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

Citation
Wiltenburg, I. L. (2024, September 18). *Adapting to improve: the Odyssey of the operational mentoring and liaison teams of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4092632

Part 3

Reflection

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Analysis and conclusion

This dissertation has explored the way in which three states have fielded an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team in Afghanistan. The main research question ''how have the armed forces of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium adapted to the OMLT task in Afghanistan, and what institutional changes have materialised as a consequence of this adaptation?'' thus seeks to elucidate the adaptational processes during the deployment and the institutional changes that this SFA-type deployment has instigated.

In the introduction, this research commenced with the observation that SFA is increasingly used as a foreign policy tool, however, what exactly encompassed SFA remained mostly unclear. The plethora of military and academic terms to describe a broad topic further obfuscated scholarly endeavours to elucidate the utility and challenges of SFA-type operations. Revisiting the questions that were asked in the introduction, this analysis will first consider that first question: what was asked for when the OMLTs were created, and during what type of conflict? Secondly, this chapter will use the manifestations of military innovation described in chapter two to identify how the OMLTs of the selected case studies have adapted during their tenure, and what institutionalisations have materialised after this series of deployments.

6.1 The strategic rationale behind SFA-type deployments in Afghanistan

Ameliorating the Afghan army has been a quintessential example of security force assistance during a contemporary counterinsurgency campaign. Indeed, the observation in the first chapter that SFA has its utility mainly in support rather than in lieu of major regular combat operations, and as such is particularly suitable for certain types of irregular warfare, counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare in particular, is corroborated by the research in this dissertation. As theorised in the introduction, the Afghan campaign epitomises the evolution of COIN operations into a population-centric approach, aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the population. As the ANA was at the forefront of strengthening and legitimising the authority of the host-nation regime, one would expect that the main strategic effort of ISAF would be to stand up the ANA into a system that would boost the control over the Afghan society whilst simultaneously attriting the insurgency in its effort to control the Afghan populace. The OMLTs would perform a role in this effort, as the ANA was not considered to be operationally effective without western mentors. So during this COIN campaign, what exactly did we ask the OMLTs to do? In analysing the assignments of the OMLTs, a further understanding of the rationale behind OMLT teams can be gained.

After the decision had been made to create a new Afghan National Army -the first attempt had failed-, the US quickly recognised that its embedded training teams were lacking the capacity to mentor the many Afghan kandaks that would be deployed across the country in the upcoming years. The novel OMLT concept was created, and although it was understood that the OMLTs would be an important factor in contributing to the development of the Afghan National Army, it was left to each OMLT-contributing state to interpret its exact mission statement. A few important caveats were presented, including the OMLT's minimum term of deployment and a number of operational capabilities, however, ISAF HQ allowed many other variables to be decided by the individual states.

Although this might come across as loose control, the operational reality in Afghanistan differed across the country, and therefore it is understandable that the leading state in each province had some leeway in deciding how to use its OMLTs. For the British, who were drawn into the series of pitched battles described in this dissertation, the OMLT and ANA were very much a secondary concern during the first years and were mainly useful in freeing up British forces by manning outposts and patrolling across the province where needed. Although the OMLT and ANA provided for extra combat power capacity, the mentoring assignment was initially considered to be both a second-rate assignment, as well as a part-time job: the unit responsible for the first OMLT had received two more assignments besides mentoring the ANA. The first rotations had to muddle through, as British leadership was not inclined to elevate either the ANA or the OMLTs to a position of operational or strategic influence. Although the OMLT remained the less glorious assignment, the fourth rotation of OMLTs had been given a more tangible mission statement: to train, mentor and strike in support of their ANA Brigade to deliver this Brigade as an operationally proven, self-supporting combined arms brigade. Although understandable when viewed through the lens of a commanding officer looking to expand his provincial combat power, the magnitude of this mission statement was not observed as the British were not in the position to make any demands of the Afghan force generation process, the logistical support or whether or not the brigade was to be operationally proven -indeed the actual commitment of the Brigade was formally an Afghan decision. Its successors were thus quick to acknowledge the long-term goal, but conceded on the realisation that this would become a long-term effort by adjusting the mission statement to enable the continued progress towards 3/205 Brigade becoming a self-sufficient sustainable and operationally proven all arms Brigade. Later iterations of the OMLT had even more issues with supporting the ANA on the formation level, as the Afghan Brigade became fragmented all over Helmand, reducing the OMLTs to supporting their mentees in a more decentralised fashion.

In Uruzgan, the Dutch OMLT built on the mission statement that was provided in the Article 100 letter provided by the Dutch government: they were to train, monitor and mentor the ANA-battalions, including the provision of JTAC capacity. During the formation of the

OMLTs, however, it became clear that the Dutch Directorate of Operations had little interest in the OMLT and the ANA. Indicative, the first TFU commander was unaware that he had an OMLT in Uruzgan, and the JTAC capacity – a scarce commodity in the Dutch Army, was never allocated to the OMLTs. As a result, the question 'what was asked' can not be answered in the Dutch case, as this was left to the field grade officers commanding the OMLTs unit until 2008. Later Dutch OMLTs mostly focused on the Dutch-Afghan interoperability and formation-level liaison in an attempt to smooth out the partnering directives provided by ISAF's commanding officers. On the lower tactical level, junior officers and NCOs were given a great amount of self-determination in their ANA/OMLT activities, however, given the constraints in means this watered down to area patrols in the immediate surroundings of the patrol bases that were constructed after every battlegroup operation, typically three per year.

Lastly, the Belgians were initially asked to coach, teach and mentor ANA units, provide the conduit for liaison and command and control and when required support the operational planning and employment of the ANA unit to which they are aligned in order to support the development of a self-sufficient, competent and professional ANA. In a rather free interpretation of this assignment, the first Belgian commanding officer rephrased this as "to improve the level of the kandak that has been assigned to us in all aspects, and to build a working relationship by our continuous presence, by sharing our expertise and by sharing risks in a responsible manner". The Belgian contingent thus accepted a relative improvement of their ANA mentees to be a successful mission outcome, aiming to improve where their expertise matched those aspects where the ANA needed development. Later rotations would adjust the mission statement slightly, but would not alter the underlying relative and modest goal of its mission.

In conclusion, all three states have been involved in the same mission, however, the mission statements of the three states with regard to the OMLT differed. This observation harkens back to the different policy goals as stated in the introduction. Indeed, the British aimed to mobilise a partner in order to assist the British in defeating the insurgency. The neighbouring Dutch OMLT initially lacked guidance, but in the campaign plan, the Dutch stated that their aim was to improve the Afghan institutions during their tenure in Afghanistan. Lastly, the Belgian Army was deployed in order to gain influence with a partner, i.e. the United States, as well as grasping at the opportunity of a bespoke, low-risk, military participation. The table below thus represents the *main* military aim and political utility of the OMLTs in each province.

State	Military aim	Political utility
United Kingdom	Increase ANA capacity and capability	Mobilise a partner and attrit the enemy
The Netherlands	Initially none, later focus on interoperability and capacity	Institution building
Belgium	Improvement of ANA	Influence and participation

Upon reflection, the strategic culture of each state, (i.e. the persisting socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions and habits of mind and preferred methods of operation that are more or less specific to a particular security community) trickles down to the way each OMLT has been deployed. As stated earlier, the strategic culture is influencing the choices made on force structure as well as length and type of deployment. The OMLTs, however, have been a rather modest part of the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan as well as the efforts of both the British and the Dutch in their respective areas of operation, and are thus not fully representative of each state's strategic culture.

The British commitment to Afghanistan was second only to the American effort, and the British were highly reluctant to accept a strategic defeat in Helmand. The British OMLTs were thus part of a prolonged campaign to subdue insurgent forces, which reflected the British strategic aims to uphold its special relationship with the US, its national pride and its unwillingness to accept a shrinkage of its global influence. In line with Dutch strategic culture, the Dutch government was less comfortable with an enduring involvement in Uruzgan, rather reemphasizing its willingness to contribute, rather than committing fully to ISAF. Although training, advising, and mentoring fitted the Dutch strategic culture of contributing to security, stability, and international rule of law, the overstretched Dutch Army did opt to concentrate its efforts on the Dutch Task Force Uruzgan, rather than strengthening its mentoring efforts. Facing pollical unwillingness to extend its contribution to ISAF, the Dutch withdrew in 2010 from Uruzgan, causing allegations of alliance defection in its wake.

The most significant observations of strategic culture as an external driver of adaptation might be observed in the Belgian case. The Belgian risk-averse and modest approach to military operations in Afghanistan contributed to a limited contribution in a rather safe area of operations, restricted by nationally-imposed caveats in order to avoid casualties. In a similar vein, this driver led to the allocation of more resources to the Belgian Landcomponent before deployment.

6.2 Military innovation during the OMLT deployments

The Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams were a novel concept, and each participating state went through an adaptational process in order to accommodate the demands put forward on these teams. In chapter two, a number of manifestations of military innovation were identified. As the empirical chapters described the evolution of the OMLTs over several years, we can identify several manifestations of military change in each case. The next section will elaborate on those manifestations that were most distinctly present in the empirical evidence, starting with the change of the tactics, techniques and procedures of the OMLTs, as well as the development of operations. These are followed by education and training, the force levels and resources allocated to the OMLTs, doctrine and concepts, organisational structure and the dissemination of lessons learned.

6.2.1 Tactical and Operational Adaptations

Farrell theorised that pressure from operations are the most important driver of military adaptation. However, for the OMLTs the operational challenges in Afghanistan did not only originate from the insurgent forces, they were in part created by the partners of the OMLTs. Indeed, the interaction and cooperation with the ANA might very well be considered an operation challenge. This observation will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. As for the ANA, most Afghan soldiers in Helmand, Uruzgan and Kunduz had a similar military education, going through the basic military training pipeline in the capital Kabul, before being transferred to one of the brigades deployed throughout the country. The southern provinces were rightfully considered to be more dangerous than for instance Kunduz, which contributed to the high levels of desertion encountered by the British and Dutch OMLTs. Still, during the tenure of the OMLTs in both southern provinces, the number of ANA troops increased remarkably, allowing for larger operations than during the initial rotations and more comprehensive military operations. This section will detail the different adaptations and approaches undertaken by each of the three OMLT-providing states.

Upon arrival, the British were quick to position the OMLT teams throughout the province, as the number of (jointly) Afghan-held positions increased over time. On the lowest tactical level, the British attempted to join forces as much as possible with their Afghan counterparts. Patrols were undertaken in such a way that Afghan and British soldiers would pair up in couples so that the Afghanis could feed off their British mentors by following the example given. This proved to be a useful concept, on the premise that the Afghan soldiers were willing and able to learn from their British counterparts. Leadership issues on the lower tactical levels plagued the Afghan Army, however, and the OMLTs would frequently have to lead the Afghan soldiers themselves, either directly or through the voice of the Afghan officers, especially when under fire.

Whilst many junior British officers relished the freedom of commanding a small OMLT team with an Afghan platoon present, the individual interpretation of the OMLT tasks by those young officers, in combination with the inability of oversight from the OMLT battlegroup staff due to the geography of the outposts and lack of an overall intent on the ANA and OMLT, made for dissimilar outcomes. Most patrols would be attuned with a nearby battlegroup company to deconflict and support if needed. As the OMLTs did not hold any authority over the ANA, the operational tempo and scheme of manoeuvre were directly proportional to the quality and willingness of the ANA leadership.

Larger operations were mostly prepared and led by TFH leadership, with little Afghan interference, despite the efforts of officers like MacKay who endeavoured to incorporate the ANA into his counterinsurgency campaign. As such, the large-scale operations frequently only had an Afghan veneer whilst being led and controlled by the British or RC/S. The initial partnering initiative by McKiernan did not have the intended effect, and it took a second directive by McCrystal to force the TFH to fully partner with the ANA. This initiative would also put mentor and mentee on the same echelon, as the British and Afghans would partner with a peer unit, with partners of equal rank. The OMLT mentored one echelon up, the commanding officer (a Lieutenant-Colonel) mentoring the Afghan Brigadier General. However, at this stage the liaison and mentoring function was essential for partnered operations, so despite the hypothesis that the ground-holding battlegroups would take over the OMLT function, the OMLTs remained vital for deconfliction, liaison and guidance. Despite the good intentions of the partnering directive, the new status of the ANA as equal partners effectively stated that the ANA's current tactics and techniques were of the required standard. The overnight improved opinion of the ANA's capabilities was however a paper construct, and the ANA had to resort to British military capacities well beyond the envisioned end of the OMLTs in 2010.

In Uruzgan province, the ANA was more prudently integrated into the area of operations. As the first rotation did not venture much outside of the wire of Camp Holland and Camp Hadrian, the second rotation's certification allowed a more forward-leaning utilization of Afghan combat power. Usually, three to six OMLT members accompanied the ANA during patrols. These first OMLT iterations criticized the Dutch approach of having the ANA drive point, as it felt like the ANA were used as a tripwire for Taliban IEDs and ambushes. During the first year of operations, the ANA was indeed mostly used as the 'Afghan face' of operations, with small groups of ANA being reluctantly attached to Battlegroup patrols. The ANA/OMLT only gained some recognition after the Battle of Chora in 2007, where the ANA/OMLT combination was able to execute a mostly OMLT-led clearing of the Dehrashan Valley in support of the largest offensive Dutch operation to date. As each subsequent Dutch battlegroup-sized operation led to another outpost -typically one per battlegroup rotation-, the increased ANA presence was mostly used to man the patrol bases, supported by the OMLT, but generally without a battlegroup presence. Like its British compatriots, a general

sense of independence was experienced by the OMLTs as neither the Battlegroup nor the TFU was concerned with the day-to-day activities of the ANA/OMLT. During larger operations, for instance, Spin Ghar and Mani Ghar in 2007 and 2009 respectively, the ANA and OMLT were used in numbers, but the Dutch OMLTs initiatives to instil a degree of ownership with regard to operational planning did not stick to the Afghan staff. The TFU's attempts to embolden the ANA were dependent on the whims of the incumbent commanding officer. Generally, a sense of distrust impeded close cooperation and intelligence sharing, so most COs opted to communicate with the ANA through the OMLT CO, which was a Colonel after the third rotation. Unlike the British, who mentored one echelon up, the Dutch started to mentor one rank up after 2007. The OMLT Colonel thus mentored the ANA Brigadier General, and the kandak OMLTs were generally commanded by a Major.

The Belgians inherited the relatively quiet province of Kunduz from its predecessors. As the Belgians had a policy of horizontal mentoring -matching the rank of one's mentee- the Belgian CO and Afghan kandak commanders were on equal terms and the Afghan officer would be mentored by someone who had both experience as a Battalion commander, and was a selected officer of the Belgian Army. After their stint in Kabul, the Belgians were quick to shift to a more participative style of mentoring than their predecessors. The 3 PARA OMLT, an elite light battalion, was eager to dismount and accompany the Afghan soldiers on foot patrols instead of staying within the boundaries of the Kunduz compound. However, after the first few contacts with enemy elements, 3 PARA was harshly corrected by Brussels, as the risk-averse Belgian government had little incentive to risk Belgian soldiers being killed in action during dismounted operations. The ukase from Brussels to stay mounted -and protected by armour- during operations generally prevented the Belgian OMLTs from adapting to the operational realities if so was needed. As the first rotations were on occasion engaged by Taliban forces, after the first rotations, Kunduz quieted down to a level where no operational adaptations were deemed necessary. Indeed, most Belgian OMLT rotations were not involved in direct combat with local insurgents at all during their six-month tenures. Moreover, the Belgian OMLT was mostly confined to the direct surroundings of Kunduz city, although the ANA and Belgians did conduct regular patrols, albeit mostly mounted due to the caveats imposed on them by the Belgian government.

On the lowest tactical levels, all three cases show little tactical adaptations. The British chose to closely accompany the Afghans, in order to guide the ANA's actions and take over the lead when needed. Similarly, the Dutch also closed in with their Afghan interlocutors in order whilst on patrol. The only observable shift in small unit tactics is observable in the Belgian case, as political pressure from Brussels prevented the Belgian OMLT from mentoring 'below the company level', in an attempt to prevent Belgian casualties. This lack of adaptation has a logical reason. As indicated by the empirical data, it was commonplace for all OMLTs to take over joint operations as Afghan leadership was unable to adequately lead their forces in

battle -or at least according to their mentor. So, in order to be able to take over command, the OMLT officer or NCO in charge would have to position himself close to the Afghan leadership (and his radios), as well as positioning countrymen up front, so that accurate reports could be passed on in both the OMLT hierarchy as well as a possible partner unit close by. In their liaison function, the OMLT would have to have access to the same information in order to pass this down to partner units and air assets. These approaches towards the tactical positioning of forces are all by the book, which explains why little adaptations were made during the campaign.

	United Kingdom	The Netherlands	Belgium
Method of tactical mentoring	Low-level combined operations	Low-level combined operations	Company-level combined operations
Level of mentoring	One echelon up	One rank up	Equal level

6.2.2 Force Levels, organisational structures and Resources

The British OMLTs were embedded into the chain of command of the Helmand Task Force, allowing for clear lines of communications between the CO of TFH and CO of the OMLT. This would endure for the rest of the campaign. This would also allow the CO of the OMLT to express his concerns with regard to equipment and staffing directly into the chain of command. Although the OMLTs were not considered to be at the forefront of the British strategy early in the campaign, the force levels and equipment did increased significantly after the first rotation. The first rotation was drawn from all over the Army, including 7 RHA but also an assorted mix of volunteers from other units as a result of an Army-wide trawl. Subsequent rotations were constructed around the a skeleton crew of a regular battalion or commando. This battalion structure -devoid of the majority of the lower ranks, but augmented with specialists and individual officers and NCOs to fill the gaps where needed- would pair with its Afghan counterparts one echelon up to mentor, liaise, train and even command where needed or possible. As one regular battalion was often not sufficient to provide each ANA kandak with an OMLT, another (company-level) team would be constructed from individual augmentees and volunteers, in a similar way as the first OMLT. Still, after the force structure of a kandak level OMLT had been established, the OMLT would only increase proportionally as the ANA increased its presence in Helmand, indicating that little necessity was perceived in increasing OMLT numbers.

Mirroring the light infantry role of the ANA, few adaptations were made after the first rotation in its equipment table. The HERRICK 4 OMLT, especially after the demise of an OMLT officer near Sangin, however, caused an acceleration of the influx of night vision optics, vehicles

and heavy weapons into the mentor teams. Initially, these types of equipment were scarce, and the OMLT had to resort to scavenging and borrowing from other British forces in the area of operations. As the British could resort to the organic equipment table of the battalion after the first rotation, the equipment of the OMLTs was mostly on par with the Battlegroups.

The Dutch OMLT was initially set up with 12 members to train and advise the ANA. The force structure of the Dutch contingent doubled after this initial understaffing, a result of ISAF's insistence on a minimum of 24 service members per team. This directive was adhered to after three rotations. Experiencing little guidance from either the Task Force Uruzgan or the national hierarchy, the Dutch OMLT force structure and equipment table meandered as the commanding officers of the first rotations held different views on how to employ the OMLTs. The force structure steadied with the arrival of the Brigade OMLTs, however, the Dutch OMLTs were never able to structure the OMLTs around the foundation of an existing battalion. Also, unable to increase its numbers after the ANA influx from 2008 onward, the Dutch opened up the OMLT internationally. Eventually, the OMLT (including the Brigade OMLT) was comprised of Australians, French, Dutch and Slovakian service members, complicating the unity of effort of the OMLT in Uruzgan.

Remarkably, the Dutch experienced similar difficulties in adequately equipping its mentors, although this improved as the operation progressed. One of the sources of this improvement was the introduction of the Bushmaster vehicles to the TFU. Although these vehicles were never distributed to the OMLTs, it freed up the 4x4s also used by the Dutch Battlegroup, making them available to the OMLTs. Like the British, the Dutch OMLT mirrored the light infantry role of the ANA, and as such little adaptation was considered needed in the equipment table as the individual equipment of an OMLT service member generally was on par with that of the infantry soldiers of the Battlegroups.

Standing out equipment-wise were the Belgians. A late entry, the Belgians emulated other states' approach to the force structure of the OMLTs. The Belgian Army thus constructed their teams around a regular infantry battalion, matching their mentees' position by Belgian equivalents. Moreover, the Belgians considered ISAF's requirements to be more of a guideline, and decided to increase the number of personnel to an amount deemed necessary to mentor effectively, almost tripling the minimum requirements. This force structure would stay in place for the duration of the deployment, only altering after the decision had been made to forego on mentoring on the lowest tactical levels by the ISAF hierarchy. Moreover, adhering to their decision to only mentor one kandak, no further demands had to be made to increase its numbers.

As the Belgian Landcomponent was notoriously underfunded in the time period 2009 - 2013, the OMLTs were pleasantly surprised as additional requirements were quickly and adequately

acquired by the Landcomponent. Moreover, the Belgians were from the start equipped with modern light armoured vehicles, boasting protection as well as firepower for the mentor teams.

Finally, a remarkable difference in force structure between the three states is that the British opted to mentor an echelon up, meaning that a British Lieutenant-Colonel, commanding a battalion, would mentor the Brigade commander of the ANA. The Dutch generally mentored 'one rank up': a lieutenant would mentor a captain etc. The Belgian OMLT -referring to their decades-long experience with African armed forces- would match the Afghan soldier's rank and function where possible. In the Belgian opinion, this would avoid any rank or seniority-related issues and would be beneficial in establishing mutual respect.

6.2.3 Education and training

When opportune, all military units strive to arrive in their area of operations as well-trained and prepared as possible. As combat units focus most of their time practising to close in and destroy the enemy forces efficiently and effectively, the concept of combat mentoring taps into different aspects of soldiering. As described in this study, the OMLTs looked to gain knowledge on culture, language, didactics, rapport-building skills, etc., whilst at the same time keeping up their ability to fight, lead and liaise with other units. This section compared the three states' approaches to preparing their OMLTs before deployment, and how these pre-deployment training (PDT) packages changed over time as a result of lessons learned looping back into the organisation from the area of operations.

From the start, the British OMLTs had to contend with the lack of knowledge of both the task and purpose of the OMLT and as such initially had to work off assumptions and limited knowledge gained from pre-deployment reconnaissance. As time progressed, more informal dissemination took place as personnel from two rotations earlier were involved in the PDT of later iterations. Still, the PDT provided by the Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) lagged in providing bespoke OMLT training. Though the OMLT battalions increasingly were made aware of their responsibilities in Helmand, Operation ENTIRETY, the comprehensive institutional change programme to place the Army on a war footing, was needed to revamp the PDT, as the PDT initially would demand the OMLTs to perform combat FTXs whilst already in its skeleton cadre-only OMLT formation, to a custom-made round-robin focused on mentoring. Language awareness also increased, as later OMLT rotations benefitted from both short-term and long-term service members trained in the main languages spoken in Afghanistan. Although the numbers of language-trained British soldiers and their proficiency varied, the British understanding of language being of importance to the mentoring effort stood out as a formalised adaptation. In addition, the construction of an Afghan village as well as the increasingly professional 'ANA' role-play is indicative of the formal adaptation processes in preparation for the deployment. Outside

of the training overseen by OPTAG, the OMLT battlegroup could fall back on its battalion staff cadre to prepare individual training courses, small unit tactics and marksmanship, or other aspects of mentoring considered key by battalion leadership. Lastly, a uniquely British aspect of pre-deployment training constituted inviting senior Afghan officers to Britain. Having ANA officers stay over in Britain, showing them their dedication to the mentoring task and introducing them to the officers and men whom they would soon work together with in Afghanistan was considered a best practice in order to build rapport before actually deploying and remaining part of the OMLT preparation from the rotation of 1 R IRISH onwards.

The Dutch PDT revolved around two constants during the 2006-2010 period. First, all Dutch OMLT attended the highly standardised NATO-led OMLT course in Hohenfels, Germany, alongside many other international teams. This American-led course was comprised of both theory and practice and strived to fly in actual ANA soldiers for a realistic immersion into Afghan mentoring particularities. Moreover, the American instructors were regularly updated on OMLT best practices by NATO staff in Kabul, making sure the instructions were as up-to-date as possible. One Brigade OMLT also attended a similar course in Bydgoszcz, Poland. Secondly, as the OMLTs were constructed around a commanding officer and some key staff, each OMLT relied on its own aptitude in organising the PDT. As a result, the OMLTs were consistent in their attempts to boost individual soldier skills -marksmanship, care under fire, patrolling-, but varied strongly in other aspects. For instance, the availability of vehicles for training depended on informal relationships between NCOs and officers, as did the availability of ammunition, medical instructors and training facilities. Language training was non-existent, and the Dutch TFU FTX 'Uruzgan Integration' never evolved to accommodate the OMLT significantly.

The Belgian OMLTs differed from the Dutch and British as their mentoring effort constituted the main effort of its army at the time. Again, the training programmes in Hohenfels and Bydgoszsz represented one pillar of the PDT, and the battalion was also responsible for the details of the preparation. However, unlike the Dutch OMLTs, the Belgians -and British- could make use of the full capacity of a battalion staff in order to create a fruitful training environment. Also, the more formalised Belgian training system called for the Assistant Chief of Staff Operations and Training (ACOS Ops & Trg) to certify the training before deployment as an arrangement for quality control. The feedback from Afghanistan and the participants in the training were afterwards incorporated into the next PDT as the OMLT progressed. One example of the latter is the incorporation of training in the English language, as the interaction with the ANA would pass through a local interpreter in the English language. For Belgian officers, this meant a third language that had to be mastered, which in some cases needed some remedial action. Generally, the Belgian OMLT members looked back favourably on their preparation efforts.

	United Kingdom	The Netherlands	Belgium
PDT	General → More bespoke	General	Bespoke
Pre-deployment rapport building	None → Visits by ANA senior staff to Britain	None	None
Language training	None → Limited Afghan languages	None	English
Staff capacity to enable PDT	Present	Not present	Present

6.2.4 Dissemination

The British OMLT rotations disseminated the lessons learned informally through a network of peers as each rotation went through a period of handover-takeover, or as is known in the British Army, the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI) package. Although the HOTO period is a formalised affair, the period itself is subject to the ability (and willingness) of the incumbent unit to present the lessons learned and best practices to its successors and the ability (or willingness) of the successor to incorporate the lessons learned of the incumbent into its own scheme of operations. In addition, as the OMLT was increasingly scattered over a number of patrol bases and outposts, the layered withdrawal and replacement of small OMLT teams resulted in less time to HOTO at the lowest echelons. The higher echelon, i.e. the battalion OMLT staff, had the most opportunity to transfer its tasks efficiently -no further travel was needed after arrival at Camp Bastion, giving the HOTO process a running start- resulting in numerous positive accounts on the RSOI package provided by the incumbents by the COs of successor units. However, the lowest echelons frequently had the least amount of time, regularly leading to a minimum of time -or no time at all- to share the ground truths with successor OMLT teams. Outside of Afghanistan, the British Army used personnel recently returned from Afghanistan to informally inform the preparing OMLT, and to assist in the OPTAG-led exercises. Moreover, the British Army's professional journals and regimental gazettes published regularly on military mentoring, further disseminating lessons learned through the published articles. After deployments, British commanding officers are obliged to make an after-action report, however, as the archives are closed for the foreseeable future, this research was unable to review their contents or dissemination.

Initially, the Dutch OMLT relied almost completely on the informal dissemination of lessons learned, as frequently personnel attached to a prior OMLT was contacted to inform later rotations. Later OMLT rotations were asked to take part in the 'Uruzgan Integration' exercises, and although this facilitated the contact between the experienced mentors and the mentors-to-be, little could be done to assist specific OMLT training as it simply was

not part of the Uruzgan Integration exercise. Formal dissemination existed in name only. OMLT commanders were sometimes requested to write an end-of-mission report, however, this was not always the case, nor were its findings used to adapt the PDT or execution of the mission. As a consequence, most end-of-mission reports have a striking resemblance to each other, as little was done to alleviate any issues encountered by the OMLT. As it were, the OMLT commander remained the driving factor of the OMLT PDT and execution, leaving a sense of having to reinvent the wheel each rotation. The Dutch OMLTs were somewhat more dispersed than the Belgians, but not as much as their British peers. Still, the number of outposts manned by the OMLT/ANA made the HOTO a rather complicated affair with many convoy operations needed to relieve the incumbents. This frequently led to a minimum of time available to hand over the post, with most time available for the transfer of authority and knowledge to the Brigade staff.

The dissemination of lessons learned in the Belgian armed forces has a distinct formal and informal branch. Referring to the former, Belgian commanding officers are obliged to report twice during their deployments. The first report aims to confirm that the pre-deployment training is corroborated with the observations in the mission environment whilst simultaneously allowing for remedial action with regard to the next rotation if necessary. The End of Mission report is drafted to review the entire deployment on a number of standardised topics. Although twofold reporting has a tendency to become redundant on some topics, the +1 report allows the next rotation to be formally briefed by the incumbents with time to adapt their PDT if necessary. Moreover, the biannual conference on operations which the Belgian Chief of Defence attends together with the lessons learned section of the Belgian Armed Forces staff, allows for a direct opportunity to discuss pressing issues with the highest military authority, bypassing the entire hierarchy. This structure is a redundancy which permits information to reach the ChOD which might have been otherwise opted-out from being presented to the General by staff officers.

Besides the formal reporting, the size of the Landcomponent ensures that most senior officers are acquainted through years of training, advanced staff courses and deployments. This leads to a sense of certainty amongst senior Belgian infantry officers that they know each other, and this familiarity ensures very short lines cometh information sharing and transfer of operational knowledge. The informal circuit of peers and the formal reporting make up for the lack of information sharing through the almost non-existent Belgian military discourse in military journals or regimental gazettes.

However, this informal dissemination is somewhat obstructed at the lower ranks, as the linguistic divide in Belgium causes a rift when it comes to sharing information between NCOs and private soldiers. Indeed, many NCOs and privates do not have sufficient command of either Dutch, French or English to communicate with each other on a professional level. As

officers are required -and tested- on a progressive language proficiency as they move through the ranks, information is lost as specialists in the lower ranks are unable to communicate with their peers without information being lost in translation. This typical problem in multilingual states such as Belgium is aggravated in the case of the incumbent and successor having a different linguistic background, and non-existent if this is not the case. Moreover, it was mainly an issue during the HOTO period between Belgian OMLTs. Unlike the British, the Belgians were located in a single location, facilitating the HOTO period between the two rotations, as the OMLT/ANA combination was not dotted around the province on patrol bases or combat outposts.

6.3 Learning from conflict: what lessons have been institutionalised?

Three strands of learning in conflict have been distinguished in chapter two: informal, formal and institutional learning. Informal adaptation occurs during deployment at the level of units to overcome operational challenges that do not require organisational resources or attention. Formal learning is when adaptations are integrated into the wider organisation for the duration of the conflict, and institutional learning implies that the retention of lessons is beyond the scope of a single conflict.

The manifestations of change described thus far have been a response to operational challenges that include the regular parties involved in the conflict: how should we adapt to overcome the challenges put on our organisation by enemy forces? However, a major operational challenge to the OMLTs has not been the enemy, but rather the partners involved. The three empirical chapters are indeed rife with anecdotal evidence indicating that much of the adaptation has been a result of the capacity and capability of the Afghan National Army. Examples include the acquisition of additional equipment to improve sustainability and self-reliance, the perceived necessity to select the most experienced troops for the OMLT, additional pre-deployment training and regular attempts to integrate the ANA into the broader counterinsurgency effort.

The ability to interact with the ANA via interpreters in a hostile operational environment was often referred to by respondents when citing the necessity to employ service members with a highly developed and specific skill set. These competencies included coping with the fundamental agency of the Afghan soldiers. As expressed in this dissertation, the issues with agency are often detrimental to a sound, effective and efficient relationship between the mentors and mentees. The empirical data illustrate multiple cases of agency-related issues such as shirking, information asymmetry and moral hazard. ANA soldiers were often better informed on insurgency-related activities than their mentors -Afghan soldiers were observed to have direct links with local Taliban forces via cellphone or other media-, and were prone to react unfavourably when in a combat situation. In practice, this caused the OMLTs to have

to operate with a partner that was generally considered unreliable, which added to a sense of mutual distrust. Conversely, the Task Forces were often also unwilling to share intelligence and were regularly expecting the Afghan forces to perform the more hazardous tasks during operations such as walking or driving point, putting the OMLT in a rather unenviable position as in-betweens as the moral hazard between the parties increased. The lessons learned of how to interact with the leading Task Force, the ANA - including the 'transfer' of relations during a HOTO- and the interpreters were thus a common occurrence and an exponent of informal learning processes.

The formalisation of lessons learning in the wider organisation might be observed mostly in the British case. For instance, during the four-year period under study, the British Army has evolved its pre-deployment training from 'non-existent' to 'best training I have ever had in my 30 years of soldiering'. This might be attributed to OPTAG, who, riding the wave of Operation ENTIRERY, was able to improve the PDT of the British OMLT by recruiting the Afghan diaspora for realistic roleplay, introducing language courses and investing in the pre-deployment rapport-building efforts by inviting senior Afghan military staff to Britain. Other aspects of formal learning, such as the construction of Afghan-style quala's in Britain to allow realistic training, was a formalisation, albeit not OMLT-specific, but rather applicable to the entire TFH. The Netherlands and the Belgian Army were less inclined to formalise lessons learned. According to several senior interviewees, the lack of formal learning processes in the Dutch armed forces was a consequence of a general lack of interest in the OMLT. Although these remarks are quite cynical, they might be attributed to the lack of redundancy experienced by the Dutch armed forces, especially during the latter two years of its Uruzgan commitment. Contrarywise, the Belgians did not experience any operational necessity to introduce formal adaptation processes as the reporting from Kunduz with regard to equipment and staffing was generally favourable.

The subsequent institutionalisation of lessons learned might be found in organisational adaptations to the force structure, in order to better address future challenges. However, of the three case studies, the British Army is the only institution to follow up on its OMLT experience in that it altered its force structure to accommodate for future SFA operations. In its Army 2020 review, which augmented the earlier 'Strategic Defence and Security' reviews of the British armed forces in 2010 and 2015, it became known that further proposed reductions in manpower for the British army would be implemented, reducing the British army to a 82.000 troops. This reorganisation resulted in the bulk of British regular combat power being concentrated into its 3rd Division, which is styled as the 'Reaction Force'. This division aims to integrate the 'STRIKE concept' which uses heavy-wheeled vehicles to quickly march up to 2000km to its area of operations as well as mechanised brigades equipped with MBTs. As a result, the UK 3rd division is currently the only deployable British division capable of conducting operations in major land warfare. A second division, 1st UK Division, was

renamed from 1st Armoured division and tasked to fulfil a lighter role, which resounds in its new 'Adaptable Force' moniker. Although this concept has been in development for several years, the 1st UK division lacks the firepower to be effective in major combat for years to come.[1] Lastly, the U.K. stood up the new 6th division, by rebranding Force Troops Command, a British combat support and combat service support command on the 1st of August 2019. The U.K. 6th division is not a new unit per se, it has been stood since 2008, after having served as the two-star headquarters tasked with preparing UK brigades for deployment to Afghanistan. However, after being significantly reinforced and transformed into Combined Joint Task Force 6 and deploying to Afghanistan as Regional Command South in November 2009, the division headquarters closed in April 2011. 6th UK Division epitomises the UKs efforts to reappraise its attitude towards future warfare, as the formations subordinate to 6th Div are not involved in combat, but focus on information warfare, electronic warfare, ISTAR capacity and building capacity of foreign forces through the Specialised Infantry Group.[2] After Afghanistan, it has been established that training, mentoring and advising is a distinct military activity, and the British armed forces have acknowledged that soldiers performing such missions need to be specialised. As such, it has been decided that Capacity Building tasks can and often must be conducted by any appropriately skilled and prepared force element.[3] Consequently, and in order to improve results, four battalions of UK regular infantry have been reassigned to the Specialised Infantry Group, with a fifth additional battalion in 2020.[4] Since then, the Specialised Infantry Group has been renamed the 'Army Special Operations Brigade' (ASOB) after the Army 2020 Refine restructure, and the SFA role has been passed on to 11 Infantry Brigade, which was subsequently renamed 11 Security Force Assistance Brigade, part of 1 Division in 2021. Importantly, the new Brigade consists of selected and specially trained personnel, whose missions could include combat mentoring. Although the official statement with regard to standing up the Specialised Infantry Group/SFAB refers to the perceived strategic necessity for persistent partnering and capacity building, it is generally acknowledged that remodelling the five regular infantry battalions also allowed the British Army to cut its numbers without having to resign any caps or badges. As the SIG/

■

1   J. Watling, "Strike: From Concept to Force," *RUSI Journal* (2019).

2   See: British Ministry of Defence, Army restructures to confront evolving threats, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/army-restructures-to-confront-evolving-threats, British Army Launches New 6th Division http://www.warfare.today/2019/08/01/british-army-launches-new-6th-division/

3   British Ministry of Defence, Land Operations, Army Doctrine Publication, Land Warfare Development Centre AC 71940, Warminster, 14.

4   There are currently two battalions assigned to the Specialised Infantry Group (1st Bn The Royal Scots Borderers, 4th Bn The Rifles) In 2019 two more battalions will be added (2nd Bn Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and the 2nd Bn Duke of Lancaster's Regiment. Source: Emily Knowles and Abigail Watson, Remote Warfare, Lessons Learned from Contemporary theatres, (Remote Warfare Group, London 2018), 11. Furthermore, an additional Gurkha battalion might be established, also in the Specialised Infantry role: Source: https://www.janes.com/article/81826/uk-to-recruit-more-gurkha-soldiers.

SFAB battalions only numbered around half of a regular battalion, the conversion is marked as a retrenchment under the guise of strategic reorientation.[5] With the British capacity building organisationally embedded in 1 Division, a large portion of SFA-type operations is conducted through this formation. Still, other units are regularly involved in British SFA. The British SOF conducts SFA through Military Assistance missions, and short-term training teams (STTTs) are formed and deployed throughout the entire British armed forces.

Doctrine is another indicator of military innovation and institutionalisation through the dissemination of knowledge in these formal documents. Again, the British have been the only state that has followed up on its lessons learned by integrating SFA into its military doctrine. Its Army Field Manual Tactics for Stability Operations: 'Military Support to Capacity Building' details its approach to capacity building, which in fact includes SFA as a concept, albeit with a slightly different definition than used by NATO. Furthermore, the SFAB formation adds to the dissemination of knowledge through publications and evaluation, as well as conducting field training exercises with its subordinate units.

The two other cases studied in this dissertation were far less thorough in institutionalising lessons learned. Both Belgium and the Netherlands were quick to refocus back training and organising for regular operations. After redeployment, the Dutch Armed forces quickly disbanded the OMLT units returned to the pre-Afghanistan force structure. As the main focus of the Dutch Army returned to regular operations, the Netherlands remained involved in numerous SFA-type missions. The Dutch forces were deployed in Africa for several ACOTA/GPOI deployments, as well as in the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. Also, a Dutch contingent has been deployed in Iraq for the Capacity Building Mission in Iraq (CBMI) mission. The prevalence and popularity of these kinds of SFA missions are still rising, since they allow the Dutch government, like other small countries with major foreign interests, to influence foreign events and to show international commitment at a limited cost in personnel and resources. Despite this, any strategic value of SFA is not reflected in the current doctrine nor in the current organisation, and doctrine is mostly absent. Thus, most SFA-related activities are still incorrectly labelled 'Military Assistance', which is still the only SFA-related term in Dutch doctrine. Lastly, in most cases, the Dutch Directorate of Operations is steadfast in appointing SFA operators on a case-by-case basis, trawling the organisation for available personnel, mostly disregarding any form of selection.[6]

The Dutch institutional inertia is mirrored by the Belgian Landcomponent, as SFA-type operations of this size were considered an anomaly. After the last Belgian service members

---

◼

5   Interview UK Army Brigadier Angus Young, commanding officer SIG.

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

returned from Kunduz, the Landcomponent's units were eager to reform to their original force structure and refocus on regular combat. The SFA provided by Belgium since their stint as an OMLT have centered around Central Africa, with especially Niger as the recipient of enduring SFA provision.[7] The Belgian Army doctrine has also not incorporated any insights into SFA, and amongst the regular units little discourse is present on the topic. The Special Forces community, however, does have a -mostly grassroots- discourse on MA/SFA, as it attempts to incorporate a 'way of thinking' with regard to small-state SFA provision.[8]

So what explains the institutional lethargy of both the Dutch and Belgian armed forces concerning lessons learned on combat mentoring? SFA -which includes combat mentoring- is still a highly relevant aspect of contemporary military operations. In the first place, Rosen's and Posen's observation that bureaucracies are not designed to change must be taken into account. For it to change, it would require external intervention by civilian leadership (Posen), or senior officers within a service who develop a new theory of victory, in effect an explanation of what the next war will look like and how it must be fought (Posen). However, neither civilian leadership nor senior officers have shown to be inclined to push forward SFA as a priority for the state's armed forces. This might be attributed to the performance of the service members of both states. Although the Dutch were considered to be understaffed both qualitatively and quantitively, it did not affect operations to the extent that it required intervention by senior civilian or military staff. Similarly, the Belgians were able to staff their OMLTs with the most experienced staff of its regular battalions, which in combination with a relatively quiet area of operations caused little incentive to embark on far-fetching changes in force structure or doctrine. Secondly, both the Dutch as well as the Belgian OMLT had very few casualties during their OMLT tenure and no casualties that could be attributed to a lack of training, professionalism or faulty equipment. Indeed, for the British Task Force, the first fatal casualty -which was an OMLT officer- was a strong impetus for organisational change in 2006. Lastly, the envisioned way of fighting during the next war closely resembled regular operations as had been the case prior to the War in Afghanistan. In this sense, the combat mentoring experience would be considered an anomaly, and with the return to regular operations -which is corroborated by the current war in Ukraine- little incentive is present for further innovation.

---

7   Nina Wilén, "Analysing (In)Formal Relations and Networks in Security Force Assistance: The Case of Niger," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15, no. 5 (2021); Wilén, *Belgian Special Forces in the Sahel: A Minimal Footprint with Maximal Output*; Nina Wilén and Pierre Dehaene, "Challenges with Security Force assistance in Niger: Understanding Local Context and Aligning Interests," (2020).

8   P. Dehaene, "The Localization Strategy: Strategic Sense for Special Operations Forces in Niger," *Combatting Terrorism Exchange (CTX)* 9, no. 1 (2019).

The British, however, were more inclined to institutionalise their lessons learned. The British aimed to gain or maintain influence with a number of strategic partners, mostly (former) members of the British commonwealth post-Afghanistan, for which it required a capacity of SFA-adept forces. Also, this strategic concept, dubbed 'persistent partnering', coincided with further redundancies within the British Army. By forming the Specialised Infantry Group and later 11 SFAB, the British Army was able to reduce its numbers without having to retire the battalions themselves. Furthermore, the sizeable British Army has the capacity to assign 'advising' to a part of the Army without conceding too much in terms of general combat power. Indeed, assigning another specialisation to a small army might be considered detrimental to its overall performance. The Dutch and Belgian infantry capacity are already to an extent specialised (special forces, light, medium and heavy infantry) and any additional specialisation would invariably lead to force generation issues due to lack of redundancy for smaller organisations. Moreover, generating a specialisation would require prior expertise on a subject. As expertise has in itself a limited shelf life and currency on military topics is generally considered to be paramount in order to provide mentorship, any specialisation effort on SFA would require a comprehensive human resource exertion in order to be effective.

6.4 Conclusion

Each of the three case studies has contributed to the ISAF campaign by mentoring the Afghan National Army during a four-year period. During this period, the empirical data show a number of similarities and differences in the way of force generation, execution, evaluation and institutionalisation of the lessons learned. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium have each stood up a military organisation that prior to that moment did not exist, which was tasked with a form of security force assistance that in the past was regularly assigned to special forces. The OMLTs of each state developed under the influence of the operational challenges, the capacity of its armed forces and the state's strategic culture until it either evolved into a different form such as in the British and Belgian cases, or was withdrawn from the conflict, as has been the case for the Dutch OMLT. As this dissertation indicates, the British Armed Forces have been the only case where its experiences have been institutionalised, indicating a lack of strategic necessity to adapt by the other states.

Harkening back to the paradox described in the introduction of this research, the political and strategic requests for more military capacity to ameliorate foreign security forces have indeed been at odds with the results on the ground. After all, despite all the efforts of the OMLTs and other ISAF-aligned forces, the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan has been far from successful. Still, the construction of the operational mentoring and liaison teams in Afghanistan has shown the potential of combat mentoring by regular forces. To conclude, this dissertation has identified a number of opportunities to improve, including

lessons learned on staffing, equipment, force structure and training. However, as the OMLTs were able to function as a reference force to its mentees, as well as being able to adequately perform their combat and liaison functions, the main observation of this research is that although the ad-hoc construction of these mentoring teams leaves plenty of room for improvement, it might have been good enough.

6.5 Avenues for further research

This research was able to reconstruct the alpha and omega of the OMLTs of three different states during the War in Afghanistan. In itself, this research has added to the understanding of the historical narrative of an under-researched topic of the War in Afghanistan. Moreover, it added to the discourse of SFA by adding a comparative case study from other angles than the American or British lens, which has comprised the majority of SFA-related research. This is highly relevant, as the political germaneness of SFA in the broadest sense has remained very high at the time of writing. The many current deployments in a host of states are a case in point. These current missions, however, focus on training the force, rather than accompanying those forces during combat operations. In fact, the manifestation of combat mentoring by regular troops has been a rather solitary event in contemporary warfare for regular forces. Indeed, the operational environment of the War in Afghanistan presented a perfect storm for this particular display of security force assistance. These included the overstretching of special forces capacity, a large-scale counterinsurgency campaign, and the specific absorptive capacity of the target audience. For combat mentoring in the same fashion as the OMLTs to reoccur, a number of stars would have to align including the prospect of yielding considerable returns on investment, as the recent experiences of standing up a non-Western army during wars by choice such as in Iraq and Afghanistan have been letdowns and new attempts seems unlikely. Also, when looking at contemporary conflicts, such as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war (2014-), geopolitical factors prohibit regular force involvement due to the risk of further escalating the conflict. Most likely, any involvement in this or similar conflicts would remain in the realm of SOF. Lastly, as this research indicates, the individual soldiers that perform combat mentoring need to possess such a diversity of skills to excel that it seems likely that the call to mentor during combat operations is initially sent to the special forces community, requiring a SOF capacity problem before any regular forces would be considered for deployment. However, although the OMLTs might be considered an anomaly and unlikely to reoccur in either regular or irregular warfare consistently, discarding any lessons learned would be premature. Military historians would most likely recognise the events described in this dissertation as they compare the experiences of John Paul Vann in the Vietnam War with the OMLTs in Afghanistan. This dissertation thus adds to the body of knowledge available as a reference for future combat mentoring operations by regular forces. This brings us to the relevance of the research for military doctrine.

Besides adding to the discourse of SFA, this thesis could also be utilised as a source document for military doctrine. Doctrine, as the formal outing of military thinking during a certain period of time, is indicative of the status of regular forces providing SFA-type operations. Moreover, doctrine is considered to be focused on best practices, lessons learned and how-to's on all levels of operation, as it includes tactics, techniques and procedures that, in most cases, would generate a suitable solution for military problems. The total absence of any doctrine on the topic of SFA in the Netherlands and Belgium is noticeable, considering the abundance of SFA-type deployments currently executed by the armed forces of both states and the abundance of knowledge present within these organisations as a result of these deployments. For upcoming operations, the discourse on combat mentoring and SFA, including this research, should therefore be used as a source for future operational design, avoiding the pitfalls experienced by the OMLTs in Afghanistan. The formalisation of best practices and TTPs into doctrine could benefit from the data presented in this research. Further research into SFA, including the other deployments referenced in this dissertation might be able to confirm and refine the findings of this research in a bespoke fashion for each state.

Reflecting on the research, it is clear that of the three, the Dutch OMLT was researched most thoroughly, which was possible to a fine-knit personal network and the invaluable assistance of a co-researcher on that specific case. The other two case studies offer more changes for additional research. The British case study would benefit from additional interviews as well as archival access to further elaborate on the actions of British OMLTs. As the Dutch case has shown, the abundance of data would allow for a volume on each case alone. The Belgian case would benefit from additional interviews, especially with Francophone servicemembers of the lower ranks, to broaden the narrative and reaffirm the claims made in this research.

Besides increasing the available data on the OMLTs themselves, the most notable omission in this research is the Afghan servicemembers and interpreters themselves. Future research which includes the experience and evaluations of the Afghans themselves would highly contribute to the perception of the OMLTs. This research was able to contact a small number of interpreters, but their contribution proved -for different reasons- inadmissible for the thesis. The regime change in Afghanistan prevented contact with former OMLT mentees. Future research into combat mentoring and SFA would greatly benefit from the participation of all parties involved, including the recipient side.

Lastly, further research into the effectiveness of combat mentoring and SFA would be recommended. Although within the scope of this dissertation, further scrutiny on the effectiveness of the OMLTs and the ANA themselves is necessary as they were either not monitored, politicised or discarded, resulting in a highly shifty representation of Afghan combat power. Although the appreciation of military capability is always qualitative, better

methods to reflect on this important military activity are needed to support future SFA-type operations.