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

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Chapter 2

Chapter 2: The Theory of Military Innovation

2.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

3 Ibid., 6.

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

2.2 Schools of Thought within Military Innovation Studies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 Ibid., 913

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

12 Ibid., 7–8.

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

14 Ibid., 928.

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

2.3 External Factors of Influence

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

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

2.3.1 Domestic Politics

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

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

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

17 Ibid. 6.

18 Ibid. 8–10.

19 Ibid. 10.

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.2 *Alliance Politics*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 Wiltenburg and Vorm, "Small State Strategic Thinking"

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

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

2.3.3 Strategic Culture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.4 Civil-military Relationship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 Internal Factors of Influence

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

2.4.1 *Military Leadership*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4.2. Organisational Culture

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

2.4.3 Disseminating Knowledge

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4.4 Manifestations

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

2.4.5 Doctrine and Concepts

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

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

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

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

58 Ibid., 7.

59 Ibid., 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

62 Ibid.

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

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

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

66 Ibid., 3-1 – 3-16.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

69 Landmacht, *Landoperaties Doctrine Publicatie 3.2*.

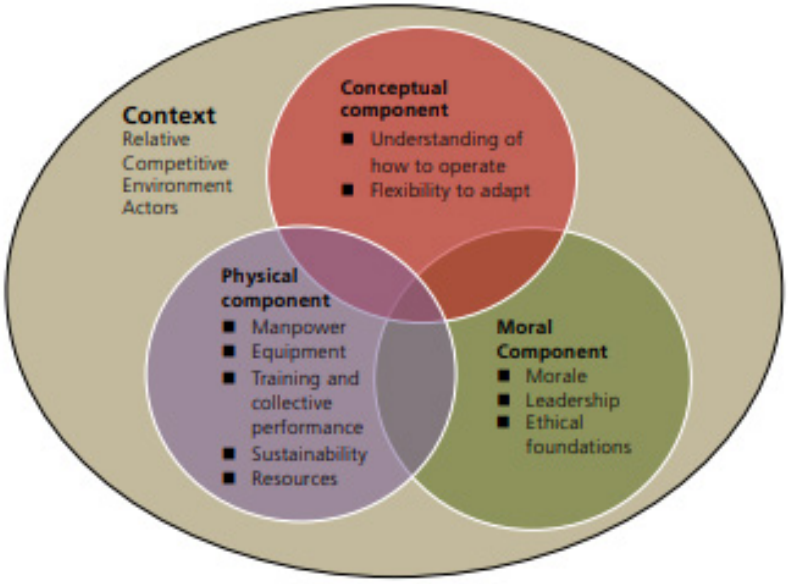

Figure 3: Components of Fighting Power. Source: Land Operations, Land Warfare

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

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

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

70 Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, 2.

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

2.5 Types of Organisational Learning

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

2.5.1 *Informal Organisational Learning in Conflict*

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

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

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

72 Ibid., 72.

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

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

2.5.2 *Formal Organisational Learning in Conflict*

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

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

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

75 Field notes Author 2007.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.5.3 Institutionalisation of Inter-conflict Learning

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

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

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

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

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

83 Ibid., 75.

84 Ibid., 75–76.

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

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

2.6 Subconclusion

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

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

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

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

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