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

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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.

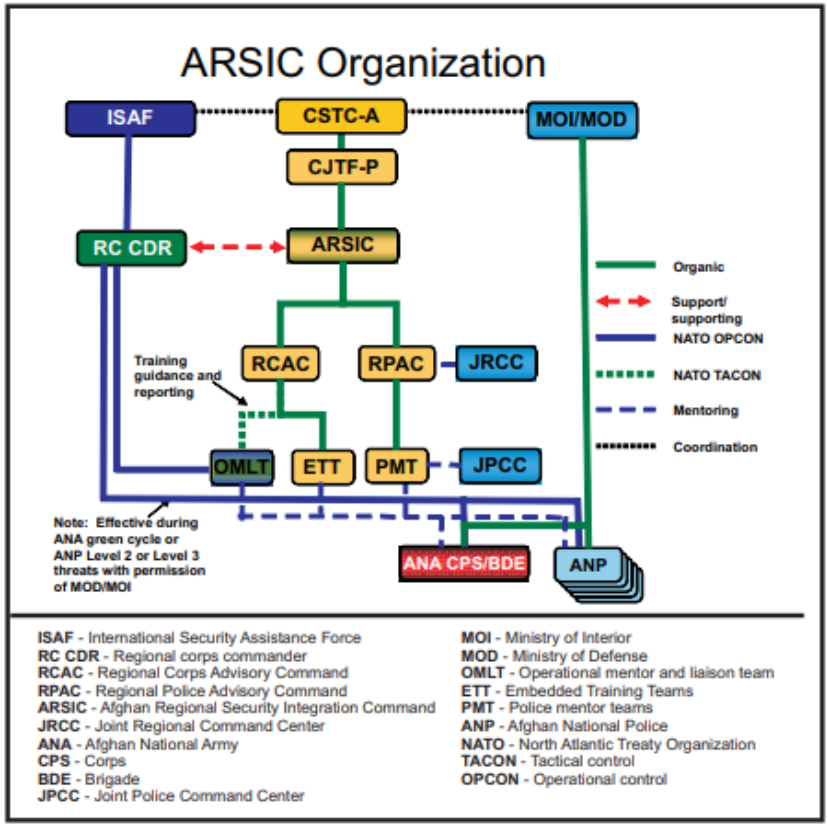

Figure 4 OMLT hierarchy

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.