe the initial three OMLT-rotations, and subsequently the larger, better organised OMLTs.

85 Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal "Kamerstuk 27925," 22 December 2005, https://www.parlement.com/9291000/d/uruzganbesluit_2005.pdf, 3.

86 Ibid., 1-27

87 Ibid., 1-27

88 Ibid., 1-27

89 The initial period was two years, although ultimately the Dutch commitment would last four years.

4.2.1 OMLT 1

In 2006, the Dutch Army was assigned to staff the OMLTs. Because Military Assistance was embedded in the Dutch Special Forces doctrine, the missions was initially assigned to the Korps Commandotroepen (KCT), as the main exponent of Dutch SF capacity. However, the KCT was unable to execute this mission, as it was already preoccupied with other operations abroad, including Afghanistan (Kandahar).[90] This led to the decision by the Army HQ to assign the OMLT's staffing to 11 Airmobile Brigade (11 AMB). This elite light infantry brigade complied, subsequently staffing the majority of the early OMLT-rotations.[91]

However, in the planning for the Uruzgan mission, all battalions in the Dutch Army had been assigned a slot in the scheme of rotation for the Dutch Battlegroups, and therefore had few personnel to spare. As it was perceived that the Uruzgan mission was to be one of the most 'kinetic' and inherently dangerous missions of recent years, the commanding officers of the Battlegroups were highly reluctant to spare any, let alone the most capable, NCOs and officers to staff other units such as the OMLT. In the preparation for the Uruzgan mission, the commanding officers of the regular battalions already had to handpick capable NCOs and officers to fill in the gaps in their own organisation before shipping off to Uruzgan. These practices left scarce opportunity to adequately staff the OMLT.

The first Dutch OMLT's staffing was initiated by appointing the commanding officer of a combat support unit of 11 AMB not assigned to participate in the Uruzgan deployment: 11 Mortar Company. This officer, then Major Richard Stet, subsequently handpicked as many able personnel from his own subunit, and subsequently escalated to the brigade level for additional personnel. A brigade-wide search delivered "adventurers and adrenaline seekers",[92] as the mentoring mission was then understood to be a mirror-image of the exploits of the US Operational Detachment Alpha's 595, in what was later dubbed by Biddle as the "Afghan model" of operations.[93] In this image, Stet compiled a list of demands which would be held against the experience and capabilities of OMLT-applicants. This list detailed OMLT-personnel to have experience within either an infantry or a reconnaissance unit, and experience as a platoon sergeant for NCOs and as a platoon or company commander for officers. Stet assessed that in order to mentor and train an Afghan unit, first-hand subject matter expertise on the topics that would be mentored and trained would be instrumental. Unfortunately, these demands could not be met, as insufficient numbers of personnel could be located that held these experiences and qualifications. Eventually, a blend of

90 For further reading on the Dutch Special Operations Forces activities during this period, see: Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: het moderne Korps Commandotroepen 1989–2012* (Boom, 2012), 202-233.

91 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 50.

92 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020.

93 Biddle, "Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare," 161.

NCOs and officers was attached to OMLT 1 with only a few meeting the initial commanders' requirements. OMLT 1 also was capped to only twelve personnel, although the ISAF and NATO demands required a twenty-four-man strong team for any OMLT.[94]

Although the Article 100-letter stated that the Netherlands would provide one OMLT for the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, it was unknown to the participants what the mission would constitute.[95] When Stet was appointed in April 2006, he had a three-month window to execute a threefold mission: to assemble and train his team, to formulate an operational concept and to write the job descriptions of the team. At this stage, it was unknown how long the mission would last, and what the scheme of operations would be when in theatre. Through an accidental contact in Kabul, the possibility to take NATO's OMLT training course at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany became known in the Netherlands. Although it became commonplace for later rotations to attend in entirety, the unfamiliarity with the course led to the decision to only send part of OMLT 1 to Germany. As the realities in Germany, Afghanistan and the Netherlands differed somewhat, conflicting information on the OMLT's task and purpose was passed down to Major Stet.

So, unguided by his chain of command, Stet had formulated an operational plan and trained up his team to the best of his ability. Neither the concept of SFA nor operational mentoring had any doctrinal foundation in the Dutch Army at the time, so Stet was left to his own merits with regard to the mission design.[96] As Stet's plan was accorded by his brigade commander and the TFU-commander, then colonel Theo Vleugels, it became apparent that the operations plan as envisioned by Stet would be incompatible with the demands made by the US on any successors of the ETTs—the incumbent mentors to the Afghan forces—whose demands included longer deployments—a minimum of six months, rather than the four that the Dutch Army envisioned—and larger teams and self-sufficiency on both tactical and logistical terms. Still, with the consent of Vleugels, Stet and his team were deployed according to the initial operational plan, lacking half the staff and all the combat support that was deemed necessary by the US.

Major Stet arrived in Afghanistan two weeks ahead of his team. During his first fortnight in Kabul, he was briefed by Canadian and American officers on their expectations of the Dutch OMLT. A field grade officer, Stet found himself stuck between his guidance from Colonel Vleugels and the general grade officers from the US/Canada, restating their demands for a certified OMLT. With the explicit national caveats not to engage in cross-province operations and lacking half of the team, including the 'enablers,' Stet was dismissed with the notion

94 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020, Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 50–51.

95 Ibid., 04/03/2020, Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 52–53.

96 Wiltenburg, "Security Force Assistance: Practised but Not Substantiated," 89–90.

that the ETTs would stay put in Uruzgan as the Dutch, their intended successors, were not in the same league as the US Special Forces and ETTs currently working with the ANA.[97]

Upon the arrival of the rest of OMLT 1 in Afghanistan, an acclimatisation period in Kandahar followed the mandatory three-day OMLT-course in Kabul. During the acclimatisation period, Stet reshuffled his teams as tensions rose between several team members. Stet had envisioned a system of officer/non-commissioned officer duos in his operational plan, who would be attached to the Afghan platoons in order to train them. In this way, the duos would emulate the common Lieutenant/Sergeant pairing that constitutes platoon leadership in many Western armies. Due to the staffing process, however, Stet did not command a homogenous unit, but a mix of officers and NCOs with different backgrounds, including cadre from Combat Support units. Although everyone within the Air Assault Brigade is expected to master basic infantry skills, a significant difference is discerned between the infantry NCOs and the Combat Support officers with regard to their combat prowess. Although this is not necessarily a problem—ANA battalions would eventually also have to be mentored on Combat Support and Combat Service Support issues—the presumption of the OMLT tasks in 2006 was that they would fight unsupported by Western units amongst the ANA. Therefore, the infantry NCOs within OMLT 1 were adamant that their officers would match their combat skills. As it were, a certain level of distrust had developed during the first combined training exercises, which culminated during the field training exercise in Hohenfels and resurfaced in the initial stages of the deployment.

Having to decide between repatriating some of his already understaffed team or reorganising the 'duos,' Stet opted for the latter, resulting in an 'officers duo' and 'noncom-duos.' In both Tarin Kowt as well as Deh Rawood, the duos would report to a team lead, who reported to the command element led by Stet and his executive officer.[98]

In Stet's perception, his OMLT would mentor two Afghan kandaks, including the kandak staff, and OMLT 1 would be supported in that role by the Battlegroup staff. However, upon arrival, he encountered a different situation. Few Afghan soldiers were present in either Tarin Kowt or Deh Rawood. Moreover, he found that the materiel he requested was not present in Afghanistan. A prolonged period of "borrowing and scavenging" equipment for both themselves as well as the ANA, who were woefully underequipped at the time, commenced.[99] The plans Stet had devised in the Netherlands and during his reconnaissance in June 2006 also proved impracticable. As the Dutch were not certified as an OMLT, which was an ISAF demand, the US ETTs and ODA would not hand over the task of mentoring and training the

97 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 54.

98 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 55.

99 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 56–58.

ANA to the Dutch. With the US paying for the ANA, very little Afghan Army capacity would be left for the Dutch. Indeed, only if neither the US ETT nor ODA needed the ANA would the Dutch OMLT have any leeway with the Afghans. Stet also disagreed with the US approach towards the ANA soldiers. Stet attested that "[t]he US ETTs and ODA use the ANA as a forward element to draw enemy fire, which is subsequently engaged with US-led fire. That is not a way to get the ANA to become a better fighting force; they will never be able to operate independently that way."[100]

Thus upon arrival, the incumbent ETT in Uruzgan was adamant in its assessment that the Dutch OMLT was not capable of relieving the ETTs due to its lack of capacity and capability. Without the formal consent of the US through certification, the Dutch OMLT did not have any rights or leverage on the US ETTs and the Afghan soldiers present. Stet quickly recognised the need to get the ISAF certification, and in close cooperation with Vleugels it was decided that reaching this milestone would be the primary objective of the second rotation.[101]

As for OMLT 1, it started cooperation with both the ANA and its American counterparts in Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood, the major towns in Uruzgan province. The cooperation with the Dutch Battlegroup would also have to be initiated, as well as with the TFU staff. Initially, it was unknown whether or not the Dutch OMLT would assist the ANA in the remote firebases Cobra and Anaconda, in the north of Uruzgan. Shortly after arrival, however, it became clear that the US would continue to man both firebases—both of which included an ANA detachment—with their ETTs, and that the Dutch efforts would focus on the ANA present in the largest towns of Uruzgan. The OMLT's operational readiness was low initially, as it had trouble locating its equipment in the logistical chaos of Tarin Kowt. A few of its Mercedes Benz 4x4 vehicles had also been requisitioned by the Dutch Battlegroup, further complicating matters.

As the OMLT was gathering its equipment, Stet had to manoeuvre between national caveats, American interests and the TFU/BG demands. As for the national caveats, Dutch politicians were eager not to be involved with any Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) endeavours, nor to operate outside of the provincial borders. The American ETTs were part of OEF, and as such a form of formal separation between the ETTs and OMLT had to exist, although in practice this distinction was minimal. As OMLT 1 was not a certified OMLT, the ETTs were practically in the lead with regard to the ANA efforts. This was problematic, as very few ANA were present in Uruzgan in 2006. In fact, after a majority of the ANA present were dispatched to FOB Cobra

100 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020.

101 Ibid.

in September 2006, only twenty-two Afghan soldiers were present for the Dutch OMLT to mentor in Tarin Kowt.[102]

With few ANA soldiers present, OMLT 1 focused on two lines of operation. The first line of operations consisted of training the Afghan soldiers in basic military skills such as marksmanship, care under fire and patrolling. The second line of operation consisted of joining patrols of the Battlegroup with the ANA troops present. With respect to the training, one OMLT member remarked that "the soldier skills of the ANA are way below acceptable," citing an Afghan soldier with such poor eyesight that he was unable to hit a target a few metres away on the shooting range.[103] Despite serious qualitative shortcomings, no remedial action was taken by Afghan Army leadership, thus impacting the performance of the ANA as a whole. Still, some progress was made, as ANA soldiers incorporated the OMLT's instructions, according to one OMLT member. Eventually, when the OMLT considered the ANA to be up to a minimal standard, they offered ANA troops to the Battlegroup to perform patrols jointly.[104]

Joining the ANA and Battlegroup during patrols constituted the second line of operations. Following the adage 'put an Afghan face on everything,' an Afghan presence during patrols was valued by the TFU. The cooperation with the Dutch Battlegroup still proved a difficult process, as the Afghan soldiers were initially not trusted by their Dutch counterparts. Early patrols, even though they were meant to have an 'Afghan face,' did therefore not include the ANA. The OMLT's efforts to initiate combined operations were also repeatedly hampered as the ANA was withdrawn by the US ODA or ETTs to support OEF operations, even at the eleventh hour.[105] Eventually, even though no substantial numbers were available, a few ANA soldiers with an OMLT team were regularly added to a Battlegroup platoon to show the local populace that the Afghan security forces were working together with ISAF. Within weeks, thirty patrols were supported by an ANA presence. Mostly, the ANA were used to make first contact with the locals, or in the case of a house search, have the Afghans themselves enter first.

Considering the ANA presence in Tarin Kowt, the OMLT actually had overcapacity as three OMLT duos were assigned to the provincial capital. Stet therefore ordered his two non-infantry officers to start mentoring the Afghan Security Guards (ASG). The ASG were local security guards who were tasks to guard the outer ring of Camp Holland in Tarin Kowt. This outer ring consisted of a HESCO-wall, with guard towers every few hundred metres. As this ring was too large to withstand a determined attack, it acted mostly as a tripwire for the inner ring, manned by ISAF forces. Initially hired by the US in Tarin Kowt, the 250-odd ASGs

102 Update Effects Model G5: First Assessment per Effect (1/5) in OWD-280706; FRAGO OP Darius in OWD 250906 and 290906.

103 Interview Dutch mentor 23, 29/04/2020.

104 Interview Dutch mentor 31, 12/03/2020.

105 ISAF Eindevaluatie, 95; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 62–63.

were transferred to the Dutch payroll as the TFU took command of the ISAF operations in Uruzgan.

The ASG was however a "rogue bunch," with no uniforms, proper weaponry, night vision goggles or any military training.[106] As Stet had no meaningful work for his combat support officers, and the ASG was in a deplorable state, the two lieutenants started working on improving the soldier skills of the ASG. The guards were eventually provided with uniforms and weaponry via the OMLT efforts. Moreover, the communication between the outer and inner ring was improved.[107] During the deployment, calamities at the gate were frequently settled through intervention by one of the OMLT members, including a number of incidents involving wounded local nationals who reported to Camp Holland in an attempt to receive medical aid. The OMLT would in this case liaise between the TFU and the ASG.[108]

Deh Rawood had a far smaller Battlegroup presence—only a company—and no TFU staff was present at Camp Hadrian. As the smaller of the two Dutch bases, only a single OMLT pair was stationed there. Without the need to confer with a Battlegroup or TFU staff, the OMLT had more autonomy over its own programme. A sixty-man-strong ANA company was present in Deh Rawood, presenting enough opportunity to the OMLT pair to share their knowledge with the ANA. The Dutch collaborated with the American Operational Detachment Alpha in Deh Rawood, which provided far less of an issue than in Tarin Kowt, and joint Afghan/Dutch/American patrols were a common occurrence, despite the ODA being an OEF-unit. To the dismay of the duo in Deh Rawood, the cooperation with the ODA was suspended after the CO OMLT was informed of the intertwining of OEF and ISAF efforts. Still, even with all the limitations and initial reservations between the US, Afghans and Dutch, OMLT 1 managed to participate in forty-four patrols during their four-month period in Uruzgan.[109]

The OMLT 1 team experienced some teething problems due to the unfamiliarity with the mentoring concept. As such, Major Stet considered the OMLT 1 deployment to be a "fact-finding mission," rather than an actual mentoring deployment. The artificial OEF-ISAF partition thwarted both the integration between the American and Dutch forces, as well as the integration between the ANA and the Dutch. As both the OMLT and the ANA contingent were very small in number, it proved impossible for Stet to leave his mark on the broader TFU campaign. Indeed, the TFU commander did not recall any involvement with the ANA

106 Interview Dutch mentor ASG 45, 29/04/2020.

107 Fragо 029 (ASG Comms), OWD-110806 and 260806.

108 Interview Dutch mentor ASG 45, 29/04/2020; Interview Dutch mentor ASG 41, 26/05/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 59–62; Het Parool: Afghaanse Waakhonden voor Kamp Holland, 04/10/2006.

109 Interview Dutch company mentor 61, 19/05/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 96, 28/04/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 66–71.

or OMLT, as his attention was mostly drawn to the logistical issues that troubled the TFU.[110] Still, a number of key takeaways were forwarded to the successors, including the need for a six-month deployment, and a fully staffed OMLT. These conditions were absolutely adamant if the Dutch OMLT was to be certified. In November 2006, OMLT 1 handed over their tasks to OMLT 2.

4.2.2 OMLT 2

As described in the previous section, the overstretched Dutch Army reached out to the Dutch Marine Corps ("Korps Mariniers") in order to backfill the OMLT. Although Marine leadership did agree to fill a number of officers and NCOs within the OMLT task organisation, it also demanded to provide the commanding officer for every other OMLT rotation. As such, Dutch Royal Marine Major Peter Kersbergen was approached in June 2006 if he would be available to command OMLT 2. At that time, he was working as a staff officer at the Marine Training Command in Doorn, the Netherlands. Although he was at the time unknowledgeable of the specifics of the OMLT work, he gladly accepted the challenge. Kersbergen recalls: "we were unsure whether we would operate outside of the wire, or train the Afghans at the barracks. We did not know between who we would have to liaise. I was really at a loss."[111]

With the discussion ongoing on the size of the detachment, Kersbergen was also unsure on the size of the contingent—twelve or twenty-four personnel—nor was he sure on the length of the deployment, as part of the list of demands included a minimum of six months in theatre for OMLTs.[112] This was initially opposed by the Dutch directorate of operations (DOPS) as this would portend that the deployments would be out of sync with the four-month cycle of the Dutch Battlegroups. With Stet only just in Uruzgan, no feedback loop had been established from Afghanistan to OMLT 2 concerning its tasks, utility and challenges. This implied that Kersbergen encountered the same obscurity regarding his tasks as Stet did.[113]

Eventually, Kersbergen received two separate mission statements. The first was to "prepare the Afghan army so that they are capable of independent operations, to the extent that they no longer need our assistance at all."[114] Secondly, whilst already in Afghanistan, Kersbergen was informed by the commanding officer of Regional Command South, Dutch two-star general Van Loon that "certification would be his utmost priority" during the upcoming

110 Interview Dutch TFU CO 98, 08/07/2020; Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020.

111 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 69, 09/03/2020.

112 NOTA C-OMLT aan C-MTC Kolmarns Swijgman: Knelpunten en Lessons Identified NLD OMLT-II, 28/06/2008.

113 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 69, 09/03/2020.

114 Ibid.

deployment. Informed by these intents, Kersbergen led OMLT 2 during its six-month rotation in 2006 and 2007.[115]

Kersbergen would meet most of his team at the OMLT field training exercise in Hohenfels. His team would constitute fifteen Royal Dutch Marines, complimented with eight Royal Army officers and NCOs.[116] His team was generally very experienced, as it included a number of late-entry officers and senior NCOs with already long operational careers. Like the first rotation, OMLT 2 had no higher echelon available to set the conditions for effective pre-deployment training, and so under Kersbergen's leadership, OMLT 2 set of to prepare its pre-deployment training themselves. The Hohenfels exercise provided OMLT 2 with an outline of the general OMLT tasks, and it also provided the team with the opportunity to get to know each other as, like the first OMLT, it was staffed in an ad hoc fashion.[117]

"You will do *anything* to get yourself certified," was the specific instruction of Major General Van Loon to Major Kersbergen. General Van Loon was the first Dutch general to command RC/S, and as such held responsibility for ISAF's activities in Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand during his six-month tenure from 1 November 2006 until 1 May 2007. Naturally, it was somewhat easier for Dutch officers to reach out to a Dutch general than either a British or Canadian officer. As the OMLT was still understaffed and underequipped relative to the ISAF benchmark, Kersbergen had little confidence that the DOPS would reinforce the OMLT on short notice with either personnel or equipment, Kersbergen decided that the certification had to be done through "grey area bookkeeping," as he called it, alternatively dubbed "the greatest lie ever told" by his team members.[118] In order to get certified, OMLT temporarily recruited JTACs, military nurses, drivers and gunners from the Battlegroup to present to the US staff during OMLT certification courses in Kabul and Kandahar.[119] Some of these staff would be appropriated by the OMLT permanently, as understaffing was still and issue.[120] Objecting Battlegroup officers, reluctant to detach personnel, were asked by Kersbergen to inform Major General Van Loon himself on the reasons why their objections would constitute a more important argument than the generals' direct orders. Indeed, at some point, the entire vehicle park of a Battlegroup mechanised company was presented as if it were OMLT assets to the US certification officers. Kersbergen ultimately was successful in attaining the certification, as by the end of January 2007, the Dutch OMLT got certified

115 Ibid.

116 Verslag werkbezoek CS MTC aan OMLT 2-3 te Hohenfels, 11–14 September 2006.

117 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 72.

118 Memorandum aan Kol TWB Vleugels, NLD-OMLT II Knelpunten validatie 03/01/2007; Interview Dutch mentor 112, 20/04/2020.

119 Interview Dutch mentor 112, 20/04/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 42, 28/05/2020.

120 Interview Dutch mentor 113, 12/04/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 74.

by ISAF. More importantly, the certification was permanent, so that not every subsequent rotation had to go through the same process.[121]

OMLT 2 reached an important milestone in becoming the first Dutch OMLT to be able to operate without US ETTs or ODAs. Moreover, utilising his more experienced staff, Kersbergen initiated the mentoring of the Afghan staff officers in the kandak, structuring the OMLT's training efforts and administration. With still few Afghan soldiers present in Tarin Kowt or Deh Rawood, independent operations were still rare, but patrols were now conducted together with the Battlegroup in a more structured fashion. In making an effort to adept the "Afghanisation" of the mission, more and more Battlegroup patrols included ANA/OMLT elements, and in March 2007 the first stand-alone ANA/OMLT/PRT patrol was conducted without a Battlegroup element.[122] This period also included the first operations in which the combined ANA and Battlegroup patrols exchanged fire with Taliban elements, sometimes leading to chaotic situations as the patrol's leadership had to deal with both the enemy as well as the ANA element, which did not necessarily react to fire as planned or agreed or ordered.[123]

As the Battlegroup stated its desire to have the Afghan forces on point in 'cordon and search' operations and patrolling the villages, the need to train up the ANA to the point that they were capable of executing basic infantry skills such as house clearing operations and covering movement with fire became apparent. OMLT 2 encountered difficulties in training the ANA to this level, as the Afghan soldiers often showed little coherence whilst under fire.[124] During Operation Koch, a cordon and search aiming to neutralise an identified Taliban hotspot, the ANA was ordered to breach the houses and search the compound whilst covered by the Battlegroup. Despite extensive tape drills and training efforts, the ANA was deemed not ready for such complex operations by its OMLT-trainers.[125] Pushed by TFU leadership as the commander of TFU 2, Colonel Van Griensven, wanted Afghans in first during house searches, the operation would proceed as planned.[126] Unfortunately, the lack of tactical proficiency showed as one ANA soldier was killed as he deviated from his drills and exposed himself to

121 NOTA P. Kersbergen aan C-MTC Kolmarns Swijgman, Knelpunten en Lessons Identified NLD-OMLT-II, 3.

122 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 69, 09/03/2020; OWD 070307; P. ter Velde, 188.

123 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 42, 28/05/2020.

124 Interview Dutch company commander 12, 16/06/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 54, 25/06/2020; Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 82, 02/04/2020 & 22/04/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 33, 06/04/2020; Interview Dutch TFU CO 59, 24/06/2020.

125 Interview Dutch mentor 112, 20/04/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 42, 28/05/2020.

126 Powerpoint 'AAR Operation Koch' from SFTF Viper (unclass) 06/02/2007; 'AAR COM TFU', H. Van Griensven, Initial Commanders Assessment Operation Koch, (unclass) 12/02/2007.

enemy fire in the door opening. Another was wounded in the leg in the same incident.[127] Narrowly escaping casualties themselves, operation Koch showed the vulnerability of the OMLTs as its members had the dual task of guiding their trainees while covering their own positions as well. The trait of ANA soldiers to break with the drills and intended course of action on the moment supreme did lead to harsh criticism from both TFU leadership as well as the Dutch Special forces which were leading the operation. The Dutch SF commander even went as far as to state that he would decline to work with the ANA again, considering their bad level of soldiering during the operation.[128] The critical remarks on the ANA were seconded by many other Dutch OMLT members, who also voiced unfavourable remarks on the Afghan skill set.[129]

Despite the calamities during Operation Koch, the practice to have the ANA walking point, reminiscent of the criticised ODA/ETTs tactics during OMLT 1, became a regular feature in future house search operations and other patrols in urban areas. By the time OMLT 2 handed over to the OMLT 3 and left Afghanistan, they had been successful in having the Dutch OMLT certified, patrols were conducted both together with, as well as independent of, the Dutch Battlegroup and a huge administrative effort was made to galvanise the Afghan combat service support to the ANA brigade in Uruzgan. In May 2007, OMLT 2 handed over their responsibilities to the third OMLT rotation.

4.2.3 OMLT 3

In May 2007, OMLT was thus relieved by OMLT 3, led by Army Captain[130] Bossmann, the commanding officer of the elite Pathfinder platoon of 11 Air Assault Brigade. Bossmann had the advantage that he had first hand OMLT-experience in his platoon, as several of the Pathfinders had been a participant in OMLT 1. These NCOs would not return to Afghanistan for a second OMLT tour, so 11 AMB would have to staff OMLT 3 otherwise. As the Army was already heavily committed in Uruzgan, Dutch Army HQ expected the Dutch Marine Corps, which was mostly uncommitted to any operations, to provide the majority of the team. However, Marine leadership adhered to a former agreement of twelve Marines per OMLT, and Army HQ would not back down from an earlier statement that it could only provide eight out

127 Ivor Wiltenburg and Lysanne Leeuwenburg, *The Battle of Chora: A Military Operational Analysis of the 2007 Defence of the Chora District Centre in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan* (War Studies Research Centre: NLDA Press, 2021), 34; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 80–84.

128 Powerpoint 'AAR Operation Koch' from SFTF Viper (unclass) 06/02/2007; 'AAR COM TFU', H. Van Griensven, Initial Commanders Assessment Operation Koch, (unclass) 12/02/2007.

129 Interview Dutch mentor 33, 06/04/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 84, 12/05/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 42, 28/05/2020; Interview Dutch company commander 12, 16/06/2020.

130 Bossmann was promoted for the duration of the deployment, mostly because his Marine counterpart was a major and was to function as his executive officer.

of twelve personnel due to being stretched by the Uruzgan mission.[131] Although the Army's statements were an exaggeration, these petty interservice rivalry issues led to the sub-par staffing of OMLT 3, as only twenty out of the required twenty-four personnel were eventually assigned. Especially the Army component was understaffed, as two appointees were dropped during the pre-deployment phase due to unsuitability, leaving eighteen OMLT members.[132] Also, half of the Army detachment originated from other combat arms than the infantry, such as the cavalry (tanks) or the artillery. These servicemembers, although knowledgeable on tactics, lacked the small unit/close combat expertise that was expected from the OMLT.[133] A mid-term addition to the Army OMLT during this rotation was both unexpected as well as unwanted, and the newcomer was unable to cement his place in the team, as well as being considered redundant by the rest of the team.[134] The Marine component of OMLT 3 also experienced some issues in its staffing, as the Marines were drawn from the Surface Assault & Training Group in Texel, which main tasks do not include close combat operations, but rather supporting the Marine battalions with amphibious capacity, knowledge and training. Although all Dutch Marines have undergone the same basic training and are therefore considered capable infantrymen, ex post their deployment members of the Marine detachment did consider themselves rusty in their combat skills.[135] This view was seconded by the TFU leadership reflecting on the OMLT performance.[136]

All the above led to the commander of 11 AMB, Brigadier Marc van Uhm, to formally report to Army HQ that OMLT 3 was not to be considered operationally effective. He wrote in a formal note to the Commander of the Dutch Army, his older brother Lieutenant General Peter van Uhm, that the OMLT would be of limited operation capability:

> In the first place, OMLT does not consist of 24 persons. According to my information, CZSK[137] would provide 16 persons, and CLAS[138] 8 persons. For reasons unknown to me, CZSK only provided 12 service members. Of the 8 servicemembers provided by CLAS, 2 have been found unsuitable for deployment. Furthermore, I have rated two of the remaining 6 members as of limited capability for the OMLT as a result of their military

131 Brigadier General Evers, in an informal address to OMLT III (Army) members January 2008, Apeldoorn.

132 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 82, 02/04/2020 & 22/04/2020.

133 Nota Brigade General M. van Uhm; Notes taken during conversation between the G5 of 11 Brigade, and the senior officers of OMLT III.

134 Interview OMLT 3 focus group.

135 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 64, 08/04/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 54, 25/06/2020.

136 Interview Dutch TFU CO 59, 24/06/2020.

137 Commando ZeeStrijdkrachten, Dutch military acronym for the Dutch Royal Navy.

138 Commando LandStrijdkrachten, Dutch military acronym for the Dutch Royal Army.

> background and experience. The commanding officer of OMLT-3 will have to assess on a case by case basis if participation to an assignment is a responsible course of action.

As this note was sent in carbon copy to the TFU-2 and -3 commanders, both were informed of the staffing issues of the OMLT 3.

The ad hoc staffing of the first three OMLTs led to tension amongst its members. Especially in OMLT-1 and -3, the respective commanding officers doubted the ability of parts of the team to function in combat.[139] Due to the brief interval between assignment and deployment, few OMLT-members were able to address these issues in additional training or education. Furthermore, the impromptu nature of the staffing process led to a mix of personnel from the services. Encountering institutional rivalry, authority and seniority issues as well as clashing personalities, the OMLT 3 team was divided over institutional lines. The short pre-deployment training proved to be insufficient to iron out tactical, personal or institutional differences. This was epitomised by the assessment from the American supervisor of the three-week OMLT training in Hohenfels when assessing OMLT 3:

> The current command structure of an Army captain as the Team Commander and a Marine Major as the second in command is a very difficult position for the officer in charge. Although this mission is an Army-led mission having a second in command that is of higher rank was obviously an issue. Even if the officers get along with each other and discuss this odd situation, there will undoubtedly be times where the second in command of higher rank will have issue with the decision of the Commander. This can lead to friction on the team that could cost the lives of soldiers.[140]

Besides the rank issues between the senior Army and Marine officers, the same appeared to be the case amongst the junior NCOs: "Also, with the difference in rank structure and time in service between the Army and Marines, there were times that older Marine Corporals did not want to listen to younger Army sergeants." The issues amongst the NCOs could be traced back to corporals in the Marines not being considered NCOs, whilst in the Army corporals would be considered junior enlisted personnel. In most cases, including the aforementioned rank disparities, a temporary promotion would be granted to the company grade officer or NCO.[141] Although this formally solved the problem, problems in relation to the chain of command would continue for OMLT 3 throughout the deployment.

139 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 73, 04/03/2020; Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 82, 02/04/2020 & 22/04/2020.

140 William P. Brodany, Major US Army, Hohenfels 18/2/2007.

141 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 69, 09/03/2020; Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 19, 10/06/2020.

Brodany continued his broadside on the divided OMLT 3 on other pressing issues:

> There were several issues with the integration of Army and Marine personnel. First we noticed that there were times that some of the Marines did not want to listen to the order and guidance of the Army soldiers. As an example, this also led to times where they did not want to perform simple tasks such as using proper individual movement techniques while under fire. The Army and Marine Corps definitely had different doctrine and techniques for accomplishing mission objectives and tasks. We noticed that the team did not have the time before their training at Hohenfels in which to train together as a unit and develop the Standard Operating Procedures in which to overcome these differences between the two services doctrine.[142]

The differences in doctrine, SOPs, operational background and rank structure as well as unresolved personal animosity before deployment did not only affect OMLT 3, but also had been an ongoing issue for the Dutch OMLT in the first three rotations.

Returning from Hohenfels training area, the senior officers of both the Army and the Marine detachment were summoned by the brigade G3 (operations) in order to mend relationships and attempt to come to a working solution. It was decided to follow the US advice and split up the team over service lines. To solve the rank issues, Bossmann would be temporarily promoted to major. Now divided into OMLT 3A and 3B, Bossmann decided to detach the Marines after arrival in Afghanistan to the ANA units in Kandahar and Deh Rawood, and base the Army OMLT team in Tarin Kowt, close to the TFU and BG HQ. With both senior officers split geographically, the Army and Marine OMLT detachment would eventually be able to function independently. Indeed, the entire chain of command was unclear to Bossmann during the pre-deployment period, so he was instructed by Brigadier General Marc van Uhm only to respect the orders of the commanding officer of the TFU himself.[143] With these directions in hand, Bossmann was able to position himself as a direct subsidiary of the TFU, in effect on the same level as the Battlegroup commander, the PRT and the Australian Reconstruction Taskforce (RTF). As Army HQ or the 11 AMB brigade considered their tasks limited to the formation and preparation of the OMLT, Bossmann received little instruction on the mission or expected end state of his deployment.[144] During the mission brief, in the paragraph concerning the execution of the mission, Bossmann found that he was to be involved in "training and train/accompany the ANA with all training and operational activities they put forth in the context of the cooperation with the Task Force and the Battlegroup."[145] As

142 William P. Brodany, Major US Army, Hohenfels 18/2/2007.

143 Nota on OMLT 3, 11 Brigade, private archive S. Bossmann

144 Operatiebevel nr 20 (Formering en gereedstelling Operational Mentor [sic] and Liaison Team 3 voor BG 3 en 4).

145 Ibid.

this left room for interpretation, Bossmann would have to present a more specific mission statement to his team.

Lacking both the numbers as well as the experience, Bossmann did not intend to build on OMLT 2's administrative efforts, much to the dismay of his predecessors. A natural combat leader, Bossmann intended to focus on independent platoon and company patrols by the ANA, thereby supporting the TFU counterinsurgency effort. The first Battlegroup commander had assessed that he would need fifteen platoons to conduct an effective counterinsurgency, but he only had the possession of twelve.[146] ANA platoons patrolling the area would represent a significant reinforcement of the COIN efforts.

Moreover, OMLT 3 was the first Dutch OMLT to have enough ANA troops present to actually participate in operations without continuous support from the Dutch Battlegroup. After repeated requests from the Battlegroup, the TFU and also the ANA themselves, the ANA battalion was reinforced with another full-sized company.[147] As Bossmann had been a small unit leader without any staff experience or even experience on company level, he was neither willing nor able to mentor the ANA kandak staff adequately. Indeed, the entire team was by far the most junior of the early OMLTs. As part of the OMLT assignment included mentoring ANA staff officers, Bossmann assigned junior company officers and NCOs to the Afghan kandak's section chiefs, which yielded little results and was quickly abandoned. Recognising that 'mentoring' Afghan officers and NCOs on the kandak-level would not constitute to a fruitful mission, Bossmann resorted to aggressive patrolling outside of the wire, which was more in his comfort zone, and warranted given the growing pressure from the Taliban in Uruzgan.[148]

Coincidentally, OMLT 3A would be part of two watershed moment for the Dutch Armed forces. The Chora district in Uruzgan province was visited regularly by Dutch patrols, but after Taliban forces attacked and occupied one of the Afghan National Police posts in the district on 26 April 2007, Dutch commanders decided to post a permanent presence in Chora. However, this decision necessitated the Battlegroup to occupy the main bases in Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood, as well as the patrol bases Poentjak north of Tarin Kowt and Volendam near Deh Rawood. The patrol bases were resulting from the Dutch attempt to emulate the British platoon house strategy in Helmand; however, like the British in 2006, it left the Battlegroup stretched. As the Taliban pressure on the Chora district did not relent, the TFU commander, pressed for a decision by the company commander in Chora, decided to stay

146 Sar, "Kick the Enemy Where It Hurts Most," 10–17.

147 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 82, 02/04/2020; 22/04/2020; Interview Dutch Army officer 135, 07/05/2021.

148 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 97.

and fight.[149] At this time, it was unclear how many Taliban were opposing the Battlegroup platoons in Chora, but estimations ranged from 150 to 1,000. By ordering all his available troops to Chora, TFU commander Van Griensven hoped to counter the Taliban's attack on Chora. Via local power brokers, the TFU also managed to reinforce the Battlegroup with a local militia, led by future Chora district chief Rozi Khan. Besides the Dutch and Rozi Khan's militia, the ANA was also asked to reinforce Chora. Already, one ANA platoon was present, which was supported by three OMLT members. A CH-47 helicopter carried another sixty ANA and three OMLT members from Tarin Kowt to Chora in the early morning of 17 June.

The following morning, in a battalion-sized manoeuvre, the Afghan/Dutch forces cleared the eastern Baluchi Valley from Taliban presence, albeit in a rather anticlimactic fashion, as very little opposition was encountered. During the manoeuvre, the ANA/OMLT was ordered to advance over the central axis through the green zone, the lush green area irrigated by the river running through the valley.[150] As the Dutch forces advanced on the high ground and—contrary to the ANA/OMLT—were supported by combat support and combat service support elements, the OMLT were cross with the decision to have them advance unsupported over arguably the most dangerous axis.[151] Indeed, the OMLT regularly had to oppose Dutch officers who proposed to have the ANA driving or walking point, with the Battle of Chora a case in point. This observation was corroborated by several interviewees of the early OMLTs.[152]

As for the events in June 2007, they were presented as the "Battle of Chora" by the Dutch Army, and as such a great military victory against the Taliban in Dutch national media. Through a series of roadshows on the major barracks in the Netherlands, the chain of events was also disseminated to the Dutch Army. Some merit could be given to this classification, given the fighting between of 15–18 June, especially when viewed through the lens of a COIN campaign rather than a regular conflict. The role of the OMLT and the ANA was understated during the roadshows, again causing some ire amongst the OMLT participants, although this was corrected several years after the Battle of Chora as all OMLT 3A members received a distinction from the Army.

149 The Battle of Chora has been the subject of an Occasional Paper by the War Studies Research Centre, conducted by the author of this dissertation. For a full report on the Battle of Chora, see: Wiltenburg and Leeuwenburg, *The Battle of Chora: A Military Operational Analysis of the 2007 Defence of the Chora District Centre in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan*; Ivor Wiltenburg, Lysanne Leeuwenburg, and Martijn van der Vorm, "De Slag om Chora deel 1: Een Reconstructie van de Junidagen in 2007," *Militaire Spectator* (2022).

150 Wiltenburg and Leeuwenburg, *The Battle of Chora*, 12–13.

151 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 82, 02/04/2020 & 22/04/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 16, 28/05/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 84, 12/05/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 11, 30/03/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 27, 11/ 06/2020.

152 Interview Dutch mentor 84, 12/05/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 91.

Shortly afterwards, the operation became contentious. Dutch forces were accused of violating international humanitarian law, as well as ISAF's rules of engagement (ROE), starting with a report by the US commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), primarily focusing on the (visually) unobserved use of ground-based fire support in populated areas in the Baluchi valley. Since then, several investigations have been launched to assess the legality of the Dutch reaction. Ultimately, the public prosecutor in the Netherlands concluded that International Humanitarian Law and the Rules of Engagement had been respected.[153] Another consequence of the Battle of Chora was that as this was the first battalion-sized manoeuvre performed by the Dutch Army in decades, it became a benchmark for every ensuing Battlegroup rotation, which invariably emulated Battlegroup 3 in executing a battalion-sized manoeuvre, often resulting in an additional patrol base or combat outpost within the Uruzgan borders.

The second watershed moment involving OMLT 3A was a rather minor skirmish in September 2007. An ANA/OMLT patrol was engaged in a firefight with Taliban insurgents. Coincidentally, a combat photographer had joined the patrol, and his footage was presented to a Dutch journalist present in Tarin Kowt. On 3 October, the Dutch public was confronted with the realities of the counterinsurgency in Uruzgan during at the eight o'clock journal on national television. As the Dutch cabinet had attempted to present the Uruzgan deployment as a *wederopbouwmissie*, a reconstructive effort aiming to rebuild Afghanistan, the footage of Dutch and Afghan forces exchanging fire and being supported by US air support caused consternation. Although the Battle of Chora had already shown the Dutch public that fighting was part of the mission, the televised fighting of the OMLT and the ANA reaffirmed the shift from a benign reconstructive mission to a hard-fought counterinsurgency.

The OMLT 3B team had settled at Camp Tycz near Deh Rawood, where it started to build rapport with the ANA. Again, close cooperation was maintained between the US ETTs and the Dutch OMLT. Unlike the Army OMLT, the Marines could operate in a relatively benign environment, as no troops-in-contact situations occurred during the first few months. However, at the end of August 2007, the security situation in Deh Rawood deteriorated. During a patrol near the town of Pay Chowtu, the OMLT/ANA patrol was engaged with small-arms fire. As the OMLT/ANA were disengaging, one Afghan soldier was hit in the upper leg,

153 See: AIHRC and UNAMA joint investigation into the civilian deaths caused by the ISAF operation in response to a Taliban attack in Chora district, Uruzgan on 16 June 2007; Openbaar Ministerie: "Geweldsaanwending Chora rechtmatig" (persbericht, 30 June 2008); Human Rights Watch, "Troops in Contact: Airstrikes and Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan" (8 September 2008); Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission/United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Note: In 2023, a Dutch court judged the engagement of an Afghan Quala to be 'unlawul'. See: https://www.prakkendoliveira.nl/en/news/2022/dutch-bombing-of-quala-during-battle-for-chora-deemed-unlawful accessed 05/05/2023

and first aid had to be administered by the OMLT whilst still under fire. The OMLT also called in a MEDEVAC helicopter to evacuate the wounded ANA soldier.[154]

The infiltration by Taliban forces into the countryside near Deh Rawood in late 2008 led to frequent exchanges of fire between the Battlegroup and the insurgents. As Taliban pressure increased, Afghan police posts near Chutu and Dizak, located on the westbank of the Helmand River, were either overrun or withdrawn from by the ANSF. The furlough of the OMLT coincided with the increased Taliban pressure, and subsequently understaffing, as Dutch service members are allowed leave during a six-month deployment. As the ANA patrols had to be supervised, Marines were transferred from Kandahar to Deh Rawood. During an ODA-led patrol, the ANA was again put forward to clear houses. The two Marines who were attached to the ANA platoon witnessed an "excess of firepower and air assets which laid the foundation for the ANA to go forward, however with minimal support from the ODA." Again, the cooperation between the OEF, ISAF and Afghan forces provided the OMLT with a dilemma, but like the Dutch Special Forces, the solution was eventually found in that the Dutch would operate "in support of coalition partners," which provided a legal loophole to formally separate the ISAF and OEF actions.[155]

A few days later, in late September 2007, OMLT 3B found itself again under enemy fire whilst patrolling together with the ODA and ANA. A small convoy consisting of four American Humvees and five Ford Rangers with twenty-four Afghan soldiers moved towards Kakrak Hill, north of Deh Rawood. The US Special Forces had an AC-130 gunship available, which was used pre-emptively on several locations before the ANA/OMLT combination was moved towards qualas where Taliban forces are expected. Although no insurgents were found, the Marines were engaged later that day. Again, the AC-130 was used to repel the Taliban forces, albeit this time the Dutch Marines pointed out the targets as the American JTAC had no eyes on target. Eventually, the patrol withdrew to a Dutch patrol base in Deh Rawood, called Volendam. As a result of the volume of firepower which was put down on targets by the American Special Forces, questions were asked by the Dutch parliament.[156] The Dutch Minister of Defence informed Parliament that possibly more than sixty Afghan civilians were killed as a result of ANA operations on 25 and 26 September 2007. As the ANA had neither air assets nor JTACs, this statement is a fallacy. Indeed, this research indicates that the air assets used to engage targets during the patrols on 25 and 26 September were ODA-controlled

154 Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 46, 14/05/2020 & 08/06/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 36, 27/05/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 122–23.

155 Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: het moderne Korps Commandotroepen 1989–2012* (Boom, 2012), 244.

156 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, "Aanhangsel van de Handelingen," 2 December 2010, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/ah-tk-20102011-662.html.

American air assets.[157] This observation is particular, as the fierce reaction of Parliament on the Dutch use of air and fire support which caused civilian casualties during the Battle of Chora was disproportionate to the rather resigned response on this similar case. As it were, the Dutch (mostly OMLT) involvement was downplayed by the Ministry of Defence, and no further action was taken.

With pressure on Deh Rawood, the TFU, under new leadership as Colonel Nico Geerts had taken over from Van Griensven, executed operation Spin Ghar, a large operation including Dutch, American, Australian and Afghan forces. The aim of the operation was to *clear* the Baluchi Valley (again), and subsequently leave a permanent presence near the Baluchi Valley entrance. To this end, the RC/S reserve, a company of the British Royal Ghurka Rifles, was attached to the Task Force Uruzgan. As OMLT 3A (Army) joined forces with the ANA to support both the Dutch and British companies, the Marines in Deh Rawood participated in a four-day patrol near the Mian Do. The complexity of mentoring the ANA again showed as "the OMLT had to fight, mark the targets for the Battlegroup, and lead the ANA."[158] Although the OMLT did not suffer any casualties, some frustration could be observed in the latter stages of the deployment. A journalist who wanted to join an OMLT/ANA patrol was rebuffed with the remark of a unit commander that he "already had 100 people to babysit," and as such had little opportunity to offer protection to the reporters.[159] An ANA NCO who had joined the Army component managed to shoot himself in the foot as the was toying with his weapon, bemusing although not surprising the OMLT members.[160]

As OMLT 3 entered the final weeks of its deployment, a large increase of the ANA in Uruzgan had been planned since September 2007. As the OMLT teams in Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood had mostly focused on the patrolling and mentoring at hand, the decision to station an Afghan Brigade in Uruzgan had gone by mostly unnoticed. The Marines in Kandahar, however, had been very busy preparing a large convoy from Kandahar Airfield towards Tarin Kowt. This convoy would constitute most of the (American made) vehicles of the 4th ANA Brigade and its personnel. This project was commanded by Colonel Teun Baartman, an old school artillery officer who had assigned himself—he worked at the directorate of operations of the Army—to set up a Brigade OMLT. To this end, several officers had visited OMLT 3 to reconnoitre the locations at Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood. At this time, little was left of the original OMLT 3 structures. The Army OMLT was by now only four strong, as two Army NCOs had left Uruzgan

157 Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2 Vergaderjaar 2007–2008 Aanhangsel van de Handelingen https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/ah-tk-20072008-852.html accessed 01/07/2022; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 123–27.

158 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 127.

159 Interview Dutch mentor 36, 27/05/2020.

160 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 82, 02/04/2020 & 22/04/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 16, 28/05/2020.

for personal reasons, and were now supported by around ten Cavalry NCOs (reconnaissance regiment). OMLT 3A had incorporated part-timers during most of its tenure, as the small team was chronically understaffed. These part-timers included the Colonel's driver, a combat photographer and the aforementioned reconnaissance staff. The Marines were tasked to come over to Tarin Kowt, and were subsequently moved forward to the Poentjak patrol base. Lastly, the Marines who were working in Kandahar joined the rest of the team in Tarin Kowt as they had joined the 4th Brigade convoy.

Baartman was less than impressed by this motley crew of OMLT members. He lamented the OMLT 3's lack of discipline, and considered them to have 'gone native.' Bossmann was equally unimpressed, as formally OMLT 3 had not been positioned within Baartman's chain of command. Indeed, the fact that the OMLT formally reported to neither the TFU or the Battlegroup, and the ANA neither had any command relationship with either the TFU or the OMLT, was a continuing source of friction.[161] Eventually, OMLT 3A redeployed back to the Netherlands late in November, with OMLT 3B staying a couple of weeks longer to ensure that the transition between the new kandak OMLT, who had not yet arrived, and the incumbent OMLT went smoothly. The reconnaissance troop also joined the OMLT for a few more weeks to assist in the transition. As OMLT 3 left Afghanistan, Baartman restructured the OMLT effort along the ANA brigade line, and seventy officers and NCOs had been ordered to staff the OMLT—both the Brigade as well as the kandaks—a more structured unit was now in place. Also, the rank of the OMLT commander, a full Colonel, put him on equal rank with the TFU commander, albeit that the latter would of course stay in charge of the overall operation. Still, the appointment of a Colonel to head the OMLT indicated the increased effort the Dutch Armed forces were making to increase the ANA's potential.

4.2.4 OMLT 4

On 31 July 2007, the NATO Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC) in Portugal, presented a report on the effectiveness of ISAF's OMLTs.[162] Its most important observations included that the OMLT structure did not match the ANA brigades,' and that the age and rank differences between the mentors and mentees impacted the functional relationships. Moreover, the relatively short period of deployment (four to six months for most OMLTs, six in the case of the Netherlands during this period) did not match the ANA's nine-month colour scheme. Lastly, the national caveats of the participating nations had a negative impact on the continuation of mentoring, even in the event of cross-border operations (provincial). This research could not find any indication that the JALLC report had found its way into the Netherlands' Ministry of Defence, although a few adaptations had already been made in a parallel learning loop. The new Dutch brigade OMLT thus resembled the ANA brigade when

161 See: Wiltenburg and Leeuwenburg, *The Battle of Chora*, 57.

162 "OMLTs in ISAF: Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team in ISAF," JALLC, 31/07/2007, 4.

it arrived in Afghanistan in September 2007, and an attempt was made to match the rank of the mentee more evenly, as the brigade OMLT had a substantial number of field grade officers in its ranks.

Although Colonel Baartman had been responsible for setting up the Brigade OMLT, and he enabled the arrival of the 4th ANA OMLT in Uruzgan province, he was quickly relieved by Colonel Rob Sondag as the Brigade OMLT's preparatory phase had been concluded. Under the Brigade OMLT, two infantry kandak OMLTs would be positioned, one staffed by the Royal Dutch Marines, and one by the Royal Dutch Army. The previous rotation had been reformed over service lines due to friction during the mission's pre-deployment training, however in this case this was a result of mission design. The Army OMLT, OMLT 4A, was for the first time formed by a singular unit.[163] 43 Brigade Reconnaissance Squadron (43 BVE), part of 43 Mechanised Brigade, was according to several of its officers selected to replace the Dutch Special Forces detachment 'Viper,' which would leave Afghanistan to enjoy an operational pause in December 2007 and would not return to Uruzgan until 2009, eighteen months later.[164] Although 43 BVE is by no means a special forces unit, it was assessed that its reconnaissance expertise could partially fulfil the special reconnaissance operations as conducted by the Dutch SF.[165] In the summer of 2007, the squadron was retasked to function as an OMLT. Unfortunately, the rationale behind the withdrawal of the special forces capacity could not be retrieved by this research. Still, 43 BVE benefitted from a coherent and prolonged preparatory phase before deploying to Uruzgan. Also, the BVE had a OMLT 2 mentor within its ranks, and one of the officers of OMLT 3A, made the effort to brief the BVE during his leave, so a proper understanding of the situation could be developed through these informal lines.

The commanding officer, Major Gorissen, split the team into six mentor teams consisting of three persons and a small staff, totalling twenty-four personnel. In a conventional conflict, 43 BE would operate in teams of six persons, but considering the many different locations where the ANA was already present, smaller teams seamed more feasible.[166] The shift from six to three persons enabled the BVE to participate in more patrols and be more redundant, albeit at the cost of sustainability.

163 See: OMLT 4A Herinneringsboek.

164 Ten Cate and van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: het moderne Korps Commandotroepen 1989–2012*, 183.

165 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 25, 23/09/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 58, 16/12/2020 & 14/04/2021; Interview Dutch company mentor 83, 23/07/2020 & 08/03/2021.

166 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 25, 23/09/2020; Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 68, 17/08/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 182.

The OMLT 4B team, in contrast, was again a result of a trawl across the Royal Dutch Marine subunits, which yielded twenty-four OMLT members under the leadership of a Marines captain who would be promoted to major for the duration of the deployment. As the trawl resulted in a quantitatively well-staffed unit, the plethora of different personalities and capabilities resulted in discord amongst the Marines.[167] One responded stated that OMLT 4B was "constructed from the periphery of the Marine Corps," while another mentioned that the OMLT was staffed "from all over the Marine Corps."[168] The commanding officer was unable to enforce his authority, and his leadership was formally questioned by his subordinates. This resulted in higher-echelon Marine leadership to appoint a Marine Captain as a 'tactical commander,' with the major de facto reduced to a position of symbolic leadership.[169] Apparently, the Royal Marines were either unwilling or unable to replace the CO by an officer with more authority, resulting in this rather unconventional solution. Moreover, multiple respondents mentioned the rather toxic environment within the OMLT 4B team, which abated somewhat as the five three-man teams were dispersed over the different locations in Uruzgan province.[170]

The OMLT 4B team started operations shortly after arriving in Deh Rawood. Three Battlegroup platoons were stationed at Camp Hadrian, while a third manned patrol base Volendam. Joint patrolling was initially conducted in the Deh Rawood district centre and the area south of the Tiri Rud River. Later the patrolling was moved north, which was less permissive and resulted in the first troops in contact situations for the ANA/OMLT unit. A second incident occurred as the ANA and OMLT were supporting a Battlegroup effort to build a bridge between the patrol base Volendam and a feature called 'Cemetery Hill-North.' During the construction of the bridge, the Dutch engineers and Afghans were engaged repeatedly, which resulted in the death of anV ANA lieutenant. His demise was a blow to morale, as the Marines had recognised the military skill of this particular officer, despite the disparaging remarks that were so common about the average skills of the Afghan soldiers. This chain of events marked the end of OMLT 4B efforts in Deh Rawood, as the 4A detachment was by now arriving at Camp Hadrian.

OMLT 4A arrived a month after 4B in Uruzgan, resulting in a temporary situation that all battalion and company mentoring was performed by Marines (most were part of the 4A team, but its predecessors from OMLT 3, the Marine's 3B team was also still in theatre supporting

167 Interview Dutch tactical CO / advisor 7, 21/08/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 80, 20/01/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor/ instructor 62, 22/09/2020; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 49, 27/10/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 136, 03/09/2020.

168 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 62, 22/09/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 80, 20/01/2020.

169 Interview Dutch mentor 80, 20/01/2020, Interview Dutch tactical CO / advisor 7, 21/08/2020.

170 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 62, 22/09/2020; Interview Dutch mentor 80, 20/01/2020.

the ANA as they had not yet returned to the Netherlands). Upon the arrival of OMLT 4A, Colonel Sondag decided to concentrate the Marines in the Tarin Kowt area, with the Army focusing on Deh Rawood. This decision was opposed by the Marines, as they had spent the last month building rapport with the ANA, had patrolled the Deh Rawood area and were by now knowledgeable about the area and its inhabitants.[171] Moreover, the Marines had issues with the (unfounded) prospect of being restricted to base duties at Kamp Holland.[172]

Meanwhile, the interservice infighting continued as OMLT 4B was accused of appropriating the equipment belonging to 4A, which was possible because the Army detachment arrived somewhat later than its Marine counterparts. This conflict escalated to TFU-level, leading to a formal investigation by the TFU-staff.[173] The interservice squabbles overshadowed the objectives of the OMLT-mission, and continued as the Marine detachment were ordered back from Deh Rawood to Tarin Kowt.

The switch between the teams was completed shortly before a sizeable operation was due in the larger Deh Rawood area. The criticism by the Marine detachment thus held some merit, as the new OMLT would have to work with Afghan soldiers that were by and large strangers to the detachment. The initial assessment by the Army OMLT of the ANA capabilities in Deh Rawood were also rather dire, with one NCO observing that the soldier skills of the ANA were "comparable to Miffy's."[174] On 12 January 2008, operation Kapcha As commenced, with two Battlegroup companies being reinforced with an (OMLT complemented) ANA detachment. Although the initial plan was to conduct a combat reconnaissance from the north towards the south in the Deh Rawood area, the commanding officer of the Battlegroup decided to switch the direction of march 180 degrees. This decision was vehemently opposed by the Battlegroup staff, the company commanders and the OMLT; however, the CO decided to stay with his decision. This left the OMLT with an unprepared assignment with fresh, ill-equipped ANA troops. "The [ANA] soldiers carried a rifle, but that was it. They did not have additional magazines, no bulletproof vests, almost nobody wore a helmet," according to an OMLT NCO.[175]

The first contact with the Taliban during this operation occurred shortly after the operation started on 12 January. Although no casualties were sustained, "the Afghan soldiers fired on everything that moved. One of our team tried to have an Afghan soldier to fire his RPG on a certain quala, but he managed to fire in the wrong direction twice, despite the target being

171 Personal diary Dutch mentor 136.

172 Ibid.

173 Interview Dutch mentor S4, 03/11/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 184–85.

174 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 186.

175 Ibid., 187.

only a short distance away."[176] The OMLT responded to the ANA inaptitude by pre-deploying the ANA infantry groups, and marching them under OMLT control towards the target area, which was a common technique amongst the previous OMLTs. De facto under the command of the OMLT, the ANA did perform admirably at times, even using fire to support a manoeuvre and subsequently clearing a large quala complex. With dusk approaching, the Battlegroup commander decided to go firm for the night. During the night, a series of tactical deficiencies on all levels—Battlegroup, company, platoon, squad and individual—contributed to misconceptions on all levels which had serious repercussions during the night. As one company had progressed further than the other, the subunits went firm unaligned. Although this might be resolved by strict application of sector division, errors were made during the operation. Conflicting reports on enemy movements eventually led to a blue-on-blue incident in which three Dutch soldiers were hit by cannon fire from a Dutch YPR infantry fighting vehicle. The OMLT present at this location were able to retrieve the wounded soldiers to a safer location and administer first aid. Despite these efforts, two Dutch soldiers died from their wounds, with the third sustaining serious injuries to his lower extremities.

On the other axis, the OMLT and Battlegroup soldiers were on high alert as a result from the shooting, and the troop expected the Taliban to be in close proximity to the Dutch positions. Two ANA soldiers—unrecognisable as they had covered themselves with blankets during the cold night—were mistakenly identified as Taliban fighters and killed by an OMLT member and a Battlegroup marksman.[177] By now, Operation Kapcha As had claimed the lives of four soldiers by friendly fire, and seriously injured a fifth. As dawn lifted the fog of war, the TFU commander ordered the operation to be cancelled, much to the dismay of the ANA, who considered withdrawal to be dishonourable. Colonel Sondag later informed the ANA Brigade commander on the death of two of his soldiers, and although the Dutch were forthcoming on the cause of their deaths, the general accepted this as a consequence of war, and was quick to resume his daily routine afterwards.

Operation Kapcha As was intended as the preceding manoeuvre of a larger clearing operation, dubbed Pathan Ghar. Notwithstanding the disastrous outcome of Kapcha As, the new TFU commander's intent—Colonel Geerts was succeeded by Colonel Richard van Harskamp—had remained unchanged with regards to Pathan Ghar. In between these operations, the OMLT was tasked to train up a kandak in Tarin Kowt to support the Battlegroup. However, the American special forces in Deh Rawood, working under the OEF mandate, utilised the

176 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 47, 07/09/2020.

177 Official report Kapcha As, retrieved from TFU archives; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met geweer en Geduld*, 185–95; interview OMLT 4A focus group.

gap between these operations to clear the area in the north of Deh Rawood autonomously.[178] Unsupported by the OMLT, the ODA, together with thirty-five ANA soldiers and 200 militiamen of the Kandak-e-Amniant-e Uruzgan (KAU) moved through the north Deh Rawood area, generously utilising American air and fire support. The KAU was a militia led by Matiullah Khan, a nephew of local power broker Jan Mohammed Khan, who the Dutch had decided to shun due to his unsavoury humanitarian and legal record. The US had no such qualms, and the resulting clearing led Pathan Ghar to be a rather benevolent operation, as most opposing forces had chosen to withdraw for the time being.[179] Also, the TFU, supported by the ISAF reserve battalion known as Task Force Fury, constituted to ascendancy that the Taliban resorted to its common modus operandi and dissolved into the population.[180] Pathan Ghar did little to attrite the Taliban; however, the opposition's absence allowed the TFU to establish yet another four combat outposts c.q. patrol bases, which would, in part, be occupied by the ANA and its mentoring teams on the Westbank of the Helmand river.

In the Tarin Kowt area, the last sizeable operation, Operation Spin Ghar in late 2007, had also resulted in the construction of a few new patrol bases. Patrol base Mirwais was now the new ANA base camp, located a few hundred metres from the White Compound, the government building in the village of Ali Shirzai in the Chora district. In the Tarin Kowt bowl, patrol bases Buman and Kyber were constructed and required occupation. This was bestowed largely on the ANA, who together with their mentors resided in these bases from December 2007 onward. Patrol base Khyber would be the first base without any Battlegroup presence, relying solely on local forces and the OMLT. Although the construction of the bases could be presented as 'increasing the ink blot' to national politicians and general ISAF officers, the conditions were far from ideal for its occupants. The OMLT reported that "we had not received a mission statement before going to Khyber, so we formulated one on our own: charting the territory and clear the area from enemy activity."[181] Another OMLT member added: "we wanted to go out and hunt, kill the enemy and apprehend the Taliban so that the locals could live in peace."[182] Although this restated mission was not by any means a derivative of ISAF's intent with regard to the OMLT, the positioning of a small OMLT detachment with a platoon of Afghan soldiers without a clear mission statement from either the Brigade OMLT or the TFU almost naturally resulted in grassroot initiatives being undertaken. The first concerns, however, were focused on improving the poor defences of the patrol base, as the Australian engineers left well before the project was finished. Moreover, although the OMLT Marines were rather enthusiastic of the opportunity to establish their own fiefdom at Khyber, they

178 Kitzen, *The Course of Co-option*, 435.

179 Kitzen, *The Course of Co-option*, 441–42.

180 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 195–97.

181 Ibid., 219.

182 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 49, 27/10/2020.

would have to do without combat support or combat service support, as no mortars, combat medics, search capacity or forward observers were present at the outpost.[183] Colonel Sondag stated that the "Afghan Army was only of any importance when it was to the TFU's benefit, and it occurred regularly that the TFU forgot that Dutch personnel was also present on the outposts."[184] The situation led to demotivated ANA personnel and frustrated Dutch OMLT staff. The standing rule was that medical support was essential when operating outside of the wire, and in the absence of any combat medics, the Dutch OMLT detachment had to step over this line habitually in order to accompany the ANA on patrols. As it happened, the OMLT had to make do, as only at the end of the OMLT 4 term any substantial improvements were made to the patrol base. The ANA/OMLT presence presented the Taliban with a target of opportunity: IEDs were regularly found during patrols, and the base was with some regularity fired upon from the green zone 150 m from the patrol base. Lastly, the OMLT had to deal with tribal unrest within the ANA, which in one case resulted in the Afghan soldiers discharging their weapons on each other, with the OMLT unable to intervene.[185] Friction between Afghans of different tribal backgrounds was also a recurring issue for the OMLTs.[186]

The expanding number of locations had its effect on the OMLT, as rotating was increasingly difficult. On some locations, OMLT members would stay for as many as six weeks before rotating to Camp Holland, and the austere conditions on the patrol bases had its effect on the OMLT teams and the ANA. A proposal from the Brigade OMLT staff to decrease the number of mentors per location to two was quickly abandoned after criticism from the practitioners. In a sprint towards the finish, the Marines made the effort to fully commit themselves to the outposts until OMLT 4 was relieved in place by the fifth rotation.

4.2.5 OMLT 5

In many ways, the fifth OMLT rotation was a carbon copy of OMLT 4. Again, the OMLT consisted of a Royal Dutch Marine detachment and an Army detachment. The latter was again staffed by 43 BVE, as the unit was large enough to staff two subsequent rotations. The Marines were selected from 2 Mariniersbataljon (2 MARNS), resulting in the first instance that the Dutch armed forces staffed the OMLT by selecting from a standing unit, instead of trawling from the periphery of the organisation. Moreover, the pre-deployment training was performed collectively, positively adding to the unit coherence. The Marines' infantry skills rubbed off

183 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 219; Interview Dutch mentor 137, 02/02/2021.

184 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 76, 02/09/2020.

185 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 224.

186 Ibid. 224.

on the reconnaissance squadron, and the Marines were able to acquaint themselves with the Army's radio systems and procedures.[187]

However, this did not mean that the preparations were a smooth endeavour. One of the officers of the rotation noted that "despite being the fifth rotation, we still felt that no higher echelon took responsibility to staff and train the OMLTs. We had to take care of our own business, which clashed with Army procedures as we were not authorised to train with certain weapon systems."[188] The CO added that he was frequently reminded that the OMLT was "only in an advisory role," and thus the OMLT did have little rights to claim scarce resources and training facilities, best reserved for combat troops.[189]

Also, the communication between the OMLT 4A and its successors had some room for improvement. The decision to switch to three-person mentor teams had not been passed to the fifth rotation, probably due to a technical issue on the secure computer system, but it still resulted in a late adjustment to tactics and techniques for OMLT 5. The reports coming in from OMLT also detailed the combat scenarios as described in this chapter. However, the situation in Uruzgan had since calmed down significantly, leading to a degree of cognitive dissonance as OMLT prepared for combat but instead found the situation in Uruzgan upon arrival to be rather peaceful.[190]

As OMLT 5A (Army) settled in Deh Rawood, the unit was informed that it would have to leave Firebase Tycz. The US Special Forces' base had been the home of the Dutch OMLT since 2006, but the arrival of an additional American police mentoring team meant that the OMLT drawn from the Brigade Reconnaissance Squadron (BVE) had to make way for the Americans. The Dutch themselves contemplated that the arrival of a new ODA—the international relations had always been very strong in Deh Rawood, but the new ODA was rather reticent towards the Dutch—had more to do with the request to leave Tycz. "We always had liaised between the ANA and the ODA,"[191] was the assessment of one of the OMLT officers. "However, the new ODA rather bypassed the Dutch OMLT to do business with the ANA themselves." The integration of the Dutch OMLT with the US ODA had added to the status aparte of the mentors in Deh

187 As a result of the Dutch Marine Corps integration with the British Royal Marine Commandos, the Royal Dutch Marines are better equipped for integrated operations with the British Marines than the Dutch Army. This discrepancy is more detail in Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 94–95.

188 Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 68, 17/08/2020.

189 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 26 09/09/2020.

190 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 238–40.

191 This statement is actually not true, as the American ODAs were in direct contact with the ANA in 2006 and 2007, and only later gave the OMLT some leeway in the communication with the ANA; Sitrep B OMLT 2008/05/17, Interview Dutch mentor S4 65, 03/11/2020.

Rawood, and the services on the American camp were far better than in Camp Hadrian. Also, the cramped Dutch camp had little room to spare for the OMLT, although eventually some room was found, which was sufficient on the condition that at least part of the OMLT was present on one of the outposts. The lack of belonging to the TFU or Battlegroup was common amongst the OMLT rotations, and the forced move from Tycz resulted in one of the interviewees to comment that "the most intense fighting we have done during our tour was always internally, with the Battlegroup staff officers who were safe on a camp."[192]

The uneventful 5A rotation resulted in unopposed patrolling, as well as the opportunity to train and school the Afghan soldiers in soldier skills and military decision-making processes. This yielded results as one NCO witnessed an Afghan sergeant presenting an orders brief on his own initiative, which had not been observed earlier in the tour. Indeed, much effort was put into leadership and military decision-making processes (MDMP), although the OMLTs observed that Western-style structured analysis were unnatural to the ANA, who in the best case had some officers who had received formal military training during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, but more often than not were elevated to the position of officer by virtue of their family's status or even only on their ability to read.

The only combat incident for OMLT 5A occurred at the end of the tour, as the OMLT/ANA supported a Battlegroup patrol near Gharam, in the north of the Deh Rawood district. The long-range exchange of fire did not result in any casualties; however, the ANA reverted to type as the OMLT found it impossible to initiate fire disciple: "the ANA fired back with everything they had to their disposal, despite our inability to observe any enemy."[193] Shortly after this incident, the BVE transferred its mandate to a French OMLT, which terminated the Dutch OMLT efforts in Deh Rawood. As OMLT 4A prepared their transfer to Tarin Kowt and subsequently back to the Netherlands, the differences between the French and the Dutch were already discernible. "When the ANA was left without food, we were usually willing to give them some food money. The French were adamant in their stance that the ANA would have to fetch for themselves."[194] The French drew from SFA-type operations they conducted in Africa, as the French logistical officer stated that "[t]he Africans and Afghans see you as the rich man, and they intend to exploit that fact. They both have their needs, such as fuel, and they want you to provide that. For us and for them it is like a game of chicken; who will yield first? We will give them nothing, that is our solution. They have their own logistical chain, let them use that."[195]

192 Interview Dutch Senior Sergeant mentor 55, 08/12/2020.

193 Interview Dutch company mentor 79, 15/12/2020.

194 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 243.

195 Herinneringsboek Korps Mariniers; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 243.

The Marine mentor team from OMLT 5B was assigned to mentor the ANA in the Tarin Kowt bowl. Its twenty-four-strong detachment was reinforced shortly before embarking to Afghanistan with two special forces-medics, making a twenty-six-strong total: the most numerous kandak OMLT so far. Again, the OMLT was led by a Marine major, but the tactical aspects of the deployment were led by a subordinate officer, the so-called 'tactical commandant.' Like the Army OMLT, the Marines used three-man OMLT teams to support the ANA, but quickly adjusted to four-man teams as they found that an additional man was indispensable. The 5B staff regularly stepped in to provide a fourth mentor, relieving some of the workload. OMLT 5B staffed three outposts like its predecessors, and at the end of the tour a fourth, as patrol base Qudus was also staffed with an ANA detachment. As Tarin Kowt and its surroundings were peaceful during the OMLT 5 tenure, the Marines attempted to teach the ANA the basics of maintenance and logistics. The assessment was that the ANA was more than capable to go into the green zone shooting at everything, but they had a lax attitude towards maintenance. Like the French in Deh Rawood, the 5B Marines were also increasingly unwilling to provide the Afghan troops with food, water, fuel and amenities as it did nothing for the ANA independence on the long term.[196]

Under no pressure from the Taliban, the OMLT also found time to train the ANA on tactics and techniques. One of the OMLT members attempted to have five ANA soldiers take a course in first aid, but found that after a couple of days his class was no longer interested and had decided to skip class, ending the OMLT's initiative. As the Taliban pressure on the Tarin Kowt area increased somewhat during the end of the tour, the Marine detachment was also involved in a few incidents. Despite the Marine's infantry training given to the ANA, the OMLT found that their mentorship revolved around "herding the ANA into firing their weapons to a more or less safe area."[197] "The most direct threat probably came from our Afghan colleagues themselves," as a Marine captain recalled the incidents.[198] Nonetheless, the amount of incidents that involved direct contact had seriously decreased over the summer as the Taliban adapted its tactics, and now used IEDs as it main weapon. Also, the now four patrol bases north of Tarin Kowt which were staffed by ANA platoons gave Dutch politicians the opportunity to applaud the 'Afghanisation' of Uruzgan, as they could now state that the 'Dutch Approach' was working as the 'ink blot' was increasing in Uruzgan. The fact that the progress of the ANA was far more nuanced than Dutch Defence Minister Eimert van Middelkoop proclaimed found its reasons in the Dutch extension of the Uruzgan

196 Ibid., 246.

197 Ibid., 255.

198 Interview Dutch tactical CO / Advisor 37, 01/10/2020; Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 258.

mission with an additional two years, starting in August 2008.[199] Apparently, the need to report successes outweighed a truthful and nuanced depiction of ANA's present maturity.

With the OMLT's mission in Deh Rawood now completed, the 5B team would hand over to another Marine detachment, and the Dutch would also stay in charge of the Brigade OMLT. July 2008 marked the handover of the OMLT to what would be the last Marine OMLT in Uruzgan.[200]

4.2.6 OMLT 6B

OMLT 6 consisted of a Marine detachment, OMLT 6B; however, the French Army had taken over part of the mentoring, resulting in the 6A detachment being staffed with French soldiers. Notwithstanding the earlier success of selecting NCOs and officers from a regular Marine battalion, the 6B rotation was again staffed by assigning Marines who were available and volunteering. OMLT 6B thus consisted of Marines from the Marine Joint Effect Battery (MJEB), a combat support unit, as well as the 2nd boat company, 22 infantry company and the Marine Special Forces unit. The OMLT was led by the commanding officer of the MJEB. Unlike previous rotations, OMLT 6B did not have the opportunity to train with an ANA company in Hohenfels, as it was not available. Instead, the OMLT had to role-play for the Australian OMLT and vice versa.

The new detachment stuck with the previous rotations' modus operandus to assign four OMLT members per team, and in this composition the first patrols were conducted. Again, the OMLT was dispersed over the numerous patrol bases in the greater Tarin Kowt area. As the ANA had by now received training in the MDMP process for years, the ANA NCO who led the first convoy operation to Kandahar in which the OMLT would partake was however still clear about his options under enemy fire: "During the ANA NCOs briefing, it became quite clear that everybody would look at us in the event of a calamity. Because we only just met these soldiers and were unsure about their capabilities, we were happy to assume the leading role, and so we did. The ANA seemed content about this."[201] As the convoy arrived in Kandahar, the OMLT witnessed a number of ANA soldiers jumping out of the vehicles, as they took the opportunity to either take their leave or desert from the Army. As the ANA leadership did not intervene, the OMLT were reduced to bystanders, the general sentiment being that the OMLT should not interfere in these matters.[202]

199 See: "Kabinetscrisis 2010: de Uruzgan-crisis," https://www.parlement.com/id/vicxczwrt5h4/kabinetscrisis_2010_de_uruzgan_crisis.

200 Herinneringsboek Korps Mariniers.

201 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 267; Interview Dutch company mentor 34, 23/11/2020.

202 Interview Dutch company mentor 34, 23/11/2020; Interview Dutch infantryman / instructor 6, 16/11/2020.

As the 6B rotation started the routine of training and patrolling on the patrol bases, it rekindled the attempts to shape the Afghan Army companies into a more effective organisation. On patrol base Buman, the OMLT's attempts to instil the virtues of delegation to the ANA officers did not fall on fertile ground, as the ANA officers insisted on doing everything themselves: "probably a cultural issue," according to a Marine sergeant major.[203]

The insurgents by now used primarily stand-off tactics to harass ISAF and ANA forces. Regularly, 107 mm rockets were fired towards patrol bases, which, however disturbing, had no impact. The IED threat was more tangible, and as the ANA still had its 'inshallah' attitude, the structured searching for improvised explosives was impaired by cultural issues as well as the lack of proper equipment and training.

The effectiveness of the OMLT was also affected by the Afghan soldiers' tendency to have the Ramadan take precedence over ISAF's operational priorities. The annual Muslim custom of observing a month of fasting thus reduced daytime operations to a minimum.[204] Any OMLT-incited operations near the patrol bases were concluded by September 2008, when all Marines were called back to Kamp Holland to support the voter registration in Daykundi and Gizab—both areas being void of ANA or ISAF presence. This project was supported by the fourth kandak of the ANA brigade, but as this was a relatively inexperienced unit, and their assignment was to function as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF), the battalion needed additional training. The QRF was by its nature supposed to perform a number of different tasks, often on short notice, so QRFs needed to be trained on a number of different operational assignments. Again, the OMLT officers took up command, as the 4th kandak officers were considered to be too inexperienced to lead their platoons in complex operations. As the QRF might be deployed by air, the OMLT and ANA practiced in helicopter mock-ups and were briefed on the specifics of air mobility. Unfortunately, no helicopters were available for a full-dress rehearsal, so the makeshift preparations had to make do. Despite violent incidents during the voter registration in other provinces, the Daykundi and Gizab registration progressed without issue, and the Dutch OMLTs were subsequently moved to the Mirabad valley to reinforce the newly constructed patrol base Atiq from 31 October 2008 onwards. OMLT 6B's presence on Atiq was without incident, and on 18 November the OMLT tasks were transferred to an Australian OMLT, allowing the Marines to redeploy to the Netherlands on 26 November.

The Marines' redeployment marked the start of a nine-month period in which no Dutch infantry kandak OMLT was present in Afghanistan. The French had taken over in Deh Rawood, and the Australians served in the Tarin Kowt area together with the ANA. The Dutch OMLT

203 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 273.

204 Ibid., 66, 124, 273, 276.

effort was thus limited by leading and partially staffing the multinational Brigade OMLT in Tarin Kowt.

4.2.7 The Brigade OMLTs

The total ANA presence in Uruzgan was a mere 300 personnel in 2006, but as the counterinsurgency progressed, this number was increased to 2,250 in February 2008, of which about 1,750 were actually present in the province, the rest being on leave, training or AWOL. In 2009, the total number of Afghan soldiers had increased to 3,100 (2,000 actually present). By now, the Afghan Brigade staff numbered 188, including a staff-company, five sections, engineers and fire support and several smaller additions—finance, legal, public affairs, etc. Located in Tarin Kowt on the border between Camp Holland and the ANA camp, the Brigade staff was mentored by a Dutch-led OMLT since late 2007. The ANA commanding officer and his section chiefs were matched by an OMLT officer in order to further professionalise the Brigade staff. However, although the ANA and ISAF were supposed to be complimentary, the early OMLT commanders noticed that an informal culture of apartheid interfered with joint operations. Colonel Baartman, the first Brigade OMLT commander, observed that "the TFU produced an operations order—involving the ANA—but the ANA officers were not allowed to be present at the orders brief. They were formally considered to be 'friendly forces,' but were de facto not considered to be full-fledged."[205]

The second rotations' commanding officer, Colonel Sondag, made an effort to intensify the cooperation between the TFU units and the ANA, attempting to synchronise the infantry OMLTs, the Battlegroup and the ANA's operations. However, it would take to February 2008 before the TFU would integrate the OMLT into its decision-making process.[206] The ANA was still excluded, the TFU citing reasons for operational security. The ANA was clearly not trusted with the classified intel produced by the TFU staff and its subsidiaries. The tendency to solicit ANA troops to fulfil the TFU pretence of an 'Afghan face' during operations was difficult to amend, although progress was made over the years. In April 2008, the ANA brigade was present at a TFU order brief, and in May of that year, regular meetings were held between the TFU staff and the ANA Brigade, with the OMLT monitoring the congregations. These meetings resulted in the sharing of information and intentions between the Dutch and Afghans; however, operational security remains a concern: "The cooperation between the TFU and ANA needed to be better and more forceful, as it was part of the exit strategy. The real knowledge of the population and the enemy was with the ANA Brigade. However, the TFU intel sections always referred to operational security as a reason not to share intelligence.

205 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 85, 02/04/2020 & 22/04/2020.

206 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 76, 02/09/2020.

The wall between the Dutch and the Afghans was higher than we wanted, and it was rebuilt at the beginning of every rotation."[207]

During the next few months, the OPSEC struggles were reduced as the Dutch (and Australians subordinate to the TFU commander) realised that the directives concerning OPSEC "must be relaxed to reflect the cooperation between the ANA and mentors."[208] The Battlegroup was the first to act on these insights as it started to plan and execute operations jointly. However, the TFU staff maintained the practice to "plan an operation and afterwards inform the ANA that they had to join in on the action."[209] As Colonel Ooms handed his tasks over to Colonel Verweij, he reiterated the need for collaboration and partnering as he reminded the TFU staff in his speech that "[o]ne cannot ask for an 'Afghan face,' one should ask for an Afghan unit."[210] Ooms' statement referred to ISAF's commander David McKiernan's new directive, that Afghan units should no longer be trained and subsequently be guided during operations, but that a further integration through 'partnering' would be implemented. This would include joint planning, preparation and execution of operations.[211] To this end, an ops room was set up within the Afghan HQ, and during the tenure of Colonel Ooms, the commanding officers of the Battlegroup paid a visit to the ANA camp with some regularity.[212] Indeed, the cooperation was considered to be more constructive, with a steady increase in the ANA involvement in TFU operational planning. Still, the 'Afghan face' paradigm proved hard to break, as Ooms' successor, Colonel Verweij, also had to remind his Dutch colleagues regularly that requests for "a few Afghans" just would not do.[213]

The combination of McKiernan's directive and new TFU leadership resulted in the intensivation of the Afghan-Dutch cooperation. Colonel Matthijssen's TFU 5 approached the upcoming general election in Afghanistan as a joint effort, and the Battlegroup operation TURA GHAR in January 2009 was considered to be an improvement in joint planning and execution. Still, the OMLT brigade staff felt that the TFU overstretched the ANA's capability to follow the TFU's operational tempo.[214] Verweij felt that when considering the partnering concept, both partners should be comfortable with the task and purpose of the mission, and in this case, the TFU asked too much from the nascent ANA formation. Moreover, the OMLT felt that its tasks had been reduced from mentoring and training to being a catalyst

207 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 1, 08/09/2020.

208 Australian Commanding Officer MRTF2.

209 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 1, 08/09/2020.

210 Afscheidsspeech kol Ooms, Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan.

211 D. McKiernan, "Tactical Directive Headquarters International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)," (Kabul, 2008).

212 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 1, 08/09/2020.

213 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 90, 08/10/2020 & 05/11/2020.

214 Weekly rapport Col. W. Verweij to the TFU staff.

and the mouthpiece of the TFU staff.[215] A final problem for Verweij was that the by now multinational OMLT staff—the Australians had joined the Dutch in mentoring the ANA—had different national chains of command that took precedence over Verweij's intent.[216] Still, glimmers of improvement were observed by both the OMLT and the TFU. Matthijssen stated that "the Afghan National Army has made great strides in its operational process" and "we have also improved the cooperation with the ANA by partnering the ANA brigade staff with the TFU's."[217] TFU 6 commander[218] Brigadier General Middendorp praised the ANA-TFU collaboration during operation MANI GHAR in 2009, which included over 1,000 ISAF and ANA soldiers. The OMLT regarded this operation as an example that the ANA were indeed capable to plan operations.[219] Moreover, in an attempt to integrate the multinational security efforts in Uruzgan, Middendorp attempted to fuse the endeavours of ISAF, provincial leadership, the ANA, local police, the Afghan secret service NDS and the Dutch civilian representative into what would become known as the 'Big Six.'[220] To guide these efforts, a Provincial Operational Coordination Centre (OCC-P) was established in Kamp Holland. As the Afghan Army was ordered to provide staff and leadership to the OCC-P, the Dutch OMLT was subsequently involved in providing mentoring and guidance to working in what in essence was an Afghan operations room.[221]

4.2.8 OMLT 8C

With the departure of the OMLT 6B rotation out of Uruzgan in November 2008, a seven-month period commenced in which no Dutch kandak-level OMLTs were present in Uruzgan. Indeed, the only Dutch service members who were part of the wider OMLT organisation were part of the Brigade OMLT. During the seven-month hiatus, the mentoring and training of the ANA were conducted by French and Australian OMLTs. With the arrival of the 3rd kandak of 205th Corps, the need for an additional OMLT was recognised by the Dutch Directorate of Operations, and in 2008, 43 Brigade Reconnaissance Squadron (43 Brigade Verkenningseskadron, 43 BVE) was again tasked.[222] At this time, 43 BVE was commanded by Gerhard "Joe" Schouwstra, who drew on the squadron's previous experience to both staff and guide his soldiers for the upcoming deployment. Like his predecessor, Schouwstra divided his teams into three-man groups, this time also supported by an organic medical support team consisting of an army nurse and two medics. As the OMLT trios were supposed to be formed around junior officers

215 Interview Dutch OMLT BDE CO 90, 08/10/2020 & 05/11/2020, Interview Dutch OMLT BDE XO 91, 08/10/2020 & 05/11/2020.

216 Ibid.

217 Afscheidsrede Col Matthijssen, Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan

218 As of the 6th rotation, the TFU commander was a Brigadier General, being upgraded from Colonel.

219 Evaluation report Col Verweij.

220 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 166; Interview Dutch TFU CO 100, 17/09/2021.

221 Ibid., 168–69.

222 Ibid., *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 310.

and NCOs, several Corporals were promoted to Sergeant for the duration of the deployment, making them—at least in name—senior enough to participate in an advisory fashion.[223]

As the period between the reception of the assignment and the deployment to Uruzgan was limited, 43BVE made good use of the OMLT veterans within its ranks to prepare.[224] The customary ANA troops supporting NATO's OMLT exercise in Hohenfels had been replaced by US National Guard troops. This proved to be a detriment to the sense of immersion into local Afghan norms and values for the training audience, as the training vis-à-vis a genuine Afghan partner, using interpreters proved impossible. Upon arrival, the pre-deployment detachment was able to acquire vehicles, communication systems and shelter for the incoming OMLT. However, no incumbent OMLT was present as this was the first rotation, and no sign was to be found of the 3rd kandak. As OMLT 8C was only able to scout the terrain, and prepare for any future instruction, a general sense of frustration rose as the detachment could not make sense of the pressure put on the OMLT to quickly deploy to Uruzgan, only to find there was little to do for them in the area of operations. Approximately one month after arrival, the 3rd kandak made its appearance in Tarin Kowt, accompanied by a US Special Forces escort. However, the arrival of the Afghan unit only led to additional frustration as the soldier skills of the arriving soldiers were less than rudimentary.[225] As OMLT 8C's anticipated to mentor and coach the 3rd kandak's participation in company and battalions sized manoeuvres, it had to settle for providing the ANA soldiers with basic marksmanship courses and driving lessons.[226]

A subsequent surprise for Schouwstra's OMLT was that the ODA which accompanied the ANA kandak informed him that although the Dutch were more than welcome to provide training to the Afghans, the 'ownership' of 3 kandak with regards to operations would befall to the Americans. As such, the OMLT would indeed be relegated to a training-only outfit. Eventually, it would require prolonged talks between senior Dutch and American leadership to settle on a compromise. The infantry battalions would be mentored by the US ODA, and the kandak staff, the staff company and the heavy-weapons company would be mentored by the Dutch OMLT. Still, this solution was only addressing the problem on paper. Schouwstra observed that

> as an OMLT we were not taken seriously by either the TFU staff or the OMLT Brigade. Initially, nobody could inform us when we could start working as a mentor, and

223 Herinneringsboek OMLT 8C.

224 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 116, 12/04/2021; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 58, 16/12/2020 & 14/04/2021.

225 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 311; Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 39, 21/10/2020 & 06/04/2021.

226 Interview Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 118, 10/05/2021.

> afterwards, we were pretty much confined to the camp as a training outfit. Moreover, the kandak staff was unwilling to participate in operations, preferring to drink tea and chat. The ANA had a totally different mindset than we had envisioned. With both the TFU as well as the Brigade OMLT seemingly uninterested, we had to resort to formulating our own assignments.[227]

The 2009 elections in Uruzgan brought some work to the Dutch, who were also involved in a convoy operation from Kandahar to Tarin Kowt mid-September. Still, only after the Australian OMLT in the Mirabad Valley (east of the capital) shifted its attention further eastwards, did OMLT 8C find enduring and meaningful work—at least for part of the team. As of the beginning of October, 3rd kandak soldiers and the OMLT would man patrol base Atiq in the Mirabad Valley. For the remainder of their employment, OMLT 8C and the ANA would patrol the immediate vicinity of PB Atiq. As OMLT 8C had not been incorporated adequately into the larger OMLT/TFU force structure, the individual members were forced to scrounge for personnel and materiel. Through a military acquaintance, 60 mm mortars were acquired, and an NCO of the Marine Corps was adopted to search for IEDs during patrols.

During its deployment, OMLT 8C experienced a sense of abandonment whilst on PB Atiq, and with no direction from higher up the chain of command, as well as little incentive from the ANA to commit itself to a scheme of intensive patrolling, no progress was made during the last month with regards to further professionalising the ANA.[228] Indeed, as the last rotation was preparing to take over, and the Netherlands starting the preparations to withdraw from Uruzgan, the general sentiment amongst the service members was that the OMLT and TFU were going through the motions before finalising its commitment.[229] After a rather unsatisfactory deployment, OMLT 8C handed over to OMLT 9C in November 2009.

4.2.9 OMLT 9C

The 9th iteration of the OMLT was again formed up around a reconnaissance squadron: 42 BVE from Oirschot, which was part of 13 Mechanised Brigade. As the incumbent commander was unable to take command due to personal reasons, his successor-to-be, Major Ruud Theunissen, was pushed forward to lead the OMLT. The Squadron, however, was unable to staff the OMLT with the required number of NCOs. By now a common practice, Theunissen had to staff almost half of his contingent with privates and corporals, duly promoted to the temporary rank of Sergeant for the duration of the deployment. One junior officer was found lacking in his leadership and was relegated to a staff position, further depleting the capacity of OMLT 9C. Moreover, due to reasons unknown to the squadron, the medical team had

227 Interview Dutch INF OMLT CO 116, 12/04/2021.

228 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 320–21.

229 OMLT Evaluation Colonel Bastin, 4.

been scrapped from the organisation table, leaving the OMLT exposed in its combat service support capacity.

On 17 November 2009, the detachment deployed to Afghanistan, where it was duly informed on the ground truth by its predecessors in a three-day HOTO programme. After the HOTO, OMLT 9C moved to patrol base ATIQ, where it was limited to base security and basic training efforts as the absence of enablers limited any ventures out in the Mirabad Valley. Only after the TFU waived the mandatory search capacity for Dutch patrols were regular foot patrols possible. In the same vein, the availability of forward air controllers and the aforementioned medical support restricted any rigorous presence by the TFU/ANA in the Mirabad Valley.

After a relatively quiet period on patrol base ATIQ, the kandak the OMLT mentors were relocated to Helmand province in order to participate in the largest ISAF operation so far. Operation MOSHTARAK aimed to clear central Helmand from the Taliban, with the main focal point being the town of Marjah. As both the brigade commander and the Dutch TFU opposed the transfer of the kandak to Helmand, British General Nick Carter perfidiously used the 205th corps commander to order the transfer, rather than the ISAF chain of command, both the ANA Brigade CO and the TFU commander were unable to prevent the thinning of the ANA presence in Uruzgan.[230] Worse for the OMLT, as the geographic restrictions for the Dutch troops were still in place, the OMLT were not allowed to follow their mentees into the operation, leaving the kandak under the supervision of the American Taskforce-72. This led to an operational pause for the OMLT, which ended after several weeks when a French-trained company of the 1st kandak arrived on Atiq.

The change of ANA company on Atiq brought forth more issues, as the new subunit—like its predecessors—was less than motivated to patrol or train, preferring drinking tea in the shelters. One officer stated that "as the ANA were not under our command, there was little we could do about this situation."[231] With the 3rd kandak still in Helmand and the new unit quite unmotivated to perform any action resembling working, the deployment was less than challenging for the reconnaissance troops, which had to make due until they could transfer its responsibilities to an Australian OMLT mid-March 2010.[232] The perceived lack of interest of both the ANA as well as the TFU led to scathing remarks from the senior staff of the OMLT. A telling statement from one of the officers was that he had "never experience any integral approach from the TFU with regards to the OMLT/ANA. Moreover, there was no

230 Anthony King, "Operation Moshtarak: Counter-insurgency Command in Kandahar 2009–10," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44, no. 1 (2021): 51.

231 Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 119, 07/04/2021.

232 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*, 330.

synchronisation at all with the Dutch Battlegroup in order to jointly achieve any effects."[233] His remarks were corroborated by the last commanding officer of the Dutch Battlegroup, as he could not remember the presence of the OMLT at all.[234] The reports of both Theunissen and brigade-OMLT CO Colonel Leuvering echoed these criticisms in their after-action reports, with the OMLT XO even went on record to state the "the ANA was used to enable TFU operational efforts, we [the OMLT and ANA] were used as a stop-gap measure, rather than being put in our strength. We [the Dutch] have underachieved in this respect."[235]

With the Australians now in charge of the infantry OMLT on ATIQ, the reconnaissance squadron returned home on 5 April 2010. The Brigade OMLT followed suit a few weeks later, ending the four-year effort to guide the ANA towards proficiency and independence.

4.3 Subconclusion

This chapter described how the Dutch Armed Forces have committed to the OMLT tasks, which started with the more or less casual remark in the 2005 Article 100-letter that the Dutch government presented to parliament. Starting off with a twelve-man strong detachment in 2006, the OMLT in Uruzgan grew into a multinational effort led by a Dutch colonel. The growth of the OMLTs was by and large in line with the expansion of the Afghan National Army as a whole. Nonetheless, the Dutch government as well as the Ministry of Defence had put a premium on the Battlegroup and TFU, which led to institutional neglect of the OMLT. Ironically, this caused a contradiction by design as the strategic end state—a self-sufficient Afghan government—was heavily reliant on stable and effective security forces. The strategic importance was however not followed by prioritising OMLT staffing and equipment.

Indeed, the first OMLT was put together from a host of different units, and thus comprised a dozen individuals who were oblivious to the scale and scope of their tasks. An ISAF-prompted enlargement of the detachment led to a certification in early 2007, but as this chapter has described, the certification was pushed through despite organisational shortcomings in equipment and staff. During later iterations, the staffing of the Dutch OMLTs remained an issue, as the Dutch Armed forces continued to "scrape the barrel" for personnel. Eventually, the only OMLTs drawn from regular units were not infantry, but cavalry/reconnaissance troops, as the Brigade Reconnaissance Squadrons took their place in the line for four rotations. The lack of selection with the OMLTs contributed to some intricate issues during the deployments, including repeated interservice rivalry issues, senior NCOs that flat out

233 Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 119, 07/04/2021.

234 Interview Dutch INF BG CO 110, 20/03/2020 & 21/07/2020 & 20/04/2021

235 Interview Interview Dutch INF OMLT XO 119, 07/04/2021; Briefing Theunissen TFU "Current Situation in the Atiq AO" in OWD 20100326; Leuvering, Evaluatie DOPS OMLT 6, p. 21.

refused to join patrols outside of the relative safety of Camp Holland, and masking individual incompetency by appointing 'tactical commanders,' relegating the appointed commanding officers to an administrative command. Lastly, the lack of experienced NCOs and officers to mentor the ANA with a degree of authority and expertise necessitated promoting private soldiers and corporals to the rank of sergeant. Although this allowed the Dutch armed forces to staff the OMLTs with the correct amount of NCOs, this was of course only an outward appearance and did little to ensure the level of experience which was implied by ISAF's staffing table for mentor teams. Another indication of the staffing problems for the OMLTs was the persistent presence of OMLT 'part-timers,' NCOs and officers who were found to have enough time to share their assigned jobs with the OMLT.

The process of equipping the OMLTs encountered similar issues. As no regular unit held any responsibility for equipping the mentor teams, the OMLTs frequently had to resort to friendly faces assigned to the Battlegroup or parent units for enough working equipment. Borrowing and even stealing from other units thus happened as the Dutch Army and Marine Corps were unable to supply the OMLTs with enough vehicles, weapons and optics to approximate the level of firepower, protection and mobility that the Battlegroup subunits could fall back on.

With the increased ANA presence in Uruzgan and the subsequent increased OMLT, the multinational Brigade OMLT attempted to synchronise the efforts between the Dutch-led TFU, the ANA and the OMLTs. This attempted unity of effort was hard to achieve, as neither entity held the authority to exercise command over the other: the ANA Brigade had its own chain of command, the OMLT staff's hierarchy was compromised by its multinational character and the TFU showed—at least according to successive OMLT commanding officers—little incentive to adhere to either McKiernan's or McCrystal's directives for increased and continued Afghan-ISAF partnerships. Initially, the lack of integration of the OMLTs with the TFU efforts allowed field grade OMLT officers to independently lead their OMLT/ANA combination into unconventional and cavalier schemes of manoeuvre. Later rotations also took their liberty as the TFU's neglect of the daily course of events on the patrol bases was mostly left to junior officers and NCOs. Although much to the delight of the lieutenants and sergeants who were not accustomed to such a degree of freedom, it did little for the unity of effort during the counterinsurgency campaign. Still, larger operations such as those mentioned in this chapter did comprise a larger involvement of both ANA and OMLT, taking a prodigious effort—mostly of individual senior commanding officers—to involve the Afghan Army in the TFU's plans.

In terms of pre-deployment preparation and training, the successive OMLTs were mostly left to their own merits in terms of designing and executing pre-deployment training. Apart from the Hohenfels training course—and its brigade-OMLT equivalent in Bydgoszcz, Poland, which were both highly rated and would become a staple of the OMLT's preparation—each

rotation prepared to its best knowledge and intention, but without any perceived interference or support from the Directorate of Operations. With the succession of OMLTs over the years, more knowledge was informally disseminated as the small Dutch officer and NCO corps were quick to find each other to share experiences and best practices. Nonetheless, the pre-deployment training of OMLT was mostly based on the individual efforts of its participants, rather than, for instance, the Army-led series of Uruzgan Integration exercises designed to prepare the Dutch Battlegroups and TFU staff. Some rotations benefitted from the presence of experienced cadres who were either going in for a second tour or were available to share experiences with their peers as they were training up for a rotation.

Lastly, as stated earlier in this research, no doctrine on either SFA or combat mentoring was present in the Dutch Army, nor is it at the time of writing. The lack of formal thought on the subject implies that the learning processes have not been processed towards either formal learning or institutionalisation. The ad hoc composition of the OMLTs is causal factor, as regular units often have some sort of internal reporting process on tactics, techniques or procedures. As the OMLTs were disbanded immediately after returning to the Netherlands, this did not occur at any stage of the deployment. The major exception was the iterations of the reconnaissance squadrons; however, as an independent company-sized subunit subordinated to a brigade, the BVEs lacked the staff capacity to formalise lessons learned. Individual OMLT experiences were disseminated through, for example, regimental gazettes and professional literature; however, both the depth and extent of the articles were disproportional to the discourse on battlegroup experiences.

As little action was taken either by the Directorate of Operations or the Dutch Army on the lessons identified by the successive OMLTs, it is no surprise that this institutional inertia has endured not only for the duration of the Uruzgan deployment but remains to this day.[236] The stunning resemblance of the End of Mission reports drafted by the colonels leading the OMLTs from 2007 onwards, provides evidence to the statement that the Dutch Directorate of Operation was stuck on the idée fixe of staffing the Battlegroups and TFU to the best of its ability, with OMLT more of an operational afterthought for much of the period.

236 R. G. Steehouwer, Security Force Assistance Binnen de Koninklijke Landmacht: Operatie Interflex, Breda 2023; E. J. Latul, Toekomstige Security Force Assistance inzet van de Nederlandse Krijgsmacht, Breda, 2022.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5: The Belgian OMLTs in Kunduz

5.1 Introduction

The Belgian armed forces have been involved in Afghanistan since 2002. Initially, this involvement only included guarding the international airport of Kabul (KAIA) and logistical support in providing ISAF with tactical air transport via a C-130 aeroplane. As the growth of the Afghan National Security Forces had to be facilitated by increasing numbers of NATO trainers and operational mentors, NATO requested additional OMLTs from its member states.[1] On 1 February 2008, the Belgian government decided to contribute to the development of the ANA by committing one OMLT to be deployed by the end of 2008.[2] This proposal was presented to parliament, resulting in a resolution intending to expand the Belgian contribution to Afghanistan by around twenty personnel in either Kunduz province or the capital city of Kabul. The Belgian parliament was hesitant; contributing to the development of the Afghan security forces through training and mentoring was considered a worthwhile endeavour, but losing Belgian lives by participating in a high-risk deployment in Afghanistan was beyond the appetite of many risk-averse politicians. Indeed, a 'red card holder,' an officer who could cancel any operation deemed too risky, and national caveats were installed to further reduce the possibility of casualties.[3]

After the parliament's approval, Belgian OMLTs would support the ANA in nine rotations from the beginning of 2009 to mid-2012 in Kunduz province. After 2012, the Belgian OMLT evolved into Military Advisor Teams (MATs), of which another two rotations would further assist the ANA until mid-2013. This chapter will recount the Belgian involvement in the OMLT operations in Kunduz province, providing a detailed overview of the Belgian SFA effort in Afghanistan in the 2009–2012 bracket.

5.1.1 *Belgian Strategic Culture*

Belgium is a small federal state divided into the French-speaking area of Wallonia and the Dutch-speaking province of Flanders. With Brussels as the capital and centre for several international organisations, Belgium acts as a significant diplomatic hub—"a manifestation of Belgium's desire for multilateralism and alliances."[4] Since its existence, Belgium has

1 NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *Afghanistan Report 2009*, NATO (Brussels, 2009), 13, https://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_03/20090331_090331_afghanistan_report_2009.pdf.

2 Zitting Belgische Senaat en Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers, zitting 2007–2008. Het regeringsbeleid betreffende Afghanistan: uiteenzetting van de heer Pieter de Crem, minister van Landsverdediging, 13 February 2008.

3 Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, voorstel tot resolutie, 9 July 2008.

4 Michel Liégeois and Galia Glume, "A Small Power under the Blue Helmet: The Evolution of Belgian Peacekeeping Policy," *Studia Diplomatica* 61, no. 3 (2008): 111, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44839040.

promoted a policy of neutrality. It slightly diverged from this after WW1 by signing the Franco-Belgian Military Accord but moved back to its neutrality in the 1930s. Its history is in strong contrast with Belgium's strategic culture in the past decades. While historically being a rather pacifist country, Belgium is now firmly European-orientated and in favour of collective security, multilateralism, and European integration.[5]

Belgium's strong preference for multinationalism is visible through the various multinational operations (under UN, NATO and EU command) it has participated in since the 1990s. These range from Somalia to Lebanon and Afghanistan. One peacekeeping operation made an impact on Belgium's future contributions: UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda), during which ten Belgian peacekeepers of the Parachutist regiment were killed by rebels.[6] This led to the end of the Belgian contribution to UNAMIR in a country where genocide was taking place. It would be a traumatic experience for Belgium, similar to the Netherlands' Srebrenica.[7]

The two pillars of Belgium's security policy are NATO and the EU.[8] Belgium presents itself as a "small but reliable" and "responsible and credible" partner.[9] Participation in these multinational operations is important for Belgium because "it is the only way of maintaining militarily relevant capabilities in a cost-effective manner."[10] Pooling resources has become one of Belgium's main priorities. Therefore, the country is also largely in favour of military cooperation within the EU. In terms of willingness to use military force, Belgium's emphasis is on peace operations and conflict prevention rather than on combat operations.[11] This must be understood in the context of Belgium's pacifist history, with its neutrality violated twice during World War I and World War II. Public opinion plays an important role as well: only when there is a legal just cause will a combat operation be implemented. Yet this creates a paradox: on the one hand, Belgium has strong, principled support for collective security

5 Heiko Biehl, Bastian Giegerich, and Alexandra Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe: Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent* (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH, 2013), 33, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mindef/detail.action?docID=1206216.

6 Tim Haesebrouck, "Belgium: The Reliable Free Rider," *International Politics* 58, no. 1 (2021): 44, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00221-z.

7 Liégeois and Glume, "A Small Power under the Blue Helmet," 118.

8 Haesebrouck, "Belgium: The Reliable Free Rider," 41.

9 Sven Biscop, *Belgian Defence Policy The Fight Goes On*, Egmont Institute (2011), 1, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06569.

10 Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe*, 37.

11 Michel Liégeois, "Belgium's Multilateral Politics 2010–2015," *Studia Diplomatica* 68, no. 2 (2015): 31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26531646; Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe*, 38.

through organisations such as NATO and the EU that has the 'risk' of having to use force. On the other hand, Belgium's major parties, leaders and public are rather pacifistic.[12]

Belgian decision-making regarding the deployment of armed forces is in the hands of the executive, without consent necessary from parliament.[13] Debates on defence policymaking rarely exist in Belgium as political attention on the matter is low. Therefore, the passive role of parliament regarding decisions on armed forces is no source of debate.[14] According to Biscop, the lack of a specific budget for crisis operations is, however, a limiting factor when it comes to deployment decisions. Only long-term ongoing deployments are provided for, while funds for additional deployment are dependent upon additional funds.[15] Furthermore, the replacement of territorial defence with expeditionary operations has led to a cut in the defence budget: from 1.37 per cent of GDP in 2000 to 1.09 per cent in 2011.[16] This trend of decreasing Belgian defence expenditure has an impact on the armed forces: "[the size of the professional force] is forecast to continue falling to approximately 25.000 or below."[17] Even more important, it has affected the quality of Belgian defence.

Further complicating and directing Belgian strategic culture is the Belgian *linguistic* divide – it becomes more difficult to symmetrically spread the bases. "The constrained investment space is triggering ever more serious rivalry amongst the different armed services."[18] An important tool in grand strategy and thereby defining strategic culture is the tool of the arms embargo that, through linguistic dynamics, is defederalised.[19] Ultimately, Belgium's strategic culture has directed the country's stance towards several interventions, including in Afghanistan. Belgium's commitment to international law, and thereby the requirement of a UNSC resolution, has, for instance, led to a critical position on the US push for Iraq without a mandate.[20] According to De Grave, "In Belgium, the country's strategic narrative only allowed for the deployment of a mostly symbolic contribution to Afghanistan."[21]

12 Biscop, *Belgian Defence Policy*, 1.

13 This does not mean that parliamentary approval is not sought before deployments, as was the case for the OMLTs.

14 Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, *Strategic Cultures in Europe*, 36.

15 Ibid., 36.

16 Ibid., 38.

17 Alexander Mattelaer, "Strategic Insurance: The Future of the Belgian Armed Forces," *Personnel* 1, no. 3.40 (2014): 2.

18 Mattelaer, "Strategic Insurance: The Future of the Belgian Armed Forces," 3.

19 Personal correspondence Jan Weuts 26/06/2023.

20 Ibid. 26/06/2023.

21 W. De Grave, "Who Is Ready to Bleed for the United States?," Masters Thesis (University of Amsterdam, 2015), 56.

5.1.2 *The Belgian Political Decision-making Process*

As a small state monarchy that sits across the fault line that separates German and Latin cultures, the Belgian people are politically, linguistically and culturally diverse. This has affected the Belgium polity in that the Belgium federal state is comprised of three communities and three regions that are based on four language areas. Although this division has made governing the state an intrinsically complex endeavour, deciding on the use of the armed forces is solely invested at the federal level.

Article 167 of the Belgian constitution states that "the King commands the armed forces and determines the state of war and the cessation of hostilities."[22] As the role of the King has become ceremonial, the executive—the Minister of Defence in particular—controls the military.[23] The Belgian decision-making triangle thus consists of the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister. The formalisation of decisions in regard occurs within the cabinet with final approval by the council of ministers.[24] The Belgian Chief of Defence has no real decisional authority concerning military deployments other than in his role of adviser to the Minister of Defence.[25] Although the Belgian parliament's task is to control the executive, it has very few tools to do so, as the parliament is only informed about troop deployments. The general scrutiny and oversight powers of parliament, thus, do not include a constitutional or legal right to approve or reject the use of force.[26]

In 2007, Belgium held federal elections. During the formation, Pieter de Crem (Christian Democratic and Flemish Party) was selected as the Minister of Defence. De Crem was "more pro-NATO and pro-United States than his predecessor and believed the Belgians needed to demonstrate its commitment to NATO in a more visible manner. The F-16 deployment in Kandahar and the OMLT were both visible symbols of that commitment."[27] As the Belgium democracy is "one of the most fragmented party systems of any modern democracy," De Crem had some difficulties in guiding the OMLT deployment through the coalition ministers,

22 Nele Verlinden, "Parliamentary Oversight and Democratic Control over Armed Forces with Regard to Military Deployments Abroad: Some Observations on Belgium and the US," *Mil. L. & L. War Rev.* 55 (2016): 35.

23 Yf Reykers, "Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight of Defence Procurement: Lessons from Belgium," *European Security* 30, no. 4 (2021): 510.

24 Philippe Lagassé and Stephen M Saideman, "When Civilian Control Is Civil: Parliamentary Oversight of the Military in Belgium and New Zealand," *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 1 (2019): 17.

25 David P. Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, "NATO in Afghanistan," in *NATO in Afghanistan* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 171.

26 Hans Born and Heiner Hänggi, *The Use of Force under International Auspices: Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability* (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces Geneva, 2005), 5.

27 Auerswald and Saideman, "NATO in Afghanistan," 171.

resulting in both a cap in time and additional caveats designed to limit personal risk.[28] The latter statement will be elaborated upon in the section detailing the preparatory phase of the first OMLT.

5.1.3 Belgian Armed Forces Structure

The Belgian armed forces consist of a so-called "Land Component of the Armed Forces" (the Army), an "Air Component of the Armed Forces" (the Air Force), a "Naval Component of the Armed Forces" (the Navy), and a "Medical Component of the Armed Forces," which is a uniquely separate branch attending to the medical aspects of Combat Service Support.[29] Although the Belgian armed forces had invested in modern equipment during the Cold War, a series of redundancies since 1989 had left the Belgian armed forces with ageing equipment by the time it started its participation in the ISAF mission, with especially the Land Component being in a rather deplorable state.

As Belgium has vast maritime interests, its Naval Component is smaller than other maritime states such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Its only combat-capable vessels are two second-hand Karel Doorman-class frigates purchased in 2005.[30] The Air Component has fifty-three operational (out of an original 160) F-16s fighter aircraft that have been modernised to the MLU standard.[31] The Medical Component is a separate branch that provides medical support to all three other branches. As such, the Medical Component has been active in all Belgian OMLT/MAT rotations, although not as a separate unit, but rather by attaching medical elements to the OMLT/MAT organisation. Historically, most of the Belgian armed forces comprise the Land Component elements.

In the 2009–2012 timeframe, the Land Component transitioned from a mechanised army equipped with tanks and tracked infantry fighting vehicles to an all-wheel, motorised army.[32] This allowed the Land Component to lay off the antediluvian Leopard 1 tanks and YPR IFVs and replace these vehicles with Dingo 2 wheeled armoured personnel carriers and Piranha III wheeled armoured vehicle variants. Thirty-nine of the latter were equipped with a direct firing system to support the infantry. The transition from a mechanised to a motorised Land Component allowed the Belgian Army to field a medium capacity. However,

28 Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*, 35.

29 https://www.mil.be/nl/, accessed 10/05/2022.

30 Brief minister en staatssecretaris met de Marinestudie 2005 - Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaten van het Ministerie van Defensie (X) voor het jaar 2006, https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmj1ey0/vi3a09gdonzu, accessed 10/05/2022.

31 Email correspondence Major J. Van der Lelij, 10/05/2022.

32 Tom Sauer, "Deep Cooperation by Belgian Defence: Absorbing the Impact of Declining Defence Budgets on National Capabilities," *Defence Studies* 15, no. 1 (2015): 11.

it lacked the firepower and protection needed to operate in high-intensity contemporary warfare.[33] Indeed, the vehicles selected by the Belgian Land Component mostly had their use in low-intensity combat and peace support operations. The transition from mechanised to motorised affected the structure of the Land Component, as the tank regiments were either abolished or reformed to a medium capacity. Moreover, the light infantry regiment, known as the Para commando regiment, was reduced from three battalions to two.[34] The combination of financial-driven reforms with the introduction of new material left the Belgian infantry battalions unable to conduct and sustain high-intensity combat operations. However, it was more than capable of performing the OMLT tasks in combination with guarding the Kabul Airfield.

The Assistant Chief of Staff Operations and Training (ACOS Ops & Trg) is the head of the Staff Department for Operations and Training of the Belgian Ministry of Defence. This position reports to the Chief of Defence and is responsible for the training of the Belgian armed forces and for its operations.[35] As such, the ACOS Ops & Trg is responsible for ensuring that every Belgian unit has undergone the proper preparation before its deployment, which is validated by a Certification Exercise (CERTEX). One month into the deployment, the Belgian commanders are obliged to report to ACOS Ops & Trg about the progress of their mission, including lessons identified, operational progress and other issues that might impact a successful tour. This is called the 'X+1' report, which aims to confirm that the pre-deployment training is corroborated with the observations in the mission environment whilst simultaneously allowing for remedial action with regard to the next rotation if necessary.[36] By insisting on a relatively short period in theatre before the report is due, ACOS Ops & Trg aspired to draw on these lessons identified before the observations are corrupted by local impressions and learning on the job. At the end of the deployment, the End of Mission report is drafted, which gives a more elaborate account of the progress (or lack thereof) of that particular deployment. A Lessons Learned section is part of the ACOS Ops and Trg, which consists of two field grade officers (majors) and one NCO. When lessons are identified, these are then presented to the ACOS, who, if deemed necessary, assigns a project officer to analyse the problem and present different options for the ACOS to decide on. This project officer will investigate on behalf of the ACOS Ops & Trg, which usually includes subject matter experts from the different components. Biannually, the most important lessons learned are briefed to the Chief of Defence. This briefing ensures that no important issues are stuck

33 Sauer, "Deep Cooperation by Belgian Defence," 16.

34 1 para, http://www.1para.be/, accessed 10/05/2022.

35 Academic "ACOS Operations and Training," https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/7184026, accessed 27/06/2002.

36 Interview Belgian staff officer lessons learned 35, 24/06/2022.

in bureaucratic processes within the Defence Staff and allows the Chief of Defence to force issues he deems important or overdue.[37]

5.2 The Decision Path to Kunduz

For Belgium, this symbolic mission would be embodied, in part, by the provision of an OMLT. As the majority of the Belgian parliament was in agreement on answering NATO's call for more OMLTs to facilitate the growing Afghan National Army, the preparations for the first deployments started in earnest. As Belgium was unable, and presumably unwilling, to commit a battalion to an ISAF battlegroup, a partnership with another ISAF-participating state was indispensable, preferably a European partner.[38] Several partners were considered. Culturally, logistically and linguistically, the Netherlands was a good option. However, several political parties considered the South of Afghanistan too dangerous to deploy to, as the political risk of losing servicemembers during the deployment was considered too high.[39] Moreover, the Dutch OMLT had already paired with the French and Australians, making another foreign OMLT rather redundant.[40] France had increased its military presence in Afghanistan in 2008, taking responsibility for a battlegroup-sized deployment to both Kapisa province and Surobi district (Kabul province).[41] This presence also included several French OMLTs, and a Belgian contingent reinforcing the French would seem logical, on the same basis as why the Dutch were considered.[42] The exact reason why the Belgians decided against pairing up with the French has remained undisclosed, although the French loss of ten servicemembers during the Uzbin Valley ambush on 19 August 2008 might have influenced the Belgian decision-making process in favour of Kunduz province.[43]

Indeed, the German PRT present in Kunduz was a viable option for the Belgians. Not only was Germany a solid European partner, but its army also used the Dingo 2 armoured personnel carrier, making the logistical footprint significantly smaller. Moreover, it could support the Belgians with a relief force—commonly known as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF)—if needed. The latter was an important issue for the Belgians as no Belgian battlegroup was present in

37 Ibid.

38 Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, Voorstel van Resolutie, DOC 52 0990/005, 8 July 2008.

39 Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, Voorstel van Resolutie, DOC 52 0990/005, 8 July 2008.

40 Leeuwenburg and Wiltenburg, *Met Geweer en Geduld*.

41 Olivier Schmitt, "Remembering the French War in Afghanistan" (2018), https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/remembering-the-french-war-in-afghanistan/, accessed 10/05/2022; Division, *Afghanistan Report 2009*, 8.

42 Interview Belgian staff officer plans division 34, 19/11/2020.

43 Olivier Schmitt, "French Military Adaptation in the Afghan War: Looking Inward or Outward?," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 4 (2017): 583, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1220369.

Afghanistan to fall back upon, a contingency not anticipated by NATO planners.[44] During a series of visits to Belgian strategic partners, the nature and intent of the OMLT deployment were reconnoitred by several staff officers. Although the initial NATO demand for an OMLT was for sixteen servicemembers per team, and the Belgian parliament had envisioned twenty personnel per OMLT, the factfinding report called for sixty-nine Belgian servicemembers per OMLT.[45] The reason for the inflated number could be traced back to NATO's assumption that OMLTs could depend on other national military capacities such as (specialised) medical support, explosive ordnance disposal teams, logistics and other combat support/combat service support utilities. Although the increased number of OMLT members did lead to questions from Army leadership, no modifications were demanded.[46] Also, the equipment deemed necessary for safe and effective operations, such as personal load-bearing equipment, jammers and radios, were, surprisingly, approved by senior leadership without many difficulties.[47]

5.2.1 *OMLT 1: 3 PARA*

Shortly after the Belgian intent to participate with an OMLT in the ISAF mission had become known, the 3rd Battalion of the Belgian Parachutist Regiment (3 PARA) was selected as the first unit to be deployed. Together with the 2nd Battalion Commandos (2 Cdo), it formed the elite light brigade of the Land Component. Similar to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, Belgium also opted for an elite light infantry battalion in the first entry capacity. According to 3 PARA officers, it was indeed a logical choice to deploy 3 PARA first, considering its operational readiness, versatility and training.[48] Although the final decision to deploy to Afghanistan had yet to be made, the commanding officer of 3 PARA and his staff started analysing the proposed OMLT mission shortly after receiving its warning order in February 2008. Several 3 PARA officers drove to Hohenfels, Germany, to gather information on the OMLT tasks at the Joint Multinational Readiness Centre.[49] The OMLT task was appreciated by the Belgian Ministry of Defence as one of the most dangerous and mentally demanding tasks because of the continuous threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the close cooperation with the Afghan Forces—by 2008, the threat of green-on-blue attacks was well known in Brussels. Still, no institutional knowledge had been accumulated by the Belgian armed forces, and as such, 3 PARA officers had to rely on open-source information

44 Interview Belgian staff officer plans division 34, 19/11/2020.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020.

48 OMLT dossier MOD, Annex D- Draft debriefing commanding officer OMLT 1, 19 June 2009, 1.

49 MREx Det OMLT 1 – 3 PARA.

and interpersonal relationships with Dutch, American and French colleagues to build up understanding regarding the OMLT tasks.[50]

Besides the possible deployment to Afghanistan, 3 PARA also was assigned to deploy a company-sized element to Kosovo in the same timeframe as the OMLT deployment was due. Considering the risk assessment for both missions, the commanding officer of 3 PARA, then Lt. Col. Schoenmaekers decided to select the participants for the OMLT deployment on the basis of their experience, their maturity, the appropriate rank and their qualifications, broadly making a dichotomy between senior and junior officers and enlisted men, with the junior staff assigned to the Kosovo operation, and the more experienced paratroopers being assigned to the OMLTs. Moreover, Schoenmaekers made the decision to match the rank of the Afghan mentee with the Belgian mentor. This horizontal approach towards mentoring had its roots in the Belgian military experiences in Africa—the parts of the Belgian Land Component had previously been deployed to states such as Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, resulting in the appreciation that the recipients of mentorship had vastly better acceptance when mentored by their peers or superiors in rank, as opposed to junior officers. This observation was notwithstanding the mentors' age, experience or qualifications, as it was noticed that the nepotist army culture in many African states respected rank more than any other source of authority.[51]

The double deployment put some strain on the battalion staff. However, Schoenmaekers was adamant in that he wanted to prevent a "deployment before a deployment," and he rather trusted the operational readiness of his battalion rather than feeling the need for an intense ten-month pre-deployment training.[52] The 3 PARA OMLT detachment did attend the OMLT course in Hohenfels integrally, which was well received by the participants. However, there was no Afghan company available to support the training, which was considered a missed opportunity by the Belgian forces.[53] The Belgian performance at the JMRC resulted in the Army's assessment that "[3 PARA's] training in Belgium and Germany (and the appropriate lessons learned) [...] will ensure that the Belgian OMLT contingent is prepared to conduct the full spectrum of OMLT missions."[54]

Although the prospect of combat operations was understated by politicians and policymakers, the inherent risks were well-known by senior army officials. The Belgian Chief of Operations and Training, Lieutenant General Jean-Paul Buyse, conceded to 3 PARA staff that he did not

50 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 4, 26/11/2020.

51 Interview Belgian staff officer plans division 34, 19/11/2020.

52 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1, 04/11/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 4, 26/11/2020.

53 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 3, 08/01/2021.

54 Powerpoint presentation OMLT 1 MREx Brief 11/12/2022.

expect everybody to return unscathed from this mission.[55] Still, the directives from the political level insisted that Belgian servicemembers would only serve in the 'second line,' implying that the Belgian OMLT would keep away from the frontline and, as such, would have less risk of being injured or killed.[56] The fallacy of such statements during counterinsurgency operations had not infused the political level, and as such, it was disseminated to the tactical level. Indeed, the Belgian Operations Order for ISAF, as drafted by the Chief of Defence, stated that "the OMLT will not actively engage in combat operations. They will at all moments refrain from operating in contact with the insurgents unless required so to guarantee the success of the mission or to safeguard the security of the OMLT."[57] Moreover, "all provisions are [to be] made to prevent night operations" and "if possible, mentors will operate from their vehicles. If dismounted operations are necessary, provisions will be made to ensure that vehicles are in close vicinity, providing, if need be, shelter and/or fire support."[58] Lastly, an important caveat was included that stated that "the OMLT will NOT mentor at platoon level," restricting its interventions to Coy and Bn level. The senior mentor may always, as a result of the military decision-making process and taking into account such elements as mission, terrain and the security of his personnel, decide to engage this OMLT at the platoon level. This, however, will be an exception to the rule.[59]

Eventually, the definitive 'go' for the mission was given by the Belgian government by late December 2008, and on 5 January, the first Belgian OMLTs were deployed to Kabul.[60] The mission statement Schoenmaekers was provided with stated that his tasks included "to coach, teach and mentor ANA units, provide the conduit for liaison and command and control and when required support the operational planning and employment of the ANA unit to which they are aligned in order to support the development of a self-sufficient, competent and professional ANA."[61] Schoenmaekers interpreted this assignment into "to improve the level of the kandak that has been assigned to us in all aspects, and to build a working relationship by our continuous presence, by sharing our expertise and by sharing risks in a responsible manner."[62]

The first part of the initial OMLT deployment was to occur in Kabul, as a new kandak was to be trained at the KMTC by the Belgian OMLT in cooperation with other NATO forces

55 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1, 04/11/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020.

56 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1, 04/11/2020; Interview Belgian staff officer plans division 34, 19/11/2020.

57 CHOD OPERATION ORDER FOR (BEL) CONTRIBUTION TO ISAF, Annex G to CHODOPORDER FOR ISAF Jan 2009, p. G-4-G-5.

58 Ibid., p. G-5.

59 Ibid., p. G-4.

60 P. Defrancq, "OMLT 1 Kaboel-Kunduz 3 PARA in Operatie," *Paracommando Regimental Gazette* (2009), 14.

61 Draft Debriefing Comd OMLT 1 19 June 2009, Annex D, p. A-3.

62 Ibid., p. A-3-4.

participating in the training of the Afghan Army. The first contingent of OMLT 1 consisted of a sixteen-strong group, which constituted the core of the OMLT, i.e., the actual trainers as envisioned in the nineteen-strong standard NATO-OMLT. From January to March 2009, the Belgians trained their Afghan charges on basic infantry and road-move TTPs.[63] The rationale behind this scheme was that the road move to Kunduz would be prepared as well as possible, with the actual road move acting as some sort of informal finalisation of the training efforts. However, highly impressed with the actual performance of the ANA kandak trained by the Belgians, the US decided to reassign the kandak to Mazar-e-Sharif, leaving the Belgian OMLT without its kandak.[64] Instead, the Belgians were assigned 2/2/209 kandak, already present in Kunduz.[65] As the road move from Kabul to Kunduz did overlap with the route to Mazar-e-Sharif, both the Afghan kandak and the Belgian OMLT were committed to the same convoy, with part of the Belgian OMLT accompanying the kandak to Mazar-e-Sharif in order to conduct a handover-takeover with the receiving mentor team before joining the main Belgian effort in Kunduz.[66]

Upon arrival, 1 BEL OMLT took charge of the mentoring of 2/2/209 kandak, which was previously mentored by another NATO OMLT. The Belgian OMLT assessed that its predecessors mentored from "within the wire," implying that the OMLTs would not accompany the ANA on patrols, leaving the ANA to operate in the field without direct NATO support or liaisons.[67] Also, with parts of the previous OMLT already rotated out of Afghanistan, the handover-takeover was considered to be a poor effort.[68] Indeed, the Belgians were too reluctant to adhere to this approach and intended to conduct operations with the ANA in a partnered way, breaking with its predecessor's modus operandum.

OMLT 1's approach to tactics, however, was quite in contrast with the political intent of participating in a low-risk training mission in a relatively safe Afghan province. Infantry battalions, in particular, are trained to close in with and kill the enemy rather than to stay behind and advise from a distance. Moreover, parachutists or air assault units frequently have an averseness to the use of vehicles, as vehicles are perceived as death traps; light infantry, rather, fights dismounted. The caveats provided by the Chief of Defence thus went against the very nature of elite light infantry, and with the exemption given to the commanding

63 Powerpoint presentation OMLT 1 MREx Brief 11/12/2022.

64 Defrancq, "OMLT 1 Kaboel-Kunduz 3 PARA in Operatie," 16.

65 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1, 04/11/2020.

66 Defrancq, "OMLT 1 Kaboel-Kunduz 3 PARA in Operatie," 16.

67 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020.

68 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 4, 26/11/2020.

officer to allow platoon-level mentoring and dismounted operations by exception, this quickly became the rule during OMLT 1 tenure.[69]

The Belgian OMLT tactics revolved around the principle that the OMLT would be essentially a shadow cadre. This implied that the company mentor would be paired with the ANA company commander and that the NCOs would be upfront with the ANA platoon leadership. This would allow the OMLT to have situational awareness and for the OMLT CO to have a degree of control over the ANA via his platoon mentors even when the ANA CO would move to his command post to a tactically less sound location or in case of signal problems. Moreover, this would lead to information coming to the OMLT CO from his personnel up front rather than via the ANA chain of command and then through an interpreter, resulting in a slower and less accurate creation of situational awareness and understanding. Essentially, the OMLT would operate as a redundancy to the nascent Afghan Army command structure.

The Belgian OMLT's smallest unit of action was a seven-man strong team, supplemented with an interpreter. This team consisted of an officer in charge, a senior NCO, a junior NCO, two enlisted drivers/signaller, and two enlisted machine gunners/combat medics. Initially, CS and CSS companies were paired with a five-man OMLT, but this was quickly abandoned as it became clear during a firefight that this would constitute an understaffed OMLT team.[70] The OMLTs were double-hatted; that is to say, the OMLT leadership would not only mentor its Afghan counterparts but also were responsible for commanding their own subordinates and performing their own duties as expected.[71]

Over time, the TTPs of the OMLT adapted. It was concluded that two teams would be the minimum for effective mentoring. An ANA company would thus be accompanied by fourteen Belgian paras.[72] The organisation would be divided into an overall commander and a ground manoeuvre commander. Adhering to a basic tactical plan, the ANA company would advance over a recognisable line in the terrain, for instance, a road, two platoons up front, and one in the rear. Both front platoons would be mentored by a three-man strong Belgian OMLT section (team lead, junior NCO, gunner/medic). This allowed the overall OMLT commander to have mentoring and forward observing capability upfront. In the rear, a sergeant-major

69 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 4, 26/11/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 3, 08/01/2021; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 5, 05/02/2021.

70 Draft Debriefing Comd OMLT 1 19 June 2009, Annex D, p. A-1; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020.

71 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 4, 26/11/2020.

72 Powerpoint presentation "Overview Missions (BEL) OMLT 1 Apr–Jun '09," personal archive P. Defrancq, undated, Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020.

would command all vehicles, giving the OMLT commander a 'national manoeuvre element' to directly order to a place of necessity and act as a base of fire or extraction element.[73]

The rationale for this mentoring tactic had its foundation in ANA tactical deficits. Initially, the ANA were prone to huddle together or move in a single file formation instead of a deployed formation and thus dominant to any enemy upfront.[74] The platoon mentors were meant to guide the ANA to their proper formation. Secondly, when under fire, the ANA were prone to go firm and return fire. The Belgian OMLT found it hard to get the ANA to combine fire and manoeuvre, but the reserve element and the vehicle detachment, in combination with the indirect fire capacity provided by the para's 60 mm mortars, allowed the OMLT CO to manoeuvre even when the first two platoons were fixed, or with an absent ANA leadership.[75] In this way, the two-team company mentoring was sufficient for the Belgians to have a critical mass of fighting power for ANA-independent manoeuvres.

These observations were made by the Belgian OMLT after a series of incidents at the beginning of June 2009. As the threat levels in Kunduz increased, Belgian service members were involved in combat on 9 June, 10 June and 15 June.[76] On 9 June, a joint Afghan-Belgian patrol was ambushed as it left a village in the Kanam region. As the ANA and Belgians returned fire, close air support was called in, which allowed the ANA and OMLT to break contact and return to base. One ANA soldier was injured during the ambush, and a number of vehicles suffered damage, including a Belgian vehicle. The next day, the ANA QRF was ordered to support another ANA battalion of the same brigade, which was conducting an operation in the vicinity of Qazaq. As the patrol consisted of Afghans, Belgians and the US/Hungarian OMLT supporting 3/2/209 kandak, the deficiencies of the command structure were highlighted, as no guidance was given by the ANA brigade level, and no command relation existed between the OMLTs of different nationalities. As such, the Belgian OMLT found itself isolated on one side of a river, coordinating a brigade-level operation.[77]

On 15 June, a Belgian patrol was engaged by insurgents in the Tepa Borida region. Importantly, the Belgians usually deployed two OMLT teams, with the OMLT that was advising the ANA company commander designated as the overall commander. The position of overall commanding officer rotated between the OMLT teams. During the incident at Tepo Borida, the overall commander happened to be a young first lieutenant, with the supporting OMLT under the command of a *Kapitein-commandant*, a uniquely Belgian rank between captain and

73 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020.

74 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 2, 09/10/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 3, 08/01/2021.

75 Defrancq, "OMLT 1 Kaboel-Kunduz 3 PARA in Operatie," 18.

76 Operations and Training Tracking Sheet, TIC Reports OMLT 1, Summary, Annex A, 21 June 2009. Belgian Military Archives. p. 3/8.

77 Ibid. p. 3/8.

major, although NATO considers both *Kapitein-commandant* and major to be an OF3 equivalent. During this case, the more senior officer was subservient to a first lieutenant.

During the patrol, ANA platoons were positioned north and south of a road, moving in a deployed fashion due to the high-risk assessment. The first part of the patrol was rather uneventful, but during the march back to the vehicles, the ANA and OMLT were engaged from multiple positions by small arms and RPGs. During the engagement, two ANA soldiers were killed, with another two and a Belgian NCO wounded. As the ANA and OMLT returned fire, air support was summoned, which consisted of a pair of F15 fighters and a pair of A10s. The NATO aircraft made several strafing runs on the insurgents' positions, allowing the ANA and OMLT to disengage. During the six-hour contact, a third Belgian OMLT and eighty ANA joined to fight on the orders of the CO of 3 PARA. This was then followed by a German platoon acting as the PRT QRF.[78]

The engagement led to a number of observations. First, the Belgian command structure was prone to friction, as senior officers were put under the orders of lower-ranked officers. Although, in this case, this did not lead to additional casualties, the unity of effort had become exposed as junior and senior officers were not in agreement with the proposed course of action.[79] Secondly, ANA leadership proved to be unable to function under fire, with the OMLT bemoaning the ANA leadership's lack of situational awareness. In addition, after the initial contact, the ANA platoon leader refused to lead his platoon, which resulted in the Belgian OMLT officer taking over. It was also reported by the Belgians that one hour into the fight, "the (ANA) Rifle Coys stopped fighting due to resignation."[80] Thirdly, both the ANA and the Belgians experienced ammunition shortages, the latter due to the prolonged firefight, with the ANA's ammunition problems compounded due to a lack of fire discipline. Lastly, the cooperation and command and control structure between the Belgian and German subunits left room for improvements, as the German QRF and the Belgian OMLT were not integrated as a unit, causing some friction during the contact.[81]

The Belgian observations and after-action analysis led to a number of recommendations to the ACOS Operations and Training. First of all, a remotely operated weapon system was requested. This system was quickly implemented on the light-wheeled vehicles of the OMLT

78 Verslag van Militaire Politie, Onderwerp: Aanslag op Belgische OMLT en ANA, LOC BANANA, HAKIMBUY, in coördinaten 42 S VF 822 689, 19 Juni 2009.

79 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 5, 05/02/2021; Verslag van Militaire Politie, Onderwerp: Aanslag op Belgische OMLT en ANA, LOC BANANA, HAKIMBUY, in coördinaten 42 S VF 822 689, 19 June 2009.

80 Operations and Training Tracking Sheet, TIC Reports OMLT 1, Summary, Annex A, 21 June 2009. Belgian Military Archives, p. 3/8.

81 Operations and Training Tracking Sheet, TIC Reports OMLT 1, Summary, Annex A, 21 June 2009. Belgian Military Archives, p. 3/8; Interview Van Poecke.

as it allowed the Belgians to return accurate fire from a protected position.[82] Also, this Remotely Operated Self-defence System (ROSS) allowed the Belgians to engage the enemy over longer distances. This was important as the Belgian forces were engaged at the maximum range of the enemy's weapons, which limited the Belgian's ability to close in and kill the enemy. As the Land Component had just changed its approach to shooting to short-range engagements—the 'new technique combat shooting'[83]—the recommendation to return to long-range marksmanship was a recurring theme at the End of Mission reports, which was subsequently implemented.[84] This last observation—the friction between the Germans and Belgians during combat—led to the expansion of the Belgian detachment with a liaison officer to the German Operations Centre, who was assigned to ensure that the Germans and Belgians were on the same page when a Troops in Contact situation occurred.[85]

The incident on 15 June, which included a Belgian casualty, also caused a shockwave within the Ministry of Defence, as combat operations and casualties differed from the narrative of a 'training operation.' Within days a special investigation was ordered to be conducted by a delegation of Belgian officers. During the investigation, the Belgian OMLT was ordered to suspend any participation in ANA operations and to perform a 'reverse transfer of authority,' essentially placing the Belgian OMLT outside the ISAF order of battle for the time being.[86] The investigation was a cause for ire amongst 3 PARA personnel, as they felt they had to defend their actions to "a number of staff officers with little knowledge of combat operations."[87] Despite 3 PARA's conviction on the necessity of mentoring on platoon level and below, the guidelines and caveats for the Belgian OMLTs were sharpened to include a prohibition on any mentoring other than company and battalion level operations during night-time and dismounted operations.[88] This ban was an elaboration on the earlier guidelines that were restrictive but left some room to manoeuvre the commanding officer. Moreover, a doubling of the ammunition load was ordered, as well as a reiteration that Belgian service members were to distance themselves from the front line.[89] Ironically, the limitations and caveats were contradictory to the lessons identified by OMLT 1 themselves. Besides the validation of

82 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1, 04/11/2020.

83 Literally: Nieuwe Techniek Gevechtsschieten (NTGS).

84 Interview Belgian staff officer lessons learned 35, 24/06/2022.

85 Ibid.

86 Kabinet Chef Defensie, Onderwerp: Richtlijnen OMLT, 17/06/2009.

87 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 5, 05/02/2021.

88 Armoured infantry units make a distinction between mounted operations, dismounted operations and operations on foot, the difference between the last two types of operation being that in that during dismounted operations, the vehicles are supposed to be able to support the dismounted personnel.

89 Kabinet Chef Defensie, Onderwerp: Richtlijnen OMLT, 17/06/2009.

their low-level tactics and the necessity of physical fitness, the OMLT identified the necessity to "work dismounted" and to work with "a minimum of two teams OMLT."[90]

In addition to the formal narrowing of the operational freedom of the OMLTs, the series of incidents also functioned as an incentive to further clarify the command structure between a patrol and the QRF, whether it is German or Afghan. This was done by ways of a fragmentation order, which was drafted by the Belgian S3 officer shortly after the 15 June incident.[91] Although this order functioned as a stop-gap measure, the command and control deficiencies were greater than the coordination between a QRF and OMLT/ANA patrol, leading the Chief of Defence, General Delcour, to notify NATO by ways of formal writing to express his concerns. To ensure a smoother flow of information and "a satisfactory overall coordination between ISAF, ANA and the (BEL) OMLT,"[92] Delcour ordered additional Belgian staff officers to be deployed to the German-led PRT and Brigade OMLT in Kunduz.[93] Importantly, Delcour also addressed the ANA's lacklustre performance in the field, as he lamented ANA's leadership, equipment and staffing. In his letter, Delcour stated that the capability milestone that the ANA brigade had been granted was a gross overstatement and that the ANA capabilities were, in fact, far lower than formally indicated, resulting in the ANA being "committed to [sic] operations for which they are clearly not ready and consequently putting mission accomplishment, their own security and that of the OMLT at risk."[94] Delcour's statements were a generalisation of the OMLTs observation, whose harsh conclusions included a statement such as "the ANA stops fighting," "the ANA staff does not keep the overview," and "the ANA is unwilling to manoeuvre."[95] The next rotation was immediately confronted by the operational limitations that were ordered by the Belgian Ministry of Defence, but as they were nearing the end of their allotted timeslot, it had little impact on 3 PARAs operations. Their successors, however, were immediately impacted by the new regulations. From 1 July onwards, the French-speaking Chausseurs Ardennais battalion would succeed the Paras in mentoring the Afghan National Army.

5.2.2 OMLT 2: The Chausseurs Ardennais

The selection of the Chausseurs Ardennais (ChA) as the battalion to succeed 3 PARA had its roots in the planning cell of the Belgian Land Component, as the lead planner of the Belgian deployment would become the commanding officer of the ChA battalion shortly before its envisioned deployment. Then Lt. Col. Gérard thus planned the ChA shortly after he assumed

90 Powerpoint presentation "Overview Missions (BEL) OMLT 1 Apr–Jun '09," personal archive P. Defrancq, undated.

91 S. Schoenmaekers, Frago 007-09, Coordinating instructions for the use of the QRF, 19/06/2009.

92 Delcour, C.-H., ISAF – Report of the (BEL) Contact Team deployed to the (BEL) OMLT in RC-N, 2.

93 Ibid., 2.

94 Ibid., 2.

95 Powerpoint presentation "Overview Missions (BEL) OMLT 1 Apr–Jun '09," personal archive P. Defrancq, undated.

command to deploy to Afghanistan. Like 3 PARA, the ChA battalion would be split between the OMLT deployment in Kunduz and a less-intensive deployment, guarding the Kabul International Airport (KAIA). Drawing from the experiences of 3 PARA—Gérard had regular contact with Schoenmaekers during the preparatory phase—Gérard also opted to deploy his most experienced personnel to Kunduz, assigning the more junior troops to KAIA.

In the preparatory phase, Gérard put an emphasis on the cohesion of his battalion but also on the linguistic skills of his cadre. The former was considered important as the ChA would be divided over both the OMLT and KAIA deployment, but Gérard also had to detach enlisted personnel to reinforce the ISAF 17 and ISAF 18 deployments to support the 1/3 Lancers tank battalion, which was short on personnel as it had to perform dismounted guard duty. Gérard wanted to avoid a sense of elitism within his battalion, as he was well aware that handpicking NCOs and officers from all subunits of the battalion would induce a sense of superiority casu quo inferiority. Therefore, he opted to assign his personnel broadly along company lines, augmenting the OMLT company where needed but still avoiding broad dissent over selection issues. By selecting the most experienced company for the OMLT task, he could still draw on (mostly) experienced officers and enlisted.

The linguistic issue has its roots in the francophone background of the ChA battalion. As Belgium Land Component Battalions are spread around the country, the common tongue is naturally either one of Belgium's dominant languages.[96] In the Belgian armed forces, only officers are required to be bilingual, with the required proficiency increasing with rank. Still, junior Francophone officers are only required to hold a basic knowledge of Flemish, and only general officers are required to be fully bilingual. Enlisted personnel are thus exempted from mastering a second language and are generally not able to communicate professionally in the other dominant Belgian language. Moreover, Francophone officers generally have more issues learning English as the languages are unrelated, unlike Flemish and English—both Germanic languages. As the communication with the Afghan mentees would be through an English-speaking interpreter, Gérard made a serious effort to raise the proficiency in English across his OMLT selection.

Lastly, through a series of interactions with French and German OMLTs, Gérard based his training programme on three pillars: to act as a mentor/coach, to act as a liaison and to be able to enable support. These pillars provided the pre-deployment training structure of the ChA. Moreover, Gérard pre-deployed one of his officers to Kunduz as early as April in order to gain as much situational awareness as possible. As 3 PARA only deployed to Kunduz from April 2009 onwards—the first rotation spent its first months in Kabul—any earlier

96 German is also an official Belgian language, but it is only spoken by a small minority in the east of Belgium, and no German-speaking units serve in the Belgian Land Component.

was impossible, and the 2nd rotation's reconnaissance could only take place at the end of May 2009. Still, Gérard was very content with his decision to pre-deploy an officer, as the feedback that was received from Kunduz further guided the ChA pre-deployment training programme.[97]

The series of pre-deployment exercises did have an effect on the battalion, as the six-month preparation phase was considered to be a "mission before a mission"; however, it did reach its goals to prepare the OMLT mostly to the satisfaction of its commander. Still, Gérard identified several issues during the battalion's preparation, including lacking vehicles and radios to "train as you fight," and he had to deal with a significant personnel shortage, reporting a 68 per cent staffing. The NATO course in Hohenfels, Germany, and the battalions' effort to acquaint themselves with American doctrine and TTPs with regards to counterinsurgency, were drawn from the American Field Manual 3-24. Moreover, T.E. Lawrence's adage "better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly" was integrated into the Belgian's operational thinking during the Hohenfels field training exercise.

During the deployment, the ChA thus aimed to incorporate "Afghan ownership" with regard to operations, leaving the initiative and responsibility of patrols with the ANA.[98] The relationship between mentor and mentee was considered to be paramount, and as such, the Belgian officers invested much of their time in building rapport, although it took "two months" for the kandak commander to consider his mentors' point of view.[99] The Belgian ability to bring fire and air support to the field of battle—a direct reference to the third pillar, 'enabling support,' to which the ChA pre-deployment training had focused—acted as a catalyst for the ANA to accept the Belgian mentoring.[100] The ChA also incorporated a more "participative method," indicating that the ANA and OMLT jointly prepared and executed the operations. Lastly, the Belgians preferred a "train the trainer" approach, attempting to incorporate a heightened sense of professionalism within the ANA NCO and officer corps.[101] This approach caused friction with the US Special Forces present in Kunduz, who was also cooperating with the ANA. However, Gérard assessed the US involvements to be "US-led," interacting with the ANA "in a directive way," with the US ODAs "training the ANA the way we do in our respective armies," indicating an attempt to enforce Western army structures and procedures.[102] The US Special Force's approach to degrading the insurgent's capability was at odds with the Belgian aim to build up a more professional Afghan Army. The Belgian advice

97 P. Gérard, Rapport de preparation OMLT 2.

98 FragO Note "BEL OMLT Inputs Regarding to Partnership," 11 December 2009.

99 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 8, 27/12/2020.

100 Ibid.

101 FragO Note "BEL OMLT Inputs Regarding to Partnership," 11 December 2009.

102 Ibid.

was thus to avoid partnering with the US Special Forces contingent. However, another ISAF regular battalion was not present in Kunduz to partner with, and as such little partnering could be conducted.[103]

Still, the ChA OMLT and the ANA conducted a large number of patrols in Kunduz. During their tenure, the Belgian OMLT was engaged a number of times without resulting in Belgian casualties. The total number of contacts was estimated to be "around 10 to 12" by the commanding officer, and it included small arms attacks, RPG engagements and a Suicide Vehicle-Born IED, to which Belgian OMLT responded well, according to their commander.[104] During the OMLT 1 tenure, a red-card holder was present to oversee Belgian operations. However, unlike the previous rotation, this RCH was integrated into the German-led brigade OMLT as a special adviser and, as such, was present in Kunduz instead of Mazar-e-Sharif. By the end of 2009, the German Brigade OMLT also included several Belgian staff officers. Although a good rapport was established between the Germans and the Belgians, the language issues resurfaced as the German staff communicated in German, necessitating the selection of officers that were able to communicate fluently in that language.[105] In some cases, this was easily overcome as the more senior Belgian officers had often worked in Soest, Germany, as part of the Belgian brigade, which was stationed there during the Cold War. Although the Belgian presence in Soest was terminated in 1994, many older officers still had a good working knowledge of the German language.

5.2.3 OMLT 3: 2 Commando

As the Belgian OMLT involvement entered its second year and its third rotation, the pioneer efforts of the first rotations allowed the 2 Commando (2 Cdo) battalion to prepare for deployment in a more routine fashion compared to the first iterations. 2 Commando is the Francophone sister battalion of 3 PARA, also part of the elite light brigade and with a highly similar training compendium. The commanding officer of the battalion, Lt. Col. Christophe Closset, was able to make three reconnaissance trips to Kunduz, including two with his key officers. Closset learned that 2 Cdo would mentor 1/2/209 kandak, a different kandak than the 2/2/209 kandak that was mentored by the ChA. This made part of the HOTO redundant, as the knowledge of the battalion's characteristics could not be transferred to 2 Cdo. Moreover, Closset stated that he received little guidance from Brussels on his exact tasks and that most of his understanding of the OMLT deployment was gained through the official reporting from OMLT 1 and 2 and ISAF reporting on the OMLT.[106] Based on the general order by the Chief of Defence, Closset reformulated his tasks as

103 Ops evaluatie van de opdracht bij einde zending door Bart Laurent, 5–6.

104 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 6, 27/11/2020; P. Gérard, Rapport X+1 mission OMLT 2, 6.

105 Ops evaluatie van de opdracht bij einde zending door Bart Laurent, 5/8.

106 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10, 25/01/2021.

> (BEL) OMLT 3 will: coach, assist, mentor and if necessary teach 1/2/209 Inf kandak in the planning, preparation, execution, and follow-up of operations and training activities IOT improve its capabilities in all functional areas. Also, (BEL) OMLT 3 will request and support the employment of ISAF CS and CSS Elm, i.e. CAS, Air mobility and MEDEVAC and liaise and coordinate with RC-N, 2/209 (ANA) Bde OMLT, PRT KUNDUZ, (US) LST, and appropriate designated ISAF or ANSF partnering unit.[107]

Closset was able to make a running start, as 2 Cdo was familiar with Afghanistan since the battalion had been deployed to Kabul the previous year. The Commando battalion had a high level of operational readiness and was ready to deploy. 2 Cdo went through three months of additional pre-deployment training, which was complemented with the by now customary Hohenfels OMLT training curriculum.

After 2 Cdo took over from the ChA, Closset and his team again attemped to build rapport between the Belgians and the ANA. Closset also made an effort to acquaint himself with Dari, which enhanced his status as a mentor to the ANA commander.[108] 2 Cdo focused during the deployment on initial capacity development, which included assisting, coaching, and mentoring 1/2/209 kandak in the planning, preparation, execution and follow-up of operations and training activities.[109]

Under Closset's leadership, the Belgians considered the ANA to be their "brothers in arms in the field," and this approach to mentoring attributed to the standing of the OMLT.[110] This attitude towards mentoring took the rekindled 3 PARA's approach with regard to the proximity to the front. Indeed, 2 Cdo shared 3 PARA's position that mentoring had to be done in person at the lowest tactical (platoon) levels instead of from the vehicles at the company level. 2 Cdo thus again deviated from the nationally imposed restrictions: "[We were] fighting on foot with vehicles in fire support at a distance. The most important reason for this was that we did not want to give the impression that we were hiding behind the vehicles."[111] Operations that were considered to be overly risky or a blatant breach of the national caveats were rejected by Belgian leadership. The presence of the Red Card Holder (RCH) also allowed Closset to save face with the Afghans, as any operation that could not be supported by the Belgian OMLT could be attributed to either the RCH or Brussels, avoiding any suspicion on the Afghan side on Belgian willingness to share operational risk.[112]

107 Excerpt from Initial Opord OMLT, personal archive Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10

108 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10, 25/01/2021.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Interview Belgian commanding officer 7, 03/11/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10, 25/01/2021.

2 Cdo participated in a total of fifty-six patrols during its six months in theatre, which resulted in a total of thirteen contacts with opposing forces.[113] The most significant incident of the tour, however, was the result of a blue-on-blue incident. On 2 April 2010, six ANA soldiers belonging to 1/2/209 kandak were killed by German fire during a joint German/Afghan/OMLT operation. Hours earlier, three German soldiers had been killed in action fighting insurgents.[114] The German troops, on edge after losing three of their own, misidentified two ANA-operated civilian cars approaching its position and opened fire.[115] After this incident, the relationship between ANA and the German PRT severely deteriorated, as the ANA held the German PRT responsible. As a result, joint operations were suspended for a period, and the Belgian OMLT—although not blamed by the ANA—had to navigate between these tense relations.[116]

The Belgian OMLT detachment, both at the kandak as well as the brigade levels, was by now highly critical of its surroundings. Closset observed a number of ANA shortfalls concerning their proficiency in primary military skills.[117] Amongst these, the ANA was considered incapable of adequately planning an operation, as they lacked a planning process. They could not coordinate actions, and there was no mission command. "[There were] many non-sense [sic] decisions and unrealistic orders issued by higher echelons."[118] In addition, the ANA had a poor intelligence process. They were also not proactive and would rush into action. No training policy, logistic architecture, medical support, tactical orders, or decent personnel management. Finally, clear and hold operations—especially concerning the latter—did not exist within ANSF.[119]

Moreover, the friendly fire incident on 2 April confirmed the existing views on the German forces present in Kunduz. Looking back, Closset made some scathing remarks on German military proficiency:

> the operational cooperation with the German troops of PRT KDZ was **very poor** (bold in original text), and I really mean it. The Germans were indeed very traditional soldiers (even if they were airborne and/or cavalry), applying very classical tactics despite the very special environment of a COIN operation, which proved to be truly dramatic on many occasions (regarding this, they not only suffered quite a few KIA because of their lack

113 Evaluatieverslag End of Mission, 3.

114 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-violence-idUSTRE6320CI20100403, accessed 10/06/2022.

115 https://www.ctvnews.ca/german-troops-accidentally-kill-6-afghan-soldiers-1.498677, accessed 10/06/2022.

116 End of Mission Report OMLT_10_01, 6; Evaluation de la mission OMLT Bde et SNR/RCH, 5.

117 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10, 25/01/2021.

118 Ibid.

119 End of Mission Report OMLT_10_01, 6.

> of professionalism, but they also killed six ANA soldiers of my kandak during a night operation in the Kunduz region, in a BLUE ON GREEN incident). They had no previous partnering experience and, strangely enough, considered themselves true gung-ho warriors, which they weren't at all. More often than not, they were just a bunch of undisciplined cowboys and mavericks, many of them with openly racist behaviours and words, poorly commanded in the field by two junior officers without sufficient experience (none of them had previous combat experience but didn't have the wisdom to learn how best to adapt). Above the tactical units, the PRT was supposed to play the role of regimental-level staff, but it globally performed **very badly** (bold in original text). Poorly commanded by too many arrogant but incompetent officers who were obviously not at their place in such an environment.[120]

This assessment of the German PRT was corroborated by other Belgian officers in earlier rotations, whose criticism included a lack of planning, vision and risk avoidance.[121]

The soured relations between the Germans and the ANA thus prohibited joint operations, and only after the German Colonel parleyed with the ANA commander did the interaction between the partners normalise to some extent. Still, a Belgian officer attached to the Brigade OMLT stated that some ANA forces were keen to exact revenge. An IED strike on a German vehicle that caused six Germans to be killed in action two weeks later, according to one source, hinted at foul play on the ANA's behalf.[122] Although Belgian troops were involved in this incident, it was not reported to Brussels as it was a Brigade effort, and no Belgians were injured or killed.[123] Still, the German response to the incident reiterated the criticism of the quality of the German forces in Kunduz, as it was reported that the "German conscript forces froze and did not know what to do."[124]

As 2 Cdo's tour ended, the relations between ISAF forces and the ANA had room for improvement, and although Closset reported an excellent relationship with the ANA, this was not the case with either the German PRT or the Brigade OMLT. The next rotation, the Battalion *Bevrijding-5 Linie*, led by Lt. Col. Van Vlerken, thus ameliorated the relations between its partners.

120 Email correspondence Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10, 25/01/2021.

121 Email correspondence G. Gabriels to S. Dutron 02/09/2009.

122 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 12, 10/11/2020.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

5.2.4 OMLT 4: Bataljon Bevrijding / 5 Linie

For the Dutch-speaking Bataljon Bevrijding / 5 Linie (Bvr/5Li), the preparation for the OMLT deployment followed by now familiar lines, including the national pre-deployment training, the NATO OMLT exercise in Hohenfels and the in-theatre training in Afghanistan. Informally, the commanders of OMLT 1 and OMLT 2 shared their experience with the Bevr/5Li battalion, especially 3 PARA's experience, which included combat footage of that rotation as a part of the preparation.[125] The comprehensiveness of the OMLT task was also recognised, as Van Vlerken indicated that the OMLT would constitute "supporting the ANA Battalion as a coach in just about every functional domain."[126] Besides looking to its Belgian predecessors, Bevr/5Li also looked to incorporate the lessons learned by the Dutch Battlegroup and OMLT, with officers of both sharing their experiences with the Belgian 4th rotation during its pre-deployment training.[127] This complemented a reconnaissance in February 2010 and an increasing collection of lessons learned by ETTs, OMLTs and counterinsurgency literature.[128]

Van Vlerken, like all commanding officers, had received his orders in the general operations order and, after analysing his assignment, restated his orders for his subordinates. He considered that mentorship would incorporate giving advice and assistance to the ANA in order to make them "**independent**" (bold in original), which would include training and teaching before, as well as during, operations.[129] In his mission brief to the battalion, Van Vlerken considered his mission to "support de [sic] development of a self-sufficient [sic], competent and professional 2/2/209 (ANA) Infantry KANDAK."[130] He considered his implied tasks were "to coach and mentor all functional areas within the 2/2/209 (ANA) kandak for continued development of capabilities, including staff procedures for operations at infantry Coy, infantry Battalion and higher level, to support operational planning and tactical employment of 2/2/209 kandak, including planning, assessing, supporting and the execution of combat operations." Moreover, the order specified its liaison tasks to include "requesting and supporting the employment of ISAF combat enablers, i.e. fire support, CAS and MEDEVAC, and liaising and coordinating with the appropriate R[egional]C[ommand] and partnering units."[131]

Although Van Vlerken's order included the planning and execution of combat operations, he again deviated from his predecessors in that he adhered to his orders not to mentor below the

125 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 15, 03/12/2020.

126 B. Van Vlerken, "OMLT – Mentor in Afghanistan," *Belgisch Militair Tijdschrift* (2011), 111.

127 Zie: Bedankbrieven Tak 3 OMLT 4, personal archive B. van Vlerken

128 Personal archive B. van Vlerken.

129 Powerpoint presentation B. Van Vlerken "Operational Mentoring and Liaison team 1/2/209 KANDAK."

130 Richtlijnen Tak 3, PrepO OMLT I/4, undated, personal archive B. Van Vlerken.

131 Ibid.

company level. As the US staff in Hohenfels propagated mentoring at the section and platoon level, Van Vlerken had a minor altercation with the US trainers, as his orders prohibited this. Moreover, Van Vlerken was also unwilling to expose his forces to unnecessary risks as he stated that "Afghanistan is not a country worth dying for."[132]

During the execution, the Belgian OMLT was engaged in a 'troops in contact' situation several times during the first month, although no injuries or damage was sustained.[133] From 1 August onwards, a German Training and Protection Battalion (org. Ausbildungs und Schutzbattalion) was incorporated into the RC/N organisation. This battalion would act as the partner battalion to the ANA in Kunduz. The German battalion would be rebranded 'Task Force Kunduz' as the long, politically driven German label to the battalion was considered too difficult to explain to other ISAF states.[134] Task Force Kunduz (TF KDZ or TFK), implemented by the Commander RC-N General Major Fritz of the German Army, allowed for the first time for large-scale operations, as more combat power could be fielded by ISAF forces. Operation HALMAZAG, executed in October–November 2010, was conducted to clear the town of Quadliam and its surroundings of Taliban influence. Subsequently, using the well-known COIN adage Shape-Clear-Holad-Build, the town would be held by the ANSF, and the governance presence would take form, in this case, by improving local infrastructure.[135] This operation was formally led by the ANA, although the German, Belgian and American participants were heavily involved in the preparation and execution of the operation. Operation HALMAZAG was considered symbolic as the Germans and Afghans were once again in cooperation during a large-scale operation, and the operation was the first time the German Army was involved in an offensive operation since World War II. Still, the Belgian OMLT was heavily involved in the operation as the Germans, and the ANA did not communicate directly with each other due to linguistic issues and German unwillingness to share confidential information, as the ANA were considered untrustworthy.[136] Nonetheless, the relations between the different parties gradually improved, and the CO of the TF KDZ especially was able to build rapport between himself and the ANA commander, to which Van Vlerken acted as a catalyst, as well as with the CO OMLT himself.[137] As it happened, operation HALMAZAG succeeded in driving any Taliban forces from the vicinity of Quatliam, although the clearing operation took more than a week to complete. Also, the Germans were able to

132 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 16, 27/01/2021.

133 B. Van Vlerken, Verslag M+1 OMLT 10_06 (27 JUN 2010 – DEC 2010) Kunduz 2010.

134 C. von Blumröder, "Partnering: Auflage, Auftrag und Chance: Erfahrungen des 1. Kontingents Ausbildungs- und Schutzbataillon (ASB) KUNDUZ von Juli 2010 – Januar 2011," *Das Schwarze Barett* (2011), 16.

135 M. Seliger, "Der Sieg bei Isa Khel," *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (2010), 1.

136 Ibid., 20; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 15, 03/12/2020.

137 Blumröder, "Partnering: Auflage, Auftrag und Chance: Erfahrungen des 1. Kontingents Ausbildungs- und Schutzbataillon (ASB) KUNDUZ von Juli 2010 – Januar 2011," 20; Interview German commanding officer 36, 14/01/2021.

recover a Dingo vehicle that had been lost during the 2 April incident that left three German soldiers killed in action.[138] Although Halmazag had been made possible by ISAF support, the credit for the victory was given to the ANA, as the 'Afghan face' on operations was considered paramount in this phase of the counterinsurgency.[139]

Although Operation HALMAZAG was considered a success on all levels, the Belgian OMLT still had relational issues to overcome. The relation between the kandak-level OMLT and the ANA was good. However, the communication between the brigade-level OMLT and the ANA kandak was inadequate.[140] In the official report to Brussels, the senior Belgian brigade OMLT officer and also RCH stated that "the senior German mentor has insufficient command of the English language, displays a despicable sense of humour and has not given any guidance whatsoever to the senior kandak mentors during his entire tenure."[141] The German commander was also assessed as lacking "self-confidence and lacking respect from his subordinates."[142]Moreover, the senior Belgian mentor made scathing remarks towards the Afghan brigade-level officers, as he considered the ANA to "lack any planning capabilities in any domain, disrupting the efforts of the mentoring team."[143] One Belgian officer also lamented the continuous Afghan requests for alcoholic beverages.[144] On the kandak level, however, Van Vlerken considered a complimentary bottle of wine to be a means towards a good relationship between him and the kandak commander.[145] Alcohol was, of course, a taboo in the strictly Islamic country of Afghanistan, but some Belgian officers took the more liberal views towards alcohol by some of the ANA to smoothen the relations. However, this cut both ways as apparently some of the ANA soldiers demanded alcoholic beverages as the starting point of any interaction.

In conclusion, OMLT 4 validated its tactics and organisation and was also able to build a good rapport with both the ANA kandak as well with the TFK. However, OMLT 4 did experience friction between the kandak and brigade levels, as well as having to manoeuvre around inter-allied problems. Operation HALMAZAG was the pinnacle of the deployment, which forced a renewed cooperation between all partners in Kunduz. Moreover, the presence of the TFK offered the ANA a partnering unit between which the next OMLTs could liaise. By the

138 Seliger, "Der Sieg bei Isa Khel."

139 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 16, 27/01/2021.

140 J. Dierickx Evaluatieverslag EOM COS ISAF-OMLTBde_10_06 en RCH/SNR RC-N p. 4/5.

141 J. Dierickx, Evaluatieverslag EOM COS ISAF OMLTBgd-10-06 en RCH/SNR RC-N, 20/12/2010, p. 2/5.

142 Verslag X+1 COS ISAF-OMLTBde-10_06 wn RCH/SNR RC North.

143 J. Dierickx, Evaluatieverslag EOM COS ISAF OMLTBgd-10-06 en RCH/SNR RC-N, 20/12/2010 p. 2/5.

144 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 15, 03/12/2020.

145 Verslag End of Mission OMLT 10_06 (27 Jun 2010 – 15 Dec 2010).

end of December 2010, Bvr/5Li transferred its tasks to the Francophone battalion 12ème de Ligne Prince Leopold – 13ème de Ligne (12/13Li) from Spa.

5.2.5 *OMLT 5: 12ème de Ligne Prince Leopold – 13ème de Ligne*

By 2011, all preparatory efforts had settled into routine and thus required little adjustment or remedial action.[146] Moreover, the threat levels in Kunduz had decreased significantly, making TICs a rather scarce event. As such, battalion 12ème de Ligne Prince Leopold – 13ème de Ligne (12/13Li) split itself into the 'KAIA guard' element and the 'OMLT' element, again over the lines of experience and individual quality. During the pre-deployment training, most information was by now collected through the OMLT two rotations earlier, and two reconnaissance trips were made by the commanding officer and his staff to the incumbent OMLT. One interviewee stated that "as we were the 5th rotation, the lessons learned from the other detachments were already taken into account before our deployment regarding the material and the training. We did not receive additional equipment during our tour, and we also didn't adapt any of our TTPs. I guess it's because our preparation had been well planned and conducted."[147] Also, 12/13Li did not make any adjustments to the restated mission statement of its predecessors.[148]

Operationally, the Belgian kandak benefited from the installation of a 'tactical operations centre' at the brigade level, which aimed to deconflict the operations of the multinational OMLT structure on both the kandak and brigade levels.[149] Also, the installation of the Persistent Threat Detection System (PTDS), a tethered aerostat-based system capable of staying aloft for weeks at a time and providing round-the-clock surveillance of broad areas, improved the safety of the ISAF troops in Kunduz from April 2011 onwards.[150]

As a result of operation HALMAZAG and NOWRUZ, the ANA now operated two combat outposts (COPs) in Kunduz. Each of these COPs was manned by around fifty Afghan Army soldiers, which were at times accompanied by Belgian OMLT members in order to advise and assist with defence plans, mortar fire plans and patrol planning.[151] At the main base in Kunduz, the OMLT was primarily focused on the provision of training.

146 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 18, 09/02/2021; "Ils Sont Parés Pour L'Afghanistan," *Le P'tit 12 Li Regimental Gazette* (2010).

147 Email correspondence Belgian OMLT mentor 19, 26/10/2020.

148 Ibid.

149 Lt. Col. Cabo, Evaluation la mission OMLT Bde et SNR/RCH (Dec 10–Jun 11), 7; G. Swyngedauw, ISAF OMLTBde_10_12: Uitbating verlag EoM.

150 See: https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/return-of-the-military-airship/, accessed 16/06/2022, G. Swyngedauw, ISAF OMLTBde_10_12: Uitbating verlag EoM.

151 Email correspondence Belgian OMLT mentor 19, 26/10/2020.

During the execution of the mission, two operations stand out. The first was operation NAWROZ, which aimed to clear and hold terrain 60 km south of Kunduz city. During this operation, which was supported by ISAF air power, two Afghan companies cleared the town of ARABHA between 20 to 28 February 2011. During this operation, an ANA soldier and fourteen insurgents were (reportedly) killed in action.[152] The second operation was a road move which aimed to collect a new ANA kandak in Kabul and escort this unit back to Kunduz. This operation, dubbed SALANG EXPRESS, also had a premiere in that, for the first time in Belgian military history, reporters were allowed to accompany Belgian forces as embedded journalists. As the convoy operation was rather uneventful—no enemy contacts were observed—the subsequent articles gave a candid impression of the Belgian OMLT mission.[153] As it were, the statement made by the Belgian OMLT to the journalists reflected the official reporting at the End of Mission-report to Brussels. 12/13Li reiterated earlier statements from its predecessors with regard to the ANA's lacklustre planning capacities, unwillingness to adapt to new ideas or doctrine and general *inshallah* attitude.[154] The lack of progress after two and a half years, in combination with a general sense of frustration towards the Afghan attitude, led one OMLT 5 mentor to assess that "if the mentoring is not continued, I fear that much of our efforts will be lost."[155]

Being the 5th iteration of the OMLT, the Belgian forces recognised these trends. On a positive note, the Belgian force structure and tactics had been validated, and the importance of bilateral relations between mentor and mentee had been recognised. Belgian commanding officers were, therefore, very vocal in their End of Mission reports that a good command of English was imperative for the mission.[156] The more complicated relationship with the German force commander, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, persisted (the SNR of this rotation stated that "the relations with the senior mentor are electric. He does not trust his subordinates in any way and has decided to manage everything alone"), but were

152 P. Brennet, Bilan mi-mission de l'OMLT 10/12, personal archive; M. Lefebvre, Powerpoint presentation "Mentoring the ANA, OMLT experience brief," April 2012.

153 Esmeralda Laybe "Embarquée avec les soldats belges en Afghanistan – jour 1," *RTBF*, 13 May 2011, https://www.rtbf.be/article/embarquee-avec-les-soldats-belges-en-afghanistan-jour-1-6103213; Esmeralda Laybe "Afghanistan, embarquée avec les soldats belges – jour 2," *RTBF*, 24 May 14 2011, https://www.rtbf.be/article/afghanistan-embarquee-avec-les-soldats-belges-jour-2-6106293; Christophe Lamfalussy "Opération Salang Express," *La Libre*, May 2011, https://www.lalibre.be/international/2011/05/04/operation-salang-express-QK3TNOX72BDIPLHBKBK4F7ZKGM/.

154 M. Lefebvre, Powerpoint presentation "Mentoring the ANA, OMLT experience brief," April 2012; L. Lejeune, Rapport de Fin de Mission – OMLT BDE Branche 2; J. Cabo, Evaluation la mission OMLT Bde et SNR/RCH (Dec 10–Jun 11); M. Lefebvre, End of Mission Report – Det OMLT-10/12, 15 June 2011.

155 Email correspondence Belgian OMLT mentor 19, 26/10/2020.

156 J. Cabo, Evaluation la mission OMLT Bde et SNR/RCH (Dec 10–Jun 11); M. Lefebvre, End of Mission Report – Det OMLT-10/12, 15 June 2011.

of a transient nature, and also improving, albeit slightly.[157] The more fundamental problems could be found in the absorptive capacity of the ANA soldiers themselves, with the numerous anecdotal evidence and the formal reporting reiterated during the rotations.

12/13Li were to be relieved by 3 PARA, which of course, had served during the first rotation of 2009. In fact, a few of the first rotations' officers would be redeployed to Kunduz, which added to the knowledge of both the job at hand, as well as the geography and demographics of the province.

5.2.6 OMLT 6 and 7: 3 PARA (2) and Chasseurs Ardennais (2)

OMLT 6 and OMLT 7 saw both 3 PARA and the Chasseurs Ardennais battalion recalled to Kunduz. The introduction of a new German commander and senior mentor, Col. Rohde, improved the relationship between the Belgian service member and the Brigade OMLT.[158] Although the preparation and the execution of these rotations followed by now familiar lines, an important observation is that by now, frustration and acquiescence with regard to the Afghan Army's military performance appeared to have set in. Rohde wrote in his End of Mission assessment that there is a centralised decision-making structure within the ANA, which means that there is no initiative among officers, or as he described it, a "wait and see" attitude. Moreover, the ANA has a "use and consume" rather than "maintain and sustain" mentality. This makes it difficult for mentors to improve their methods.[159] On the battalion level, some people were tired of explaining the same thing every time again, and some were disappointed regarding the progress that was made with the ANA.[160]

During the second tenure of 3 PARA, one operation stands out to illustrate the ad hoc nature of ANA-led counterinsurgency efforts and the disconnect between the ISAF and ANA forces. From 13 December to 17 December 2011, Operation WARDUJ was executed by an Afghan/German/Belgian combination. During this period, one of the Belgian officers recalled that WARDUJ was "intended to free a number of ANP service members that had been captured by local Taliban in the province of Badakhshān."[161] The Belgian RCH and SNR, Lt. Col. Leclerq, together with Col. Rohde and the ANA Brigade commander, Brigadier General Waziri, agreed on an operation to liberate the captives. It was decided to deploy a kandak to the location where they had been captured in order to attempt a retrieval. Although Brigadier

157 Ibid.

158 Interview German OMLT senior mentor 37, 18/01/2021.

159 End of Tour Assessment Report, 28 December 2011, 2.

160 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 21, 19/01/2021; V. Descheemaeker, End of Mission report – Det OMLT 11_06, 20/12/2011; Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 24, 09/12/2020; Focus Group Belgian OMLT mentor 9, Belgian OMLT mentor 28 and Belgian OMLT mentor 13, 25/01/2021; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 31, 26/02/2021.

161 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 22, 16/12/2020.

Waziri intended to deploy the same day, Leclerq convinced him to delay until the next day in order for the Belgians to prepare. As the Belgian kandak-OMLT was in the process of being rotated, the deployed kandak was without its battalion-level mentors. Still, as the ANA brigade commander was supported by his own Western advisers, it was agreed that several would accompany him for the operation. An ad-hoc ANA brigade Command Post (CP) and multinational mentor team were quickly established, together with several Afghan officers, including the ANA intel officer (S2) and a local interpreter.[162]

Whilst the kandak moved by road towards the designated area, the Afghan/German/Hungarian/Belgian ANA/OMLT combination was moved by US helicopters towards a mountain ridge, where the CP was set up. As relatively few service members were present to man the CP, everyone, including the Western officers, participated in guard duties. Unconcerned by elaborate preparations, Waziri had not brought his personal gear with him, so one of his soldiers had to scavenge a blanket and pillow to keep him warm during the night.[163]

As the kandak reached the CP, the Belgian OMLT was surprised by the sudden delivery of a note written by the captors of the ANSF service members, consisting of a list of demands that had to be met in order to guarantee their safe return.[164] Unable to meet these demands, Waziri himself visited the nearest town, and while he bought a sheep at the local market to celebrate the presumed imminent return of the captive ANP, he and his staff were involved in a series of frantic telephone calls with, as it turned out, local powerbrokers and lower-tier members of opposing forces. The next day, as the ANA kandak started its clearance of the valley in order to reach the location where captives and captors had been spotted by NATO ISR assets, the OMLT were again surprised with the Afghan way of warfare: operations would start around at 10 a.m., and stopped well before dinner, as food had to be prepared during daylight. This low operational tempo led to a two-day advance, stalling at less than 300 m of the target area on the second day. As the phone calls between the ANA officers and local chiefs and powerbrokers again increased in number, the captive ANPs were suddenly released, as the opposing military forces recognised the inevitable progress of the ANA battalion, which would reach their positions before noon the next day.[165] Unable to fight

162 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 22, 16/12/2020; Interview German OMLT senior mentor 37, 18/01/2021; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 23, 16/02/2021.

163 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 22, 16/12/2020.

164 Personal archive O. Rohde, original note and translation of the note.

165 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 22, 16/12/2020; Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 23, 16/02/2021, Interview German OMLT senior mentor 37, 18/01/2021; Powerpoint presentation operation Warduj, personal archive O. Rohde.

the ANA on equal terms, an honourable solution was reached by releasing the prisoners, apparently with Waziri's guarantee not to pursue the matter any further.[166]

Although both rotations had to cope with a substantial IED threat—the Belgian OMLT suffered an IED attack on 23 April 2012—no Belgians were seriously wounded or killed during both rotations.[167] Indeed, a degree of routine had set in. OMLT 6 had still managed thirty-three patrols, excluding mentoring tasks on the COPs and main base in Kunduz, and the ChA benefitted from a new kandak commander, who was more willing to go on operations compared to his predecessor.[168] Still, most operations were OMLT-initiated, with a minority of the patrols being initiated by the Brigade.[169] Importantly, a level of distrust still lingered between the ANA and the OMLT. This distrust is exemplified by the Belgian suspicion of its Afghan allies as the aforementioned IED attack on the ChA occurred at a moment when no Afghan forces were present on the axis where the IED struck. The ANSF was supposed to be present at that axis, and thus a sense that the ANA knew about the attack beforehand stuck with the Belgians.[170] As both battalions concluded their mentorship, the OMLT was transitioned to a Military Advisory Team as the battalion Carabinier Prins Boudewijn – Grenadiers arrived.

5.2.7 MAT 8: Regiment Carabiniers Prins Boudewijn – Grenadiers

At the end of February 2012, the battalion Regiment Carabiniers Prins Boudewijn – Grenadiers (1C/1Grn) was invited to the Bde HQ for a briefing about "the way ahead in Kunduz." During this briefing, the news was brought up that the structure of the OMLT would be transformed into that of the Military Advisor Team (MAT). This required several changes. Instead of five teams of eight persons, the detachment now had to consist of three teams with two advisers and a force protection platoon. There would also be one company mentor for two ANA company commanders. Later on, in the next MAT rotation, this would extend to one mentor for all company commanders.[171] For 1C/1Grn, this implied that fewer personnel were needed to staff the advisory effort, as fewer company teams were needed. This was disappointing for the Belgian service members; although very little combat had taken place over the past twelve months, the aura of a combat mission was still present, and as this was the first OMLT deployment for 1C/1Grd, the battalion was eager. Fortunately for 1C/1Grn, as the battalion was already close to deployment, the Defence Staff allowed the full detachment to deploy,

166 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 22, 16/12/2020.

167 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 24, 09/12/2020.

168 Powerpoint presentation OMLT 6, personal archive V. Descheemaker.

169 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 24, 09/12/2020.

170 Ibid.

171 Interview Belgian OMLT mentor 30, 13/01/2021; Van Herreweghe "Het leven in Kunduz," part 1.

regardless of its reduced tasks.[172] Still, the detachment had to be mentally prepared that this mission now would be one of advising instead of mentoring, which has been done in the past few years.[173] Thus a change of mindset was needed: the new approach was limited to being an adviser rather than a mentor and a "second commander."[174]

Ultimately, the new concept was created to shift slowly from coaching at the lower levels (e.g., company) to the higher levels (battalion and brigade).[175] The decision by US President Barack Obama to end combat operations by US service members in Afghanistan by 2014, made during a speech on June 2011, made the inevitable transition to a self-supporting Afghan National Army imminent, whether or not the ANA would be capable of doing so.[176] Consequently, ISAF would "gradually permit tactical formations to function on their own, eventually concentrating on advisory work at brigade and corps level."[177] ISAF's commanding officer during 1C/1Grn tenure, US General John Allen, indeed expected the ANA to have problems holding their own in the insurgency but reasoned that "the Afghan army and police needed to be tested progressively and faults rectified while ISAF was still in a position to support them."[178] As 1C/1Grn was already close to deployment, little could be adjusted in the pre-deployment training. As it were, the only significant change was the incorporation of role players to act as ANA. To this end, another Belgian battalion was employed in this role, which only partly provided for 1C/1Grn's training needs: "1/3L was given the questionable honour to perform as role-players, a sheer impossible assignment. But truth be told, they played their roles with zest, including a lack of punctuality, their inability to read a map and lacking logistical preparations, which would all be situations that we would experience in Kunduz with the ANA."[179] In the End of Mission report of MAT 8, it is stated that the transition from OMLT (with five company teams) via a MAT with three company teams to a MAT with one coy team fitted perfectly within the NAVO exit strategy.[180] During this period, a trend of moving away from the lowest tactical levels could indeed be observed. For the Belgian contingent, this meant that the result-driven operation, i.e., improving the ANA until a satisfactory

172 1C/1Grd Regimental Gazette, Historiek 20 Jaar Caribiniers-Grenadiers, 2013, 149.

173 Internal newspaper, 147.

174 Verslag einde PDT Det MAT 12_06, p. 8 Bijl A.

175 Johan de Laere – Mentoring in Afghanistan, 19.

176 Trevor McCrisken, "Justifying Sacrifice: Barack Obama and the Selling and Ending of the War in Afghanistan," *International Affairs* 88, no. 5 (2012): 994, 1005; The White House, "Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan," 22 June 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-Afghanistan.

177 Robert Johnson and Timothy Clack, *At the End of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical, and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover and Withdrawal* (Constitutions of the Countries, 2015) 33–34.

178 Ibid., 34.

179 1C/1Grd Regimental Gazette, Historiek 20 Jaar Caribiniers-Grenadiers, 2013, 156.

180 End of Mission MAT 12_06, 9.

level of competence had been reached, was replaced by a time-driven deployment.[181] Notwithstanding the reduced mentoring capacity, 1C/1Grn participated in regular combined BEL/ANA patrols, which did not result in hostilities with the Taliban, although the IED threat was still present in the area of operations.[182] Ultimately, 1C/1Grn considered its deployment a success, stating that the ANA were now capable of being "independent on the company level" and "efficient with advisers" on the kandak level.[183]

With the conclusion of the deployment, the OMLT had formally ceased to exist in Kunduz, with the MAT now the formal designation for ISAF's ANA mentoring efforts. Although, in some respects, the change from the OMLT to the MAT is an almost semantic exercise, the change marked the beginning of the gradual withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan. Ultimately, the Belgian MAT would end its mission on 1 May.[184] The 1/3 Lanciers battalion would act as a redeployment MAT with a reduced mission duration and scope.[185]

5.3 Subconclusion

With the safe return of 1/3 Lanciers to Belgium, the advisory efforts in Kunduz province were concluded. First and foremost, the Belgian government were very content with its performance. The Minister of Defence, Pieter de Crem, stated that he was satisfied with the capabilities of the Afghan soldiers: "compared to Afghan norms, we can call [this mission] a success. That country has progressed from a medieval clan structure to a modern state structure in a decade's time. Now they can further build on their security structures."[186] De Crem resounded the positive comments from Belgian leadership, including the senior officers involved with the OMLT/MATs. On the political front, Belgium had participated in a combat deployment that was understood to be a dangerous endeavour without suffering any combat losses. As the US and Germany started their redeployment of combat forces, including from Kunduz, Belgium could honourably withdraw its OMLT/MAT without being accused of ally defection, as was the case

181 zInterview Belgian OMLT mentor 31, 26/02/2021.

182 1C/1Grd Regimental Gazette, Historiek 20 Jaar Caribiniers-Grenadiers, 2013, 158.

183 Ibid., 160.

184 1C/1Grd Regimental Gazette, Historiek 20 Jaar Caribiniers-Grenadiers Bijlage B. Overzicht van de operaties van 1992 tot 2012 waarin Caribinier-Grenadiers ingezet werden.

185 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 32, 16/12/2020; EoM MATBDE 13_01, annex B.

186 Gie Goris, "De Septemberverklaring van de Taliban," *MO*, 28 September 2015, https://www.mo.be/nieuws/de-septemberverklaring-van-de-taliban. Original quote: "Naar Afghaanse normen kunnen we spreken van een succes. Dat land is in tien jaar tijd van een middeleeuwse clanstructuur naar een 21e-eeuwse structuur gebracht. Nu kunnen ze een nieuwe veiligheidsstructuur opbouwen."

with the Netherlands in 2010.[187] Belgian officers validated De Crem's positive sentiment. Col. Johan De Laere of the ACOS training and operations—and as such involved with all Belgian operations, including the Kunduz deployment—authored an article in which he acknowledged the slow progress that the ANA made over the years, but he also pronounced his confidence that the accumulation of Belgian advise and support would ultimately enable the ANA to be an independent force cometh 2014.[188] De Laere expected the ANA to improve quickly and stated that the Belgian kandak was already "effective with advisers."[189] The CO of OMLT 1, Lt. Col. Schoemaekers, saw "significant progress on the company level, and slower progress on the kandak level. The latter improved as the Belgians joined the kandak on operations."[190] Lt. Col. Bart Laurent, the SNR of OMLT 2 and later the CO of the kandak OMLT conveyed his absolute confidence in the mission by stating that there was "no doubt about it" when reporting on the added value of the Belgian contingent.[191] Lt. Col. Van Vlerken also mentioned the increased effectiveness that resulted from the OMLT's efforts.[192] Moreover, he assessed the kandak—already in the fourth rotation—"is capable of executing operations independently, and that the OMLT's deployment results in a qualitative improvement.[193] Senior German Mentor Rohde commented that "HQ 2Bde made without any doubt progress, mainly within the fields of leadership, planning and coordination."[194] The End of Mission report of the 12_01 rotation mentioned the ANA's capability to plan brigade- and kandak-level operations independently, as well as the improved functioning of the 1 (personnel) and 4 (logistics) branches.[195]

Although multiple sources comment on the *gradual* progress that has been made by the ANA during the Belgian involvement, and regularly the Afghan warrior culture and cavalier attitude towards planning and logistics are also lauded, the positive comments are outweighed by the sheer volume of reflections on the Afghan inability or unwillingness to absorb advice and guidance. In this chapter, a number of rather negative assessments that were formally reported to ACOS Ops & Trg have been described. The reasons behind the contradictory reporting remain somewhat of an enigma, as no action was taken to uncover the motives behind the contrast. Still, the numerous reports and commanding officers declaring that the ANA would eventually have to perform without assistance, in combination with the, at times, blistering assessment

187 See: Massie, "Why Democratic Allies Defect Prematurely: Canadian and Dutch Unilateral Pullouts from the War in Afghanistan."

188 J. De Laere, "Mentoring in Noord-Afghanistan," *Belgisch Militair Tijdschrift* (2012), 19–20.

189 Ibid., 16–17.

190 Interview Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1, 04/11/2020.

191 B. Laurent, Ops evaluatie van de opdracht bij einde zending SNR/RCH Kunduz (28 Jul – 28 Dec 09), undated.

192 Vlerken, "OMLT – Mentor in Afghanistan," 112.

193 B. van Vlerken, Verslag End of Mission OMLT 10_06 (27 Jun 10 – 15 Dec 10).

194 L. Leclerq, End of Mission Report BELU ISAF 11-06, 10.

195 P. Vermeer, End of Mission Report (EoM) MAT Bde 12/01, 07/07/2012, 14–15.

of their capacities, imply that senior Belgian leadership was stuck between the knowledge that the Afghan solution would have to be found in the couleur locale, albeit without the conviction that the ANA would be able to deliver, leading to a degree of self-deception their assessments.

Col. Jan Moortgat, the last Brigade MAT SNR/RCH, wrote in an article in the Belgian military journal about the positive knock-on effects for the Land Component through the lens of the OMLT/MAT deployment, concluding that the Land Component had made strides in working in an international environment, a boost in the acquisition of modern materiel, and a shift in pre-deployment training activities within the counterinsurgency context.[196] Moortgat thus focused on the positive outcomes for the Land Component itself rather than concentrating on the ANA's improvement. Remarkably, the assessment that the OMLT/MAT deployment had been constructive for the Land Component itself was shared by most senior Belgian officers involved in the OMLT. An important topic in Moortgat's assessment is the necessity of having a good command of the English language, which was a reiteration of the statements made by every senior Belgian officer involved in the OMLT, notwithstanding the staff being Flemish or Walloon.

Another constant in the Belgian reporting is the positive assessment of the pre-deployment training as well as the quality of the Belgian contingent in general. Repeatedly, the Belgians were considered an exemplary OMLT in terms of the quality of the staff. The American assessment of the first OMLT is a case in point. Both considerations might be explained by the careful emulation of coalition partners' best practices on mentoring foreign forces, as well as their own national experiences with regard to mentoring. Matching the rank of the mentee by the mentor has been a typical Belgian custom, bypassing the 'one-up' method used by other nations' OMLTs. With the Land Component not otherwise engaged in large-scale commitments, each assigned battalion has been able to select the most mature and experienced service member for its OMLT, leaving the junior staff to guard KAIA. As professional infantrymen can be considered overqualified for guarding an airport, no problems arose from the deployment of junior soldiers. The ability to select the top tier cadre for the OMLT, however, is a practice that was not matched by either the British or the Dutch.

With no combat losses, positive knock-on effects for the Land Component and an opportune moment to disengage from Kunduz, the Belgian OMLT exertions were considered favourably. The direct object of the efforts, the ANA, was not by any means able to function according to the 'capability milestone one' benchmark. As mentoring the ANA became a time-driven instead of a result-driven effort, this gradually became less imperative, especially on the lower tactical levels. Considering the risk-averse Belgian political attitude in combination with a relative mission statement—mission verbs such as 'improving,' 'supporting,' and 'enabling' always left room to claim success without any indication of formal or institutional learning-leaving—the ANA as an effective combat unit was never the aspiration.

196 J. Moortgat, "Begeleiding en advies in Noord-Afghanistan: Een positieve evolutie voor de Landcomponent," *Belgisch Militair Tijdschrift* (2014).

Part 3

Reflection

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Analysis and conclusion

This dissertation has explored the way in which three states have fielded an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team in Afghanistan. The main research question ‘‘how have the armed forces of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium adapted to the OMLT task in Afghanistan, and what institutional changes have materialised as a consequence of this adaptation?" thus seeks to elucidate the adaptational processes during the deployment and the institutional changes that this SFA-type deployment has instigated.

In the introduction, this research commenced with the observation that SFA is increasingly used as a foreign policy tool, however, what exactly encompassed SFA remained mostly unclear. The plethora of military and academic terms to describe a broad topic further obfuscated scholarly endeavours to elucidate the utility and challenges of SFA-type operations. Revisiting the questions that were asked in the introduction, this analysis will first consider that first question: what was asked for when the OMLTs were created, and during what type of conflict? Secondly, this chapter will use the manifestations of military innovation described in chapter two to identify how the OMLTs of the selected case studies have adapted during their tenure, and what institutionalisations have materialised after this series of deployments.

6.1 The strategic rationale behind SFA-type deployments in Afghanistan

Ameliorating the Afghan army has been a quintessential example of security force assistance during a contemporary counterinsurgency campaign. Indeed, the observation in the first chapter that SFA has its utility mainly in support rather than in lieu of major regular combat operations, and as such is particularly suitable for certain types of irregular warfare, counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare in particular, is corroborated by the research in this dissertation. As theorised in the introduction, the Afghan campaign epitomises the evolution of COIN operations into a population-centric approach, aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the population. As the ANA was at the forefront of strengthening and legitimising the authority of the host-nation regime, one would expect that the main strategic effort of ISAF would be to stand up the ANA into a system that would boost the control over the Afghan society whilst simultaneously attriting the insurgency in its effort to control the Afghan populace. The OMLTs would perform a role in this effort, as the ANA was not considered to be operationally effective without western mentors. So during this COIN campaign, what exactly did we ask the OMLTs to do? In analysing the assignments of the OMLTs, a further understanding of the rationale behind OMLT teams can be gained.

After the decision had been made to create a new Afghan National Army -the first attempt had failed-, the US quickly recognised that its embedded training teams were lacking the capacity to mentor the many Afghan kandaks that would be deployed across the country in the upcoming years. The novel OMLT concept was created, and although it was understood that the OMLTs would be an important factor in contributing to the development of the Afghan National Army, it was left to each OMLT-contributing state to interpret its exact mission statement. A few important caveats were presented, including the OMLT's minimum term of deployment and a number of operational capabilities, however, ISAF HQ allowed many other variables to be decided by the individual states.

Although this might come across as loose control, the operational reality in Afghanistan differed across the country, and therefore it is understandable that the leading state in each province had some leeway in deciding how to use its OMLTs. For the British, who were drawn into the series of pitched battles described in this dissertation, the OMLT and ANA were very much a secondary concern during the first years and were mainly useful in freeing up British forces by manning outposts and patrolling across the province where needed. Although the OMLT and ANA provided for extra combat power capacity, the mentoring assignment was initially considered to be both a second-rate assignment, as well as a part-time job: the unit responsible for the first OMLT had received two more assignments besides mentoring the ANA. The first rotations had to muddle through, as British leadership was not inclined to elevate either the ANA or the OMLTs to a position of operational or strategic influence. Although the OMLT remained the less glorious assignment, the fourth rotation of OMLTs had been given a more tangible mission statement: to train, mentor and strike in support of their ANA Brigade to deliver this Brigade as an operationally proven, self-supporting combined arms brigade. Although understandable when viewed through the lens of a commanding officer looking to expand his provincial combat power, the magnitude of this mission statement was not observed as the British were not in the position to make any demands of the Afghan force generation process, the logistical support or whether or not the brigade was to be operationally proven -indeed the actual commitment of the Brigade was formally an Afghan decision. Its successors were thus quick to acknowledge the long-term goal, but conceded on the realisation that this would become a long-term effort by adjusting the mission statement to enable the continued progress towards 3/205 Brigade becoming a self-sufficient sustainable and operationally proven all arms Brigade. Later iterations of the OMLT had even more issues with supporting the ANA on the formation level, as the Afghan Brigade became fragmented all over Helmand, reducing the OMLTs to supporting their mentees in a more decentralised fashion.

In Uruzgan, the Dutch OMLT built on the mission statement that was provided in the Article 100 letter provided by the Dutch government: they were to train, monitor and mentor the ANA-battalions, including the provision of JTAC capacity. During the formation of the

OMLTs, however, it became clear that the Dutch Directorate of Operations had little interest in the OMLT and the ANA. Indicative, the first TFU commander was unaware that he had an OMLT in Uruzgan, and the JTAC capacity – a scarce commodity in the Dutch Army, was never allocated to the OMLTs. As a result, the question 'what was asked' can not be answered in the Dutch case, as this was left to the field grade officers commanding the OMLTs unit until 2008. Later Dutch OMLTs mostly focused on the Dutch-Afghan interoperability and formation-level liaison in an attempt to smooth out the partnering directives provided by ISAF's commanding officers. On the lower tactical level, junior officers and NCOs were given a great amount of self-determination in their ANA/OMLT activities, however, given the constraints in means this watered down to area patrols in the immediate surroundings of the patrol bases that were constructed after every battlegroup operation, typically three per year.

Lastly, the Belgians were initially asked to coach, teach and mentor ANA units, provide the conduit for liaison and command and control and when required support the operational planning and employment of the ANA unit to which they are aligned in order to support the development of a self-sufficient, competent and professional ANA. In a rather free interpretation of this assignment, the first Belgian commanding officer rephrased this as "to improve the level of the kandak that has been assigned to us in all aspects, and to build a working relationship by our continuous presence, by sharing our expertise and by sharing risks in a responsible manner". The Belgian contingent thus accepted a relative improvement of their ANA mentees to be a successful mission outcome, aiming to improve where their expertise matched those aspects where the ANA needed development. Later rotations would adjust the mission statement slightly, but would not alter the underlying relative and modest goal of its mission.

In conclusion, all three states have been involved in the same mission, however, the mission statements of the three states with regard to the OMLT differed. This observation harkens back to the different policy goals as stated in the introduction. Indeed, the British aimed to mobilise a partner in order to assist the British in defeating the insurgency. The neighbouring Dutch OMLT initially lacked guidance, but in the campaign plan, the Dutch stated that their aim was to improve the Afghan institutions during their tenure in Afghanistan. Lastly, the Belgian Army was deployed in order to gain influence with a partner, i.e. the United States, as well as grasping at the opportunity of a bespoke, low-risk, military participation. The table below thus represents the *main* military aim and political utility of the OMLTs in each province.

State	Military aim	Political utility
United Kingdom	Increase ANA capacity and capability	Mobilise a partner and attrit the enemy
The Netherlands	Initially none, later focus on interoperability and capacity	Institution building
Belgium	Improvement of ANA	Influence and participation

Upon reflection, the strategic culture of each state, (i.e. the persisting socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions and habits of mind and preferred methods of operation that are more or less specific to a particular security community) trickles down to the way each OMLT has been deployed. As stated earlier, the strategic culture is influencing the choices made on force structure as well as length and type of deployment. The OMLTs, however, have been a rather modest part of the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan as well as the efforts of both the British and the Dutch in their respective areas of operation, and are thus not fully representative of each state's strategic culture.

The British commitment to Afghanistan was second only to the American effort, and the British were highly reluctant to accept a strategic defeat in Helmand. The British OMLTs were thus part of a prolonged campaign to subdue insurgent forces, which reflected the British strategic aims to uphold its special relationship with the US, its national pride and its unwillingness to accept a shrinkage of its global influence. In line with Dutch strategic culture, the Dutch government was less comfortable with an enduring involvement in Uruzgan, rather reemphasizing its willingness to contribute, rather than committing fully to ISAF. Although training, advising, and mentoring fitted the Dutch strategic culture of contributing to security, stability, and international rule of law, the overstretched Dutch Army did opt to concentrate its efforts on the Dutch Task Force Uruzgan, rather than strengthening its mentoring efforts. Facing pollical unwillingness to extend its contribution to ISAF, the Dutch withdrew in 2010 from Uruzgan, causing allegations of alliance defection in its wake.

The most significant observations of strategic culture as an external driver of adaptation might be observed in the Belgian case. The Belgian risk-averse and modest approach to military operations in Afghanistan contributed to a limited contribution in a rather safe area of operations, restricted by nationally-imposed caveats in order to avoid casualties. In a similar vein, this driver led to the allocation of more resources to the Belgian Landcomponent before deployment.

6.2 Military innovation during the OMLT deployments

The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams were a novel concept, and each participating state went through an adaptational process in order to accommodate the demands put forward on these teams. In chapter two, a number of manifestations of military innovation were identified. As the empirical chapters described the evolution of the OMLTs over several years, we can identify several manifestations of military change in each case. The next section will elaborate on those manifestations that were most distinctly present in the empirical evidence, starting with the change of the tactics, techniques and procedures of the OMLTs, as well as the development of operations. These are followed by education and training, the force levels and resources allocated to the OMLTs, doctrine and concepts, organisational structure and the dissemination of lessons learned.

6.2.1 Tactical and Operational Adaptations

Farrell theorised that pressure from operations are the most important driver of military adaptation. However, for the OMLTs the operational challenges in Afghanistan did not only originate from the insurgent forces, they were in part created by the partners of the OMLTs. Indeed, the interaction and cooperation with the ANA might very well be considered an operation challenge. This observation will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. As for the ANA, most Afghan soldiers in Helmand, Uruzgan and Kunduz had a similar military education, going through the basic military training pipeline in the capital Kabul, before being transferred to one of the brigades deployed throughout the country. The southern provinces were rightfully considered to be more dangerous than for instance Kunduz, which contributed to the high levels of desertion encountered by the British and Dutch OMLTs. Still, during the tenure of the OMLTs in both southern provinces, the number of ANA troops increased remarkably, allowing for larger operations than during the initial rotations and more comprehensive military operations. This section will detail the different adaptations and approaches undertaken by each of the three OMLT-providing states.

Upon arrival, the British were quick to position the OMLT teams throughout the province, as the number of (jointly) Afghan-held positions increased over time. On the lowest tactical level, the British attempted to join forces as much as possible with their Afghan counterparts. Patrols were undertaken in such a way that Afghan and British soldiers would pair up in couples so that the Afghanis could feed off their British mentors by following the example given. This proved to be a useful concept, on the premise that the Afghan soldiers were willing and able to learn from their British counterparts. Leadership issues on the lower tactical levels plagued the Afghan Army, however, and the OMLTs would frequently have to lead the Afghan soldiers themselves, either directly or through the voice of the Afghan officers, especially when under fire.

Whilst many junior British officers relished the freedom of commanding a small OMLT team with an Afghan platoon present, the individual interpretation of the OMLT tasks by those young officers, in combination with the inability of oversight from the OMLT battlegroup staff due to the geography of the outposts and lack of an overall intent on the ANA and OMLT, made for dissimilar outcomes. Most patrols would be attuned with a nearby battlegroup company to deconflict and support if needed. As the OMLTs did not hold any authority over the ANA, the operational tempo and scheme of manoeuvre were directly proportional to the quality and willingness of the ANA leadership.

Larger operations were mostly prepared and led by TFH leadership, with little Afghan interference, despite the efforts of officers like MacKay who endeavoured to incorporate the ANA into his counterinsurgency campaign. As such, the large-scale operations frequently only had an Afghan veneer whilst being led and controlled by the British or RC/S. The initial partnering initiative by McKiernan did not have the intended effect, and it took a second directive by McCrystal to force the TFH to fully partner with the ANA. This initiative would also put mentor and mentee on the same echelon, as the British and Afghans would partner with a peer unit, with partners of equal rank. The OMLT mentored one echelon up, the commanding officer (a Lieutenant-Colonel) mentoring the Afghan Brigadier General. However, at this stage the liaison and mentoring function was essential for partnered operations, so despite the hypothesis that the ground-holding battlegroups would take over the OMLT function, the OMLTs remained vital for deconfliction, liaison and guidance. Despite the good intentions of the partnering directive, the new status of the ANA as equal partners effectively stated that the ANA's current tactics and techniques were of the required standard. The overnight improved opinion of the ANA's capabilities was however a paper construct, and the ANA had to resort to British military capacities well beyond the envisioned end of the OMLTs in 2010.

In Uruzgan province, the ANA was more prudently integrated into the area of operations. As the first rotation did not venture much outside of the wire of Camp Holland and Camp Hadrian, the second rotation's certification allowed a more forward-leaning utilization of Afghan combat power. Usually, three to six OMLT members accompanied the ANA during patrols. These first OMLT iterations criticized the Dutch approach of having the ANA drive point, as it felt like the ANA were used as a tripwire for Taliban IEDs and ambushes. During the first year of operations, the ANA was indeed mostly used as the 'Afghan face' of operations, with small groups of ANA being reluctantly attached to Battlegroup patrols. The ANA/OMLT only gained some recognition after the Battle of Chora in 2007, where the ANA/OMLT combination was able to execute a mostly OMLT-led clearing of the Dehrashan Valley in support of the largest offensive Dutch operation to date. As each subsequent Dutch battlegroup-sized operation led to another outpost -typically one per battlegroup rotation-, the increased ANA presence was mostly used to man the patrol bases, supported by the OMLT, but generally without a battlegroup presence. Like its British compatriots, a general

sense of independence was experienced by the OMLTs as neither the Battlegroup nor the TFU was concerned with the day-to-day activities of the ANA/OMLT. During larger operations, for instance, Spin Ghar and Mani Ghar in 2007 and 2009 respectively, the ANA and OMLT were used in numbers, but the Dutch OMLTs initiatives to instil a degree of ownership with regard to operational planning did not stick to the Afghan staff. The TFU's attempts to embolden the ANA were dependent on the whims of the incumbent commanding officer. Generally, a sense of distrust impeded close cooperation and intelligence sharing, so most COs opted to communicate with the ANA through the OMLT CO, which was a Colonel after the third rotation. Unlike the British, who mentored one echelon up, the Dutch started to mentor one rank up after 2007. The OMLT Colonel thus mentored the ANA Brigadier General, and the kandak OMLTs were generally commanded by a Major.

The Belgians inherited the relatively quiet province of Kunduz from its predecessors. As the Belgians had a policy of horizontal mentoring -matching the rank of one's mentee- the Belgian CO and Afghan kandak commanders were on equal terms and the Afghan officer would be mentored by someone who had both experience as a Battalion commander, and was a selected officer of the Belgian Army. After their stint in Kabul, the Belgians were quick to shift to a more participative style of mentoring than their predecessors. The 3 PARA OMLT, an elite light battalion, was eager to dismount and accompany the Afghan soldiers on foot patrols instead of staying within the boundaries of the Kunduz compound. However, after the first few contacts with enemy elements, 3 PARA was harshly corrected by Brussels, as the risk-averse Belgian government had little incentive to risk Belgian soldiers being killed in action during dismounted operations. The ukase from Brussels to stay mounted -and protected by armour- during operations generally prevented the Belgian OMLTs from adapting to the operational realities if so was needed. As the first rotations were on occasion engaged by Taliban forces, after the first rotations, Kunduz quieted down to a level where no operational adaptations were deemed necessary. Indeed, most Belgian OMLT rotations were not involved in direct combat with local insurgents at all during their six-month tenures. Moreover, the Belgian OMLT was mostly confined to the direct surroundings of Kunduz city, although the ANA and Belgians did conduct regular patrols, albeit mostly mounted due to the caveats imposed on them by the Belgian government.

On the lowest tactical levels, all three cases show little tactical adaptations. The British chose to closely accompany the Afghans, in order to guide the ANA's actions and take over the lead when needed. Similarly, the Dutch also closed in with their Afghan interlocutors in order whilst on patrol. The only observable shift in small unit tactics is observable in the Belgian case, as political pressure from Brussels prevented the Belgian OMLT from mentoring 'below the company level', in an attempt to prevent Belgian casualties. This lack of adaptation has a logical reason. As indicated by the empirical data, it was commonplace for all OMLTs to take over joint operations as Afghan leadership was unable to adequately lead their forces in

battle -or at least according to their mentor. So, in order to be able to take over command, the OMLT officer or NCO in charge would have to position himself close to the Afghan leadership (and his radios), as well as positioning countrymen up front, so that accurate reports could be passed on in both the OMLT hierarchy as well as a possible partner unit close by. In their liaison function, the OMLT would have to have access to the same information in order to pass this down to partner units and air assets. These approaches towards the tactical positioning of forces are all by the book, which explains why little adaptations were made during the campaign.

	United Kingdom	**The Netherlands**	**Belgium**
Method of tactical mentoring	Low-level combined operations	Low-level combined operations	Company-level combined operations
Level of mentoring	One echelon up	One rank up	Equal level

6.2.2 Force Levels, organisational structures and Resources

The British OMLTs were embedded into the chain of command of the Helmand Task Force, allowing for clear lines of communications between the CO of TFH and CO of the OMLT. This would endure for the rest of the campaign. This would also allow the CO of the OMLT to express his concerns with regard to equipment and staffing directly into the chain of command. Although the OMLTs were not considered to be at the forefront of the British strategy early in the campaign, the force levels and equipment did increased significantly after the first rotation. The first rotation was drawn from all over the Army, including 7 RHA but also an assorted mix of volunteers from other units as a result of an Army-wide trawl. Subsequent rotations were constructed around the a skeleton crew of a regular battalion or commando. This battalion structure -devoid of the majority of the lower ranks, but augmented with specialists and individual officers and NCOs to fill the gaps where needed- would pair with its Afghan counterparts one echelon up to mentor, liaise, train and even command where needed or possible. As one regular battalion was often not sufficient to provide each ANA kandak with an OMLT, another (company-level) team would be constructed from individual augmentees and volunteers, in a similar way as the first OMLT. Still, after the force structure of a kandak level OMLT had been established, the OMLT would only increase proportionally as the ANA increased its presence in Helmand, indicating that little necessity was perceived in increasing OMLT numbers.

Mirroring the light infantry role of the ANA, few adaptations were made after the first rotation in its equipment table. The HERRICK 4 OMLT, especially after the demise of an OMLT officer near Sangin, however, caused an acceleration of the influx of night vision optics, vehicles

and heavy weapons into the mentor teams. Initially, these types of equipment were scarce, and the OMLT had to resort to scavenging and borrowing from other British forces in the area of operations. As the British could resort to the organic equipment table of the battalion after the first rotation, the equipment of the OMLTs was mostly on par with the Battlegroups.

The Dutch OMLT was initially set up with 12 members to train and advise the ANA. The force structure of the Dutch contingent doubled after this initial understaffing, a result of ISAF's insistence on a minimum of 24 service members per team. This directive was adhered to after three rotations. Experiencing little guidance from either the Task Force Uruzgan or the national hierarchy, the Dutch OMLT force structure and equipment table meandered as the commanding officers of the first rotations held different views on how to employ the OMLTs. The force structure steadied with the arrival of the Brigade OMLTs, however, the Dutch OMLTs were never able to structure the OMLTs around the foundation of an existing battalion. Also, unable to increase its numbers after the ANA influx from 2008 onward, the Dutch opened up the OMLT internationally. Eventually, the OMLT (including the Brigade OMLT) was comprised of Australians, French, Dutch and Slovakian service members, complicating the unity of effort of the OMLT in Uruzgan.

Remarkably, the Dutch experienced similar difficulties in adequately equipping its mentors, although this improved as the operation progressed. One of the sources of this improvement was the introduction of the Bushmaster vehicles to the TFU. Although these vehicles were never distributed to the OMLTs, it freed up the 4x4s also used by the Dutch Battlegroup, making them available to the OMLTs. Like the British, the Dutch OMLT mirrored the light infantry role of the ANA, and as such little adaptation was considered needed in the equipment table as the individual equipment of an OMLT service member generally was on par with that of the infantry soldiers of the Battlegroups.

Standing out equipment-wise were the Belgians. A late entry, the Belgians emulated other states' approach to the force structure of the OMLTs. The Belgian Army thus constructed their teams around a regular infantry battalion, matching their mentees' position by Belgian equivalents. Moreover, the Belgians considered ISAF's requirements to be more of a guideline, and decided to increase the number of personnel to an amount deemed necessary to mentor effectively, almost tripling the minimum requirements. This force structure would stay in place for the duration of the deployment, only altering after the decision had been made to forego on mentoring on the lowest tactical levels by the ISAF hierarchy. Moreover, adhering to their decision to only mentor one kandak, no further demands had to be made to increase its numbers.

As the Belgian Landcomponent was notoriously underfunded in the time period 2009 - 2013, the OMLTs were pleasantly surprised as additional requirements were quickly and adequately

acquired by the Landcomponent. Moreover, the Belgians were from the start equipped with modern light armoured vehicles, boasting protection as well as firepower for the mentor teams.

Finally, a remarkable difference in force structure between the three states is that the British opted to mentor an echelon up, meaning that a British Lieutenant-Colonel, commanding a battalion, would mentor the Brigade commander of the ANA. The Dutch generally mentored 'one rank up': a lieutenant would mentor a captain etc. The Belgian OMLT -referring to their decades-long experience with African armed forces- would match the Afghan soldier's rank and function where possible. In the Belgian opinion, this would avoid any rank or seniority-related issues and would be beneficial in establishing mutual respect.

6.2.3 Education and training

When opportune, all military units strive to arrive in their area of operations as well-trained and prepared as possible. As combat units focus most of their time practising to close in and destroy the enemy forces efficiently and effectively, the concept of combat mentoring taps into different aspects of soldiering. As described in this study, the OMLTs looked to gain knowledge on culture, language, didactics, rapport-building skills, etc., whilst at the same time keeping up their ability to fight, lead and liaise with other units. This section compared the three states' approaches to preparing their OMLTs before deployment, and how these pre-deployment training (PDT) packages changed over time as a result of lessons learned looping back into the organisation from the area of operations.

From the start, the British OMLTs had to contend with the lack of knowledge of both the task and purpose of the OMLT and as such initially had to work off assumptions and limited knowledge gained from pre-deployment reconnaissance. As time progressed, more informal dissemination took place as personnel from two rotations earlier were involved in the PDT of later iterations. Still, the PDT provided by the Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) lagged in providing bespoke OMLT training. Though the OMLT battalions increasingly were made aware of their responsibilities in Helmand, Operation ENTIRETY, the comprehensive institutional change programme to place the Army on a war footing, was needed to revamp the PDT, as the PDT initially would demand the OMLTs to perform combat FTXs whilst already in its skeleton cadre-only OMLT formation, to a custom-made round-robin focused on mentoring. Language awareness also increased, as later OMLT rotations benefitted from both short-term and long-term service members trained in the main languages spoken in Afghanistan. Although the numbers of language-trained British soldiers and their proficiency varied, the British understanding of language being of importance to the mentoring effort stood out as a formalised adaptation. In addition, the construction of an Afghan village as well as the increasingly professional 'ANA' role-play is indicative of the formal adaptation processes in preparation for the deployment. Outside

of the training overseen by OPTAG, the OMLT battlegroup could fall back on its battalion staff cadre to prepare individual training courses, small unit tactics and marksmanship, or other aspects of mentoring considered key by battalion leadership. Lastly, a uniquely British aspect of pre-deployment training constituted inviting senior Afghan officers to Britain. Having ANA officers stay over in Britain, showing them their dedication to the mentoring task and introducing them to the officers and men whom they would soon work together with in Afghanistan was considered a best practice in order to build rapport before actually deploying and remaining part of the OMLT preparation from the rotation of 1 R IRISH onwards.

The Dutch PDT revolved around two constants during the 2006-2010 period. First, all Dutch OMLT attended the highly standardised NATO-led OMLT course in Hohenfels, Germany, alongside many other international teams. This American-led course was comprised of both theory and practice and strived to fly in actual ANA soldiers for a realistic immersion into Afghan mentoring particularities. Moreover, the American instructors were regularly updated on OMLT best practices by NATO staff in Kabul, making sure the instructions were as up-to-date as possible. One Brigade OMLT also attended a similar course in Bydgoszcz, Poland. Secondly, as the OMLTs were constructed around a commanding officer and some key staff, each OMLT relied on its own aptitude in organising the PDT. As a result, the OMLTs were consistent in their attempts to boost individual soldier skills -marksmanship, care under fire, patrolling-, but varied strongly in other aspects. For instance, the availability of vehicles for training depended on informal relationships between NCOs and officers, as did the availability of ammunition, medical instructors and training facilities. Language training was non-existent, and the Dutch TFU FTX 'Uruzgan Integration' never evolved to accommodate the OMLT significantly.

The Belgian OMLTs differed from the Dutch and British as their mentoring effort constituted the main effort of its army at the time. Again, the training programmes in Hohenfels and Bydgoszsz represented one pillar of the PDT, and the battalion was also responsible for the details of the preparation. However, unlike the Dutch OMLTs, the Belgians -and British- could make use of the full capacity of a battalion staff in order to create a fruitful training environment. Also, the more formalised Belgian training system called for the Assistant Chief of Staff Operations and Training (ACOS Ops & Trg) to certify the training before deployment as an arrangement for quality control. The feedback from Afghanistan and the participants in the training were afterwards incorporated into the next PDT as the OMLT progressed. One example of the latter is the incorporation of training in the English language, as the interaction with the ANA would pass through a local interpreter in the English language. For Belgian officers, this meant a third language that had to be mastered, which in some cases needed some remedial action. Generally, the Belgian OMLT members looked back favourably on their preparation efforts.

	United Kingdom	The Netherlands	Belgium
PDT	General → More bespoke	General	Bespoke
Pre-deployment rapport building	None → Visits by ANA senior staff to Britain	None	None
Language training	None → Limited Afghan languages	None	English
Staff capacity to enable PDT	Present	Not present	Present

6.2.4 Dissemination

The British OMLT rotations disseminated the lessons learned informally through a network of peers as each rotation went through a period of handover-takeover, or as is known in the British Army, the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI) package. Although the HOTO period is a formalised affair, the period itself is subject to the ability (and willingness) of the incumbent unit to present the lessons learned and best practices to its successors and the ability (or willingness) of the successor to incorporate the lessons learned of the incumbent into its own scheme of operations. In addition, as the OMLT was increasingly scattered over a number of patrol bases and outposts, the layered withdrawal and replacement of small OMLT teams resulted in less time to HOTO at the lowest echelons. The higher echelon, i.e. the battalion OMLT staff, had the most opportunity to transfer its tasks efficiently -no further travel was needed after arrival at Camp Bastion, giving the HOTO process a running start- resulting in numerous positive accounts on the RSOI package provided by the incumbents by the COs of successor units. However, the lowest echelons frequently had the least amount of time, regularly leading to a minimum of time -or no time at all- to share the ground truths with successor OMLT teams. Outside of Afghanistan, the British Army used personnel recently returned from Afghanistan to informally inform the preparing OMLT, and to assist in the OPTAG-led exercises. Moreover, the British Army's professional journals and regimental gazettes published regularly on military mentoring, further disseminating lessons learned through the published articles. After deployments, British commanding officers are obliged to make an after-action report, however, as the archives are closed for the foreseeable future, this research was unable to review their contents or dissemination.

Initially, the Dutch OMLT relied almost completely on the informal dissemination of lessons learned, as frequently personnel attached to a prior OMLT was contacted to inform later rotations. Later OMLT rotations were asked to take part in the 'Uruzgan Integration' exercises, and although this facilitated the contact between the experienced mentors and the mentors-to-be, little could be done to assist specific OMLT training as it simply was

not part of the Uruzgan Integration exercise. Formal dissemination existed in name only. OMLT commanders were sometimes requested to write an end-of-mission report, however, this was not always the case, nor were its findings used to adapt the PDT or execution of the mission. As a consequence, most end-of-mission reports have a striking resemblance to each other, as little was done to alleviate any issues encountered by the OMLT. As it were, the OMLT commander remained the driving factor of the OMLT PDT and execution, leaving a sense of having to reinvent the wheel each rotation. The Dutch OMLTs were somewhat more dispersed than the Belgians, but not as much as their British peers. Still, the number of outposts manned by the OMLT/ANA made the HOTO a rather complicated affair with many convoy operations needed to relieve the incumbents. This frequently led to a minimum of time available to hand over the post, with most time available for the transfer of authority and knowledge to the Brigade staff.

The dissemination of lessons learned in the Belgian armed forces has a distinct formal and informal branch. Referring to the former, Belgian commanding officers are obliged to report twice during their deployments. The first report aims to confirm that the pre-deployment training is corroborated with the observations in the mission environment whilst simultaneously allowing for remedial action with regard to the next rotation if necessary. The End of Mission report is drafted to review the entire deployment on a number of standardised topics. Although twofold reporting has a tendency to become redundant on some topics, the +1 report allows the next rotation to be formally briefed by the incumbents with time to adapt their PDT if necessary. Moreover, the biannual conference on operations which the Belgian Chief of Defence attends together with the lessons learned section of the Belgian Armed Forces staff, allows for a direct opportunity to discuss pressing issues with the highest military authority, bypassing the entire hierarchy. This structure is a redundancy which permits information to reach the ChOD which might have been otherwise opted-out from being presented to the General by staff officers.

Besides the formal reporting, the size of the Landcomponent ensures that most senior officers are acquainted through years of training, advanced staff courses and deployments. This leads to a sense of certainty amongst senior Belgian infantry officers that they know each other, and this familiarity ensures very short lines cometh information sharing and transfer of operational knowledge. The informal circuit of peers and the formal reporting make up for the lack of information sharing through the almost non-existent Belgian military discourse in military journals or regimental gazettes.

However, this informal dissemination is somewhat obstructed at the lower ranks, as the linguistic divide in Belgium causes a rift when it comes to sharing information between NCOs and private soldiers. Indeed, many NCOs and privates do not have sufficient command of either Dutch, French or English to communicate with each other on a professional level. As

officers are required -and tested- on a progressive language proficiency as they move through the ranks, information is lost as specialists in the lower ranks are unable to communicate with their peers without information being lost in translation. This typical problem in multilingual states such as Belgium is aggravated in the case of the incumbent and successor having a different linguistic background, and non-existent if this is not the case. Moreover, it was mainly an issue during the HOTO period between Belgian OMLTs. Unlike the British, the Belgians were located in a single location, facilitating the HOTO period between the two rotations, as the OMLT/ANA combination was not dotted around the province on patrol bases or combat outposts.

6.3 Learning from conflict: what lessons have been institutionalised?

Three strands of learning in conflict have been distinguished in chapter two: informal, formal and institutional learning. Informal adaptation occurs during deployment at the level of units to overcome operational challenges that do not require organisational resources or attention. Formal learning is when adaptations are integrated into the wider organisation for the duration of the conflict, and institutional learning implies that the retention of lessons is beyond the scope of a single conflict.

The manifestations of change described thus far have been a response to operational challenges that include the regular parties involved in the conflict: how should we adapt to overcome the challenges put on our organisation by enemy forces? However, a major operational challenge to the OMLTs has not been the enemy, but rather the partners involved. The three empirical chapters are indeed rife with anecdotal evidence indicating that much of the adaptation has been a result of the capacity and capability of the Afghan National Army. Examples include the acquisition of additional equipment to improve sustainability and self-reliance, the perceived necessity to select the most experienced troops for the OMLT, additional pre-deployment training and regular attempts to integrate the ANA into the broader counterinsurgency effort.

The ability to interact with the ANA via interpreters in a hostile operational environment was often referred to by respondents when citing the necessity to employ service members with a highly developed and specific skill set. These competencies included coping with the fundamental agency of the Afghan soldiers. As expressed in this dissertation, the issues with agency are often detrimental to a sound, effective and efficient relationship between the mentors and mentees. The empirical data illustrate multiple cases of agency-related issues such as shirking, information asymmetry and moral hazard. ANA soldiers were often better informed on insurgency-related activities than their mentors -Afghan soldiers were observed to have direct links with local Taliban forces via cellphone or other media-, and were prone to react unfavourably when in a combat situation. In practice, this caused the OMLTs to have

to operate with a partner that was generally considered unreliable, which added to a sense of mutual distrust. Conversely, the Task Forces were often also unwilling to share intelligence and were regularly expecting the Afghan forces to perform the more hazardous tasks during operations such as walking or driving point, putting the OMLT in a rather unenviable position as in-betweens as the moral hazard between the parties increased. The lessons learned of how to interact with the leading Task Force, the ANA - including the 'transfer' of relations during a HOTO- and the interpreters were thus a common occurrence and an exponent of informal learning processes.

The formalisation of lessons learning in the wider organisation might be observed mostly in the British case. For instance, during the four-year period under study, the British Army has evolved its pre-deployment training from 'non-existent' to 'best training I have ever had in my 30 years of soldiering'. This might be attributed to OPTAG, who, riding the wave of Operation ENTIRERY, was able to improve the PDT of the British OMLT by recruiting the Afghan diaspora for realistic roleplay, introducing language courses and investing in the pre-deployment rapport-building efforts by inviting senior Afghan military staff to Britain. Other aspects of formal learning, such as the construction of Afghan-style quala's in Britain to allow realistic training, was a formalisation, albeit not OMLT-specific, but rather applicable to the entire TFH. The Netherlands and the Belgian Army were less inclined to formalise lessons learned. According to several senior interviewees, the lack of formal learning processes in the Dutch armed forces was a consequence of a general lack of interest in the OMLT. Although these remarks are quite cynical, they might be attributed to the lack of redundancy experienced by the Dutch armed forces, especially during the latter two years of its Uruzgan commitment. Contrarywise, the Belgians did not experience any operational necessity to introduce formal adaptation processes as the reporting from Kunduz with regard to equipment and staffing was generally favourable.

The subsequent institutionalisation of lessons learned might be found in organisational adaptations to the force structure, in order to better address future challenges. However, of the three case studies, the British Army is the only institution to follow up on its OMLT experience in that it altered its force structure to accommodate for future SFA operations. In its Army 2020 review, which augmented the earlier 'Strategic Defence and Security' reviews of the British armed forces in 2010 and 2015, it became known that further proposed reductions in manpower for the British army would be implemented, reducing the British army to a 82.000 troops. This reorganisation resulted in the bulk of British regular combat power being concentrated into its 3rd Division, which is styled as the 'Reaction Force'. This division aims to integrate the 'STRIKE concept' which uses heavy-wheeled vehicles to quickly march up to 2000km to its area of operations as well as mechanised brigades equipped with MBTs. As a result, the UK 3rd division is currently the only deployable British division capable of conducting operations in major land warfare. A second division, 1st UK Division, was

renamed from 1st Armoured division and tasked to fulfil a lighter role, which resounds in its new 'Adaptable Force' moniker. Although this concept has been in development for several years, the 1st UK division lacks the firepower to be effective in major combat for years to come.[1] Lastly, the U.K. stood up the new 6th division, by rebranding Force Troops Command, a British combat support and combat service support command on the 1st of August 2019. The U.K. 6th division is not a new unit per se, it has been stood since 2008, after having served as the two-star headquarters tasked with preparing UK brigades for deployment to Afghanistan. However, after being significantly reinforced and transformed into Combined Joint Task Force 6 and deploying to Afghanistan as Regional Command South in November 2009, the division headquarters closed in April 2011. 6th UK Division epitomises the UKs efforts to reappraise its attitude towards future warfare, as the formations subordinate to 6th Div are not involved in combat, but focus on information warfare, electronic warfare, ISTAR capacity and building capacity of foreign forces through the Specialised Infantry Group.[2] After Afghanistan, it has been established that training, mentoring and advising is a distinct military activity, and the British armed forces have acknowledged that soldiers performing such missions need to be specialised. As such, it has been decided that Capacity Building tasks can and often must be conducted by any appropriately skilled and prepared force element.[3] Consequently, and in order to improve results, four battalions of UK regular infantry have been reassigned to the Specialised Infantry Group, with a fifth additional battalion in 2020.[4] Since then, the Specialised Infantry Group has been renamed the 'Army Special Operations Brigade' (ASOB) after the Army 2020 Refine restructure, and the SFA role has been passed on to 11 Infantry Brigade, which was subsequently renamed 11 Security Force Assistance Brigade, part of 1 Division in 2021. Importantly, the new Brigade consists of selected and specially trained personnel, whose missions could include combat mentoring. Although the official statement with regard to standing up the Specialised Infantry Group/SFAB refers to the perceived strategic necessity for persistent partnering and capacity building, it is generally acknowledged that remodelling the five regular infantry battalions also allowed the British Army to cut its numbers without having to resign any caps or badges. As the SIG/

1 J. Watling, "Strike: From Concept to Force," *RUSI Journal* (2019).

2 See: British Ministry of Defence, Army restructures to confront evolving threats, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/army-restructures-to-confront-evolving-threats, British Army Launches New 6th Division http://www.warfare.today/2019/08/01/british-army-launches-new-6th-division/

3 British Ministry of Defence, Land Operations, Army Doctrine Publication, Land Warfare Development Centre AC 71940, Warminster, 14.

4 There are currently two battalions assigned to the Specialised Infantry Group (1st Bn The Royal Scots Borderers, 4th Bn The Rifles) In 2019 two more battalions will be added (2nd Bn Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and the 2nd Bn Duke of Lancaster's Regiment. Source: Emily Knowles and Abigail Watson, Remote Warfare, Lessons Learned from Contemporary theatres, (Remote Warfare Group, London 2018), 11. Furthermore, an additional Gurkha battalion might be established, also in the Specialised Infantry role: Source: https://www.janes.com/article/81826/uk-to-recruit-more-gurkha-soldiers.

SFAB battalions only numbered around half of a regular battalion, the conversion is marked as a retrenchment under the guise of strategic reorientation.[5] With the British capacity building organisationally embedded in 1 Division, a large portion of SFA-type operations is conducted through this formation. Still, other units are regularly involved in British SFA. The British SOF conducts SFA through Military Assistance missions, and short-term training teams (STTTs) are formed and deployed throughout the entire British armed forces.

Doctrine is another indicator of military innovation and institutionalisation through the dissemination of knowledge in these formal documents. Again, the British have been the only state that has followed up on its lessons learned by integrating SFA into its military doctrine. Its Army Field Manual Tactics for Stability Operations: 'Military Support to Capacity Building' details its approach to capacity building, which in fact includes SFA as a concept, albeit with a slightly different definition than used by NATO. Furthermore, the SFAB formation adds to the dissemination of knowledge through publications and evaluation, as well as conducting field training exercises with its subordinate units.

The two other cases studied in this dissertation were far less thorough in institutionalising lessons learned. Both Belgium and the Netherlands were quick to refocus back training and organising for regular operations. After redeployment, the Dutch Armed forces quickly disbanded the OMLT units returned to the pre-Afghanistan force structure. As the main focus of the Dutch Army returned to regular operations, the Netherlands remained involved in numerous SFA-type missions. The Dutch forces were deployed in Africa for several ACOTA/GPOI deployments, as well as in the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. Also, a Dutch contingent has been deployed in Iraq for the Capacity Building Mission in Iraq (CBMI) mission. The prevalence and popularity of these kinds of SFA missions are still rising, since they allow the Dutch government, like other small countries with major foreign interests, to influence foreign events and to show international commitment at a limited cost in personnel and resources. Despite this, any strategic value of SFA is not reflected in the current doctrine nor in the current organisation, and doctrine is mostly absent. Thus, most SFA-related activities are still incorrectly labelled 'Military Assistance', which is still the only SFA-related term in Dutch doctrine. Lastly, in most cases, the Dutch Directorate of Operations is steadfast in appointing SFA operators on a case-by-case basis, trawling the organisation for available personnel, mostly disregarding any form of selection.[6]

The Dutch institutional inertia is mirrored by the Belgian Landcomponent, as SFA-type operations of this size were considered an anomaly. After the last Belgian service members

5 Interview UK Army Brigadier Angus Young, commanding officer SIG.

6 Survey 'Experiences from Dutch SFA Practitioners on pre-deployment training, execution and evaluation'. Wiltenburg 2019.

returned from Kunduz, the Landcomponent's units were eager to reform to their original force structure and refocus on regular combat. The SFA provided by Belgium since their stint as an OMLT have centered around Central Africa, with especially Niger as the recipient of enduring SFA provision.[7] The Belgian Army doctrine has also not incorporated any insights into SFA, and amongst the regular units little discourse is present on the topic. The Special Forces community, however, does have a -mostly grassroots- discourse on MA/SFA, as it attempts to incorporate a 'way of thinking' with regard to small-state SFA provision.[8]

So what explains the institutional lethargy of both the Dutch and Belgian armed forces concerning lessons learned on combat mentoring? SFA -which includes combat mentoring- is still a highly relevant aspect of contemporary military operations. In the first place, Rosen's and Posen's observation that bureaucracies are not designed to change must be taken into account. For it to change, it would require external intervention by civilian leadership (Posen), or senior officers within a service who develop a new theory of victory, in effect an explanation of what the next war will look like and how it must be fought (Posen). However, neither civilian leadership nor senior officers have shown to be inclined to push forward SFA as a priority for the state's armed forces. This might be attributed to the performance of the service members of both states. Although the Dutch were considered to be understaffed both qualitatively and quantitively, it did not affect operations to the extent that it required intervention by senior civilian or military staff. Similarly, the Belgians were able to staff their OMLTs with the most experienced staff of its regular battalions, which in combination with a relatively quiet area of operations caused little incentive to embark on far-fetching changes in force structure or doctrine. Secondly, both the Dutch as well as the Belgian OMLT had very few casualties during their OMLT tenure and no casualties that could be attributed to a lack of training, professionalism or faulty equipment. Indeed, for the British Task Force, the first fatal casualty -which was an OMLT officer- was a strong impetus for organisational change in 2006. Lastly, the envisioned way of fighting during the next war closely resembled regular operations as had been the case prior to the War in Afghanistan. In this sense, the combat mentoring experience would be considered an anomaly, and with the return to regular operations -which is corroborated by the current war in Ukraine- little incentive is present for further innovation.

7 Nina Wilén, "Analysing (In)Formal Relations and Networks in Security Force Assistance: The Case of Niger," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15, no. 5 (2021); Wilén, *Belgian Special Forces in the Sahel: A Minimal Footprint with Maximal Output*; Nina Wilén and Pierre Dehaene, "Challenges with Security Force assistance in Niger: Understanding Local Context and Aligning Interests," (2020).

8 P. Dehaene, "The Localization Strategy: Strategic Sense for Special Operations Forces in Niger," *Combatting Terrorism Exchange (CTX)* 9, no. 1 (2019).

The British, however, were more inclined to institutionalise their lessons learned. The British aimed to gain or maintain influence with a number of strategic partners, mostly (former) members of the British commonwealth post-Afghanistan, for which it required a capacity of SFA-adept forces. Also, this strategic concept, dubbed 'persistent partnering', coincided with further redundancies within the British Army. By forming the Specialised Infantry Group and later 11 SFAB, the British Army was able to reduce its numbers without having to retire the battalions themselves. Furthermore, the sizeable British Army has the capacity to assign 'advising' to a part of the Army without conceding too much in terms of general combat power. Indeed, assigning another specialisation to a small army might be considered detrimental to its overall performance. The Dutch and Belgian infantry capacity are already to an extent specialised (special forces, light, medium and heavy infantry) and any additional specialisation would invariably lead to force generation issues due to lack of redundancy for smaller organisations. Moreover, generating a specialisation would require prior expertise on a subject. As expertise has in itself a limited shelf life and currency on military topics is generally considered to be paramount in order to provide mentorship, any specialisation effort on SFA would require a comprehensive human resource exertion in order to be effective.

6.4 Conclusion

Each of the three case studies has contributed to the ISAF campaign by mentoring the Afghan National Army during a four-year period. During this period, the empirical data show a number of similarities and differences in the way of force generation, execution, evaluation and institutionalisation of the lessons learned. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium have each stood up a military organisation that prior to that moment did not exist, which was tasked with a form of security force assistance that in the past was regularly assigned to special forces. The OMLTs of each state developed under the influence of the operational challenges, the capacity of its armed forces and the state's strategic culture until it either evolved into a different form such as in the British and Belgian cases, or was withdrawn from the conflict, as has been the case for the Dutch OMLT. As this dissertation indicates, the British Armed Forces have been the only case where its experiences have been institutionalised, indicating a lack of strategic necessity to adapt by the other states.

Harkening back to the paradox described in the introduction of this research, the political and strategic requests for more military capacity to ameliorate foreign security forces have indeed been at odds with the results on the ground. After all, despite all the efforts of the OMLTs and other ISAF-aligned forces, the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan has been far from successful. Still, the construction of the operational mentoring and liaison teams in Afghanistan has shown the potential of combat mentoring by regular forces. To conclude, this dissertation has identified a number of opportunities to improve, including

lessons learned on staffing, equipment, force structure and training. However, as the OMLTs were able to function as a reference force to its mentees, as well as being able to adequately perform their combat and liaison functions, the main observation of this research is that although the ad-hoc construction of these mentoring teams leaves plenty of room for improvement, it might have been good enough.

6.5 Avenues for further research

This research was able to reconstruct the alpha and omega of the OMLTs of three different states during the War in Afghanistan. In itself, this research has added to the understanding of the historical narrative of an under-researched topic of the War in Afghanistan. Moreover, it added to the discourse of SFA by adding a comparative case study from other angles than the American or British lens, which has comprised the majority of SFA-related research. This is highly relevant, as the political germaneness of SFA in the broadest sense has remained very high at the time of writing. The many current deployments in a host of states are a case in point. These current missions, however, focus on training the force, rather than accompanying those forces during combat operations. In fact, the manifestation of combat mentoring by regular troops has been a rather solitary event in contemporary warfare for regular forces. Indeed, the operational environment of the War in Afghanistan presented a perfect storm for this particular display of security force assistance. These included the overstretching of special forces capacity, a large-scale counterinsurgency campaign, and the specific absorptive capacity of the target audience. For combat mentoring in the same fashion as the OMLTs to reoccur, a number of stars would have to align including the prospect of yielding considerable returns on investment, as the recent experiences of standing up a non-Western army during wars by choice such as in Iraq and Afghanistan have been letdowns and new attempts seems unlikely. Also, when looking at contemporary conflicts, such as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war (2014-), geopolitical factors prohibit regular force involvement due to the risk of further escalating the conflict. Most likely, any involvement in this or similar conflicts would remain in the realm of SOF. Lastly, as this research indicates, the individual soldiers that perform combat mentoring need to possess such a diversity of skills to excel that it seems likely that the call to mentor during combat operations is initially sent to the special forces community, requiring a SOF capacity problem before any regular forces would be considered for deployment. However, although the OMLTs might be considered an anomaly and unlikely to reoccur in either regular or irregular warfare consistently, discarding any lessons learned would be premature. Military historians would most likely recognise the events described in this dissertation as they compare the experiences of John Paul Vann in the Vietnam War with the OMLTs in Afghanistan. This dissertation thus adds to the body of knowledge available as a reference for future combat mentoring operations by regular forces. This brings us to the relevance of the research for military doctrine.

Besides adding to the discourse of SFA, this thesis could also be utilised as a source document for military doctrine. Doctrine, as the formal outing of military thinking during a certain period of time, is indicative of the status of regular forces providing SFA-type operations. Moreover, doctrine is considered to be focused on best practices, lessons learned and how-to's on all levels of operation, as it includes tactics, techniques and procedures that, in most cases, would generate a suitable solution for military problems. The total absence of any doctrine on the topic of SFA in the Netherlands and Belgium is noticeable, considering the abundance of SFA-type deployments currently executed by the armed forces of both states and the abundance of knowledge present within these organisations as a result of these deployments. For upcoming operations, the discourse on combat mentoring and SFA, including this research, should therefore be used as a source for future operational design, avoiding the pitfalls experienced by the OMLTs in Afghanistan. The formalisation of best practices and TTPs into doctrine could benefit from the data presented in this research. Further research into SFA, including the other deployments referenced in this dissertation might be able to confirm and refine the findings of this research in a bespoke fashion for each state.

Reflecting on the research, it is clear that of the three, the Dutch OMLT was researched most thoroughly, which was possible to a fine-knit personal network and the invaluable assistance of a co-researcher on that specific case. The other two case studies offer more changes for additional research. The British case study would benefit from additional interviews as well as archival access to further elaborate on the actions of British OMLTs. As the Dutch case has shown, the abundance of data would allow for a volume on each case alone. The Belgian case would benefit from additional interviews, especially with Francophone servicemembers of the lower ranks, to broaden the narrative and reaffirm the claims made in this research.

Besides increasing the available data on the OMLTs themselves, the most notable omission in this research is the Afghan servicemembers and interpreters themselves. Future research which includes the experience and evaluations of the Afghans themselves would highly contribute to the perception of the OMLTs. This research was able to contact a small number of interpreters, but their contribution proved -for different reasons- inadmissible for the thesis. The regime change in Afghanistan prevented contact with former OMLT mentees. Future research into combat mentoring and SFA would greatly benefit from the participation of all parties involved, including the recipient side.

Lastly, further research into the effectiveness of combat mentoring and SFA would be recommended. Although within the scope of this dissertation, further scrutiny on the effectiveness of the OMLTs and the ANA themselves is necessary as they were either not monitored, politicised or discarded, resulting in a highly shifty representation of Afghan combat power. Although the appreciation of military capability is always qualitative, better

methods to reflect on this important military activity are needed to support future SFA-type operations.

Appendix

Appendix 1: List of interviews

BEL List of interviews		
Interview date	**Anonymised Function**	**Nationality**
21/07/2020	Belgian commanding officer 25	BEL
09/10/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 2	BEL
26/10/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 19	BEL
03/11/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 7	BEL
04/11/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 1	BEL
09/11/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 29	BEL
10/11/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 12	BEL
10/11/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 33	BEL
11/11/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 20	BEL
12/11/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 27	BEL
19/11/2020	Belgian staff officer plans division 34	BEL
25/11/2020	Belgian commanding officer 11	BEL
26/11/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 4	BEL
27/11/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 6	BEL
02/12/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 17	BEL
03/12/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 15	BEL
03/12/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 26	BEL
09/12/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 24	BEL
16/12/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 22	BEL
16/12/2020	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 32	BEL
27/12/2020	Belgian OMLT mentor 8	BEL
08/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 3	BEL
11/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 14	BEL
13/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 30	BEL
14/01/2021	German commanding officer 36	GER
18/01/2021	German OMLT mentor 37	GER
19/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 21	BEL
25/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 28	BEL
25/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 9	BEL

25/01/2021	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 10	BEL
25/01/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 13	BEL
27/01/2021	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 16	BEL
05/02/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 5	BEL
09/02/2021	Belgian OMLT commanding officer 18	BEL
16/02/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 23	BEL
26/02/2021	Belgian OMLT mentor 31	BEL
24/06/2022	Belgian staff officer lessons learned 35	BEL

NL List of interviews		
Interview Date	**Anonymised Function**	**Nationality**
20/01/2020	Dutch mentor 80	NL
22/01/2020	Dutch BG CO 71	NL
04/03/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 73	NL
09/03/2020	Dutch INF OMLT XO 69	NL
12/03/2020	Dutch mentor 31	NL
12/03/2020	Dutch INF OMLT XO 111	NL
20/03/2020	Dutch BG CO 110	NL
30/03/2020	Dutch mentor 11	NL
02/04/2020	Dutch War Photographer 81	NL
02/04/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 82	NL
02/04/2020	Dutch OMLT Bde CO 85	NL
06/04/2020	Dutch mentor 33	NL
07/04/2020	Dutch ISTAR 63	NL
07/04/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 114	NL
08/04/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 64	NL
12/04/2020	Dutch mentor 113	NL
20/04/2020	Dutch mentor 112	NL
22/04/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 82	NL
22/04/2020	Dutch OMLT Bde CO 85	NL
28/04/2020	Dutch mentor 96	NL
29/04/2020	Dutch mentor 23	NL
29/04/2020	Dutch mentor ASG 45	NL

01/05/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 56	NL
01/05/2020	Dutch journalist 38	NL
04/05/2020	Dutch mentor 35	NL
12/05/2020	Dutch mentor 84	NL
14/05/2020	Dutch INF OMLT XO 46	NL
19/05/2020	Dutch company mentor 61	NL
20/05/2020	Dutch company commander 95	NL
26/05/2020	Dutch mentor ASG 41	NL
26/05/2020	Dutch mentor 77	NL
27/05/2020	Dutch mentor 36	NL
28/05/2020	Dutch mentor 16	NL
28/05/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 42	NL
03/06/2020	Dutch tactical CO 78	NL
04/06/2020	Dutch mentor 40	NL
04/06/2020	Dutch former member of parliament 132	NL
08/06/2020	Dutch INF OMLT XO 46	NL
10/06/2020	Dutch INF OMLT XO 19	NL
11/06/2020	Dutch mentor 27	NL
12/06/2020	Dutch journalist 70	NL
12/06/2020	Dutch former member of parliament 133	NL
15/06/2020	Dutch tactical CO 75	NL
16/06/2020	Dutch company commander 12	NL
19/06/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 43	NL
23/06/2020	Dutch company commander 72	NL
24/06/2020	Dutch TFU CO 59	NL
25/06/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 54	NL
25/06/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 92	NL
29/06/2020	Dutch Mentor G6 20	NL
06/07/2020	Dutch TFU CO 24	NL
08/07/2020	Dutch TFU CO 98	NL
10/07/2020	Dutch Army commander 134	NL
21/07/2020	Dutch BG CO 110	NL
22/07/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 52	NL
23/07/2020	Dutch company mentor 83	NL

17/08/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 68	NL
18/08/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 4	NL
20/08/2020	Dutch CS mentor 51	NL
21/08/2020	Dutch Tactical CO / Advisor 7	NL
26/08/2020	Afghan interpreter 60	AFG
02/09/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE CO 76	NL
03/09/2020	Dutch OMLT mentor 136	NL
07/09/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 47	NL
08/09/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE CO 1	NL
09/09/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 26	NL
16/09/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 115	NL
17/09/2020	Dutch CSS OMLT CO 30	NL
21/09/2020	Dutch INF OMLT XO 44	NL
22/09/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 62	NL
23/09/2020	Dutch INF OMLT CO 25	NL
28/09/2020	Dutch CSS mentor 2	NL
01/10/2020	Dutch tactical CO / advisor 37	NL
06/10/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 9	NL
07/10/2020	Dutch BG CO 89	NL
08/10/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE CO 90	NL
08/10/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE XO 91	NL
14/10/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE XO 22	NL
20/10/2020	Dutch CSS mentor 17	NL
21/10/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 39	NL
22/10/2020	Dutch CS mentor 29	NL
27/10/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 49	NL
27/10/2020	Dutch mentor 67	NL
28/10/2020	Dutch mentor / instructor / medic 87	NL
02/11/2020	Dutch company mentor 10	NL
03/11/2020	Dutch mentor S4 65	NL
04/11/2020	Dutch tactical CO / advisor 86	NL
05/11/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE CO 90	NL
05/11/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE XO 91	NL
09/11/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 5	NL

10/11/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 21	NL
11/11/2020	Dutch PTLS 3	NL
12/11/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE XO 18	NL
16/11/2020	Dutch instructor 6	NL
17/11/2020	Dutch mentor S6 57	NL
19/11/2020	Dutch company mentor 28	NL
23/11/2020	Dutch company mentor 34	NL
24/11/2020	Dutch operations NCO 8	NL
25/11/2020	Dutch TFU CO 48	NL
26/11/2020	Dutch medic 14	NL
30/11/2020	Dutch Director OPS RNLA HQ 66	NL
30/11/2020	Dutch TFU CO 74	NL
07/12/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 15	NL
08/12/2020	Dutch senior sergeant mentor 55	NL
09/12/2020	Dutch instructor 13	NL
15/12/2020	Dutch company mentor 79	NL
16/12/2020	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 58	NL
17/12/2020	Dutch OMLT BDE XO 88	NL
21/12/2020	Dutch mentor S1 32	NL
12/01/2021	Dutch BG CO 103	NL
13/01/2021	Dutch TFU CO 99	NL
25/01/2021	Dutch training officer S3 50	NL
27/01/2021	Dutch OLMT BDE CO 53	NL
02/02/2021	Dutch mentor 137	NL
03/02/2021	Dutch BG CO 104	NL
11/02/2021	Dutch BG CO 108	NL
16/02/2021	Dutch BG CO 106	NL
08/03/2021	Dutch company mentor 83	NL
09/03/2021	Dutch BG CO 109	NL
11/03/2021	Dutch BG CO 102	NL
15/03/2021	Dutch INF OMLT XO 117	NL
23/03/2021	Dutch OMLT BDE XO 129	NL
24/03/2021	Dutch TFU CO 101	NL
25/03/2021	Dutch BG CO 105	NL

01/04/2021	Dutch OMLT BDE CO 123	NL
01/04/2021	Dutch functional specialist 125	NL
06/04/2021	Dutch company mentor 39	NL
06/04/2021	Dutch OCC-P mentor 126	NL
07/04/2021	Dutch INF OMLT XO 119	NL
12/04/2021	Dutch INF OMLT CO 116	NL
12/04/2021	Dutch mentor S4 120	NL
13/04/2021	Dutch company mentor 121	NL
14/04/2021	Dutch mentor 58	NL
20/04/2021	Dutch BG CO 110	NL
21/04/2021	Dutch CS mentor 124	NL
29/04/2021	Dutch Mentor S5 130	NL
29/04/2021	Dutch CSS OMLT XO 131	NL
30/04/2021	Dutch S2 staff officer 93	NL
03/05/2021	Dutch mentor S3 127	NL
06/05/2021	Dutch OCC-P mentor / mentor S5 128	NL
07/05/2021	Dutch Army officer 135	NL
10/05/2021	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 118	NL
12/05/2021	Dutch NCO mentor / instructor 122	NL
02/06/2021	Dutch BG CO 107	NL
09/06/2021	Dutch recon officer 94	NL
10/06/2021	Dutch CO PRT 97	NL
17/09/2021	Dutch TFU CO 100	NL
03/05/2021	Dutch mentor 138	NL

UK List of interviews		
Interview date	**Anonymised Function**	**Nationality**
19/02/2020	UK OMLT mentor 30	UK
11/03/2020	UK OMLT mentor 46	UK
03/07/2020	UK OMLT mentor 24	UK
17/07/2020	UK OMLT mentor 33	UK
12/08/2020	UK OMLT mentor 38	UK
28/08/2020	UK OMLT CO 28	UK

28/08/2020	UK OMLT mentor 48	UK
11/09/2020	UK OMLT CO 1	UK
17/09/2020	UK CO HTF 4	UK
20/09/2020	UK OMLT CO 25	UK
02/10/2020	UK OMLT mentor 41	UK
15/10/2020	UK OMLT mentor 45	UK
27/10/2020	UK OMLT mentor 49	UK
28/10/2020	UK CO HTF 2	UK
28/10/2020	UK CO FDT 3	UK
29/10/2020	UK OMLT mentor 35	UK
04/11/2020	UK OMLT CO 34	UK
09/11/2020	UK civil servant 5	UK
09/11/2020	UK OMLT mentor 29	UK
09/11/2020	UK OMLT mentor 43	UK
13/11/2020	UK OMLT mentor 52	UK
25/11/2020	UK OMLT mentor 44	UK
14/12/2020	UK OMLT mentor 6	UK
15/12/2020	UK CO BAG 7	UK
20/12/2020	UK OMLT mentor 36	UK
23/12/2020	UK OMLT mentor 20	UK
13/01/2021	UK CO BAG 19	UK
13/01/2021	UK OMLT mentor 47	UK
17/01/2021	UK OMLT mentor 21	UK
20/01/2021	UK OMLT mentor 40	UK
21/01/2021	UK OMLT CO 26	UK
26/01/2021	UK OMLT mentor 42	UK
04/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 31	UK
04/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 23	UK
04/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 12	UK
06/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 27	UK
09/02/2021	UK CO OMLT 16	UK
12/02/2021	UK CO TFH 11	UK
16/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 32	UK
16/02/2021	UK CO TFH 15	UK

17/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 8	UK
17/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 22	UK
18/02/2021	UK CO TFU 14	UK
(19–22)/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 39	UK
24/02/2021	UK CO TFU 17	UK
24/02/2021	UK civil servant 18	UK
26/02/2021	UK CO TFH 9	UK
28/02/2021	UK OMLT mentor 51	UK
03/03/2021	UK OMLT mentor 50	UK
08/03/2021	UK OMLT mentor 10	UK
23/07/2021	UK OMLT mentor 37	UK
17/12/2021	UK civil servant 13	UK

Appendix 2: List of Questions Used in the Semi-structured Interviews

Dear Sir,
Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in my research. Please find below my initial list of questions I would like to ask you with regard to your deployment as part of an OMLT.

1. Could you describe the preparations for the deployment of (rotation)?
2. How was the OMLT detachment staffed, and was there any particular reason to assign (rotation) to the OMLT task?
3. If present, could you describe the higher-level guidance/mission statement regarding the OMLT / ANA?
4. How was the HOTO going in organised?
5. Could you describe the chain of command with both the OMLT and the ANA. What leverage did you have to incite ANA action?
6. How would you describe your relation with the ANA leadership?
7. Would you consider the ANA an additional combat asset, or more the Afghan face of the operations? How did you rate the quality of the troops? I would be looking for both qualities and deficiencies.
8. How did you utilise the ANA capacity during your rotation? i.e., many small patrols in combination with ground-holding units, bn sized ops/other?
9. How did the OMLT organisation, TTPs and equipment change during the tour?
10. Infantrymen are selected and trained for combat duties. Mentoring and advising is a different trade. From your view as a (position), how would you reflect on the ability of fighting men to mentor and advise a developing army? This question is related to my observations that some mentors go "full T. E. Lawrence," others do not have the ability to scale down on their own professionalism while working with indigenous forces, whilst others seem to find the sweet spot naturally.
11. Would you consider advising/mentoring a specialised task, requiring specialised forces? Is the Specialised Infantry Group (GBR) a proper solution?
12. Did your appreciation and cooperation with the ANA and the OMLT change during your deployment?
13. What advise/HOTO did you pass on to your successor with regards to the OMLT and ANA relations? How was the HOTO organised going out?
14. Considering the development of the Afghan army was considered the exit strategy, what would be your retrospective advise to improve on this effort?

Thank you very much for your consideration,

With kind regards,
Ivor Wiltenburg

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Samenvatting

Samenvatting

Nadat het regime van de *Taliban* tot val werd gebracht door een korte oorlog in 2002, werd er door de internationale gemeenschap een poging gedaan om Afghanistan te begeleiden naar stabiliteit en voorspoed. Deze inspanningen, onder de vlag van de *international security assistance force (ISAF)* werden -onder meer- gehinderd door een gewapende insurgency, bestaande uit restanten van het taliban regime, lokale warlords en criminelen. Om te voorkomen dat Afghanistan verviel in een spiraal van lokaal geweld, breidde ISAF sterk uit, waarbij uiteindelijk tientallen landen militair deelnamen aan deze missie.

Een staat moet zich echter zelf kunnen verweren tegen binnen- en buitenlandse veiligheidsdreigingen. Hiertoe heeft een staat een zwaardmacht, die namens de staat het monopolie op geweld heeft. De jonge staat Afghanistan had na verschillende gewelddadige overgangen in regime geen regulier veiligheidsapparaat meer. Het creëren van een Afghaans leger werd na 2005 dan ook in toenemende mate beschouwd als een prioriteit voor ISAF, temeer omdat de deelnemende landen inzagen dat zonder een functionerend Afghaans veiligheidsapparaat de militaire deelname aan de missie in Afghanistan de potentie had om vele jaren te gaan duren, en het functioneren van het veiligheidsapparaat voorwaardelijk was voor het beëindigen van de missie.

Het opzetten van een Afghaans leger was echter geen sinecure. De jonge staat had geen middelen, geen instituten en geen financiën om dit in eigen beheer op te zetten, en werd hierbij dan ook geassisteerd door meerdere stakeholders, waaronder ISAF. Vanaf 2006 kregen Afghaanse militairen een basisopleiding in de hoofdstad Kabul, waarna zij werden gestationeerd in een van de provincies van het land. In de opleiding kregen de Afghaanse militairen een aantal vaardigheden aangeleerd, maar zij waren niet in staat om gecoördineerd op te treden in grotere verbanden, om operaties af te stemmen met eenheden van ISAF of de gelijktijdige operatie Enduring Freedom. De Afghaanse eenheden moesten dan ook aansluitend aan de formatie en gereedstelling begeleid worden om een hoger niveau van competentie te bereiken. De mensen -Westerse militairen- die hiertoe werden uitgezonden stonden bekend als de *Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams.* (OMLTs)

Aanvankelijk waren OMLTs kleine groepen militairen (12-24 man) die aan een Afghaans bataljon (kandak) werden gekoppeld. Via de OMLTs hadden de Afghaanse militairen van het Afghaanse Nationale Leger (ANA) toegang tot kennis (via training en coaching) en middelen (bijvoorbeeld luchtsteun en vuursteun werden aangevraagd via de OMLTs). Ook kon de ANA via het OMLT communiceren met andere ISAF eenheden en zo operaties met elkaar afstemmen. Het formeren van een OMLT was de verantwoordelijkheid van de staat die het team aanbood aan ISAF. Hoewel ISAF formeel controle uitoefende op de OMLTs, richtte de facto elke staat het OMLT in naar eigen inzicht. Aangezien geen van de deelnemende

staten aan ISAF beschikte over eenheden die specifiek waren ingericht op het trainen, adviseren, mentoren en begeleiden van buitenlandse veiligheidstroepen, varieerde het formeringsproces dan ook per land.

Het ondersteunen van de krijgsmacht van een ander land is een activiteit die bekend is geworden als *security force assistance* (SFA). Hoewel de naam pas enkele jaren in zwang is geraakt, is het principe hierachter al veel ouder, en is dan ook veelvoudig voorgekomen in de contemporaine militaire geschiedenis. In theorie is SFA een middel om de gevechtskracht van een andere staat te verbeteren. Vanuit de theorie en militaire doctrine kan worden afgeleid dat gevechtskracht bestaat uit een mentale, conceptuele en fysieke component, waarbij elke component voorwaardelijk is voor de andere. Het beïnvloeden van de gevechtskracht van een krijgsmacht middels SFA kan dus geschieden door het verbeteren van een of meerdere van deze componenten. De steun die ISAF aanbood aan het Afghaanse Nationale Leger bevatte alle drie de componenten, waarbij de OMLTs werden ingezet ten behoeve van de mentale en conceptuele component. Voor de militairen die waren ingedeeld bij een OMLT betekende dit dat zij dus de Afghaanse militairen niet alleen trainden en adviseerden, maar ook begeleidden tijdens operaties. Omdat de OMLTs actief deelnamen aan gevechtsoperaties van een krijgsmacht van een ander land, vereiste dit optreden dus een aanpassing van de OMLTs ten opzichte van de wijze van optreden in het eigen leger. Grote verschillen waren waarneembaar in de technieken, tactieken, procedures tussen de verschillende nationaliteiten. Andere verschillen waren waarneembaar in de taal, cultuur en het gebruikte materieel. Ook waren de OMLTs in ieder geval gedeeltelijk afhankelijk van de gevechtsondersteuning en de logistieke ondersteuning van het Afghaanse leger. Voor de Oorlog in Afghanistan was het gebruikelijk dat dit type operatie werd uitgevoerd door speciale eenheden, maar door gebrek aan capaciteit werd een beroep gedaan op reguliere eenheden voor de OMLTs.

Dit onderzoek richt zich op de wijze waarop de krijgsmachten van het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Nederland en België zich hebben aangepast aan de OMLT taak. De *main research question* is dan ook "hoe hebben de krijgsmachten van het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Nederland en België zich aangepast aan de OMLT taak in Afghanistan, en welke institutionele veranderingen zijn waarneembaar als een gevolg van deze adaptatie?

Het Verenigd Koninkrijk had zich gecommitteerd aan de provincie Helmand in het zuiden van Afghanistan. Met het arriveren van de eerste lichting van de Helmand Task Force in 2006, kwam ook het eerste OMLT aan in de provincie. Dit OMLT was een samenraapsel van mensen uit de Britse krijgsmacht, waarbij de kern werd gevormd door de kaderleden van de vuursteuneenheid van de Air Assault Brigade. Na de eerste rotatie was al duidelijk dat er behoefte was aan een beter gestructureerde OMLT organisatie, waarbij er vanaf dat moment voor werd gekozen om een regulier bataljon infanterie te gebruiken als kern van

het OMLT, waarbij de officieren en onderofficieren de Afghaanse militairen begeleidden die in principe een echelon hoger werkzaam waren in hun eigen krijgsmacht. Een Britse compagniescommandant begeleidde een Afghaanse bataljonscommandant, et cetera. Gedurende de vier jaar dat de Britse OMLTs actief waren in Helmand -hierna werden zij afgelost door een team begeleiders met een andere naam, maar met dezelfde taakstelling- werden zij ingezet in vele operaties in Helmand. Ook werken ANA subeenheden van pelotons- en compagniesgrootte met hun OMLT ingezet om de militaire posten te bemannen die gedurende deze jaren veelvuldig werden gebouwd in Helmand in een poging controle te krijgen over de provincie. Gedurende de OMLT inzet in Helmand waren een aantal adaptaties waarneembaar, waaronder veranderingen in de samenstelling van het team, de opleidingen en trainingen voor de uitzending zelf en ook in de uitrusting. Ook de status van het OMLT was aan verandering onderhevig. Waar initieel het OMLT werd gezien als een mindere functie -de krijgsmacht van het VK maakte een groot informeel onderscheid in status tussen de *'groundholding'* bataljons en andere eenheden-, veranderde dit in de loop van de jaren enigszins. Het nut en de noodzaak van een professioneel Afghaans leger werd steeds beter bekend binnen de krijgsmacht van het VK.

De OMLTs die geleid werden door Nederland waren actief in de provincie Uruzgan, waar ook de Nederlandse Task Force aanwezig was. Echter, de Nederlandse krijgsmacht was overvraagd door de vele militairen die nodig waren voor het vullen van de Task Force, de Battlegroup, het PRT en de staf van RC/South, waardoor het adequaat vullen van het OMLT een voortdurend probleem bleef. Tot aan de Nederlandse terugtrekking uit Uruzgan in 2010 bleef de vulling van het OMLT een probleem. Omdat in tegenstelling tot hun collega's in Helmand er geen hogere staf was die verantwoordelijk was gesteld voor de gereedstelling van de OMLTs, was de training voorafgaand aan de uitzending ook voornamelijk een taak van het team zelf, waardoor de voorbereiding van elk opvolgend OMLT zich kenmerkte door de individuele inspanningen van het team zelf. Na enkele jaren veranderde de structuur van de OMLTs ook in Uruzgan, waarbij ook andere staten zoals Australië en Frankrijk begonnen met het aanleveren van OMLT-troepen. Hoewel er inmiddels een Nederlandse kolonel commandant was van het OMLT, bleven de internationale OMLTs ook rapporteren in hun eigen, nationale lijn, waardoor eenheid van inspanning soms lastig was. De Nederlandse OMLTs hadden ook moeite om de geleerde lessen goed over te brengen naar de opvolgers, en na het beëindigen van de uitzending werden ook de rapportages van de commandanten veelvuldig genegeerd door de directie operaties van de Nederlandse Krijgsmacht. Met het beëindigen van de Nederlandse bijdrage in Uruzgan in 2010, verviel ook de noodzaak van het formeren van de OMLTs, en de geleerde lessen werden niet geformaliseerd of geïnstitutionaliseerd, ondanks dat de Nederlandse krijgsmacht veelvuldig blijft deelnemen aan SFA operaties.

De Belgische krijgsmacht droeg pas vanaf 2009 bij aan de OMLTs. In scherp contrast met hun collega's uit het VK had het OMLT in België de status van een serieuze gevechtsoperatie. De

Belgische regering nam een aantal maatregelen om te voorkomen dat er slachtoffers zouden vallen onder de Belgische militairen. Zo werd er gekozen voor de relatief rustige provincie Kunduz in het noorden van Afghanistan, en kregen de OMLTs de prioriteit qua uitrusting en vulling. De Belgische modus operandus was om een regulier infanteriebataljon te selecteren voor de uitzending, en van deze eenheid de meest ervaren en capabele mensen te selecteren voor de missie. De jongere collega's werden vervolgens ingezet om het vliegveld in Kabul te bewaken. Het Belgische OMLT werd vanuit Brussel opgedragen om in principe niet deel te nemen aan gevechtsoperaties 'in de eerste lijn', wederom om het risico op eigen slachtoffers te beperken. Vanuit het institutionele geheugen van de Belgische krijgsmacht was het te doen gebruikelijk om mentoring en trainingsmissies aan te lopen vanuit een 'horizontale verhouding', wat impliceert dat de mentor en mentee in principe dezelfde rang hebben, en een vergelijkbare ervaringsopbouw. Zowel in Helmand als in Uruzgan werden de Afghaanse militairen begeleid door OMLT'ers lager in rang dan zijzelf, waarbij beschikbaarheid, kennis en ervaring belangrijker werd geacht dan rang en leeftijd door de Westerse militairen. Nadat de Duitse partners en de Amerikanen aangaven in belangrijke mate terug te trekken uit Kunduz/Afghanistan, volgden de Belgen ook, waarbij hun OMLT bijdrage werd beperkt tot een periode van vier jaar. Na het beëindigen van de OMLT missie, richtte de Belgische krijgsmacht zich wederom op het voorbereiden op het reguliere conflict, waarbij de ervaring van de OMLTs niet verder werden geformaliseerd in training, doctrine of in de organisatiestructuur.

De heroriëntatie naar het reguliere conflict na het beëindigen van de counterinsurgency in Afghanistan was ook zichtbaar binnen de andere krijgsmachten die zijn onderzocht in dit proefschrift. Waar de krijgsmacht van het VK zich aanpaste aan de eisen van de counterinsurgency met betrekking tot SFA, zichtbaar in de organisatiestructuur tijdens de missie, de opleidings- en trainingssystematiek voor de uitzending en de pogingen om kennis van dit type missie te borgen binnen de krijgsmacht na het beëindigen van de ISAF-bijdrage, was dit niet het geval bij de twee andere casussen. De Nederlandse krijgsmacht bleef vier jaar lang *muddling through*, waarbij het worstelde met de vulling, opleiding en training en het borgen van de geleerde lessen. De Belgische krijgsmacht had weinig operationele druk ondervonden om zich aan te passen gedurende de missie, en kon voortbouwen op een sterk ontwerp van de missie, waarbij een goede personele vulling, uitrusting en opleiding en training was verzekerd voor vertrek. Mede hierdoor is er ook post-Afghanistan geen noodzaak gezien door de Belgische krijgsmacht om de geleerde lessen verder te institutionaliseren.

Dit proefschrift biedt een uitgebreide beschrijving van de wijze waarop drie verschillende krijgsmachten invulling gaven aan het ontwerp van hun OMLT-missie en de uitvoering hiervan in de aan hen toegewezen provinciën in Afghanistan. Uit het onderzoek bleek dat elke krijgsmacht onderkende dat dit type SFA, i.e. *combat mentoring* bijzondere vaardigheden vereist, wat verklaart waarom het veelal is belegd bij de speciale eenheden als *military*

assistance. Het is de verwachting dat SFA-type operaties veelvuldig zullen blijven voorkomen, waardoor de ervaringen die zijn vastgelegd in dit onderzoek van grote waarde kunnen zijn als er wederom een SFA missie wordt ontworpen die zich richt op *combat mentoring*.

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

Ivor Wiltenburg (1981) joined the Royal Military Academy as a cadet in 2001, graduating in 2005. Prior to this, he graduated at the Groene Hart Lyceum high school in Alphen aan den Rijn. Since then, he has served as an officer in the Royal Netherlands Army in various positions. Ivor has been deployed three times on operational tours to Afghanistan and Africa. In 2013, he obtained a master's degree in military history from the University of Amsterdam, followed by a master's degree in Military Strategic Studies in 2015 from the Netherlands Defence Academy. He has published scholarly works on security force assistance, strategy and military history.

Security Force Assistance (SFA), enhancing the capability and capacity of foreign security forces, is increasingly considered a valuable tool in of Western States' international policy. To be sure, equipping, training and mentoring local troops is not a novel phenomenon. Yet, accompanying and mentoring the recipient forces in combat arguably remains one of the most challenging aspects of SFA. During the war in Afghanistan, allied Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) operated shoulder to shoulder with Afghan National Army units in austere conditions. Although enhancing Afghan security forces was regarded a central tenet in the allied campaign, the OMLTs were initially granted limited attention by the various troop contributing nations. This research examines the British, Dutch and Belgian OMLTs and their efforts to adapt to their challenging tasks. Furthermore, it sheds light on the relationship between Western troops and Afghan forces with occasional diverging professional views.

As a theoretical lens this study utilises Military Innovation theory to analyse the adaptation processes within each case study. Finally, the research breaks new empirical ground by examining a vast range of sources. The three case studies are based on archival records, official evaluations, regimental histories, surveys and over 220 semistructured interviews.

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