Soft power, the hard way: adaptation by the Netherlands' task force Uruzgan

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7 Soft Power, the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War the Netherlands' Armed Forces have gone through a turbulent period of continuous reduction, reorganization, and professionalization. The ability to conduct expeditionary operations was a key theme in this transformation process. As a result, a recent internal Dutch Ministry of Defence (MOD) evaluation report concludes, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has demonstrated that the Netherlands Armed Forces, in cooperation with other departments, are capable of participating in high-intensity international operations, and if necessary do so as a lead nation. The high standard of performance in the Province of Uruzgan, in particular the so-called Dutch 3D Approach (Defense, Development, and Diplomacy), has been acknowledged, both nationally and internationally.[1]

It also notes, however, that the wealth of lessons need to be captured and institutionalized. It indicates that in the fields of training, force preparation, interdepartmental cooperation, and in particular timely adjustment of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) and doctrine, the four years of deployment suggest that work remains to be done. Other recent reports too note the need to improve the lessons learned cycle, highlighting that operational adaptation in Afghanistan failed to become institutionalized in the wider organization as a result of an ill-structured lessons learned process.[2]

That seems to echo a 1996 report by the National Audit Office, which revealed a similar structural weakness in the armed forces' ability to actually learn from operational experiences and adapt to the challenges of peacekeeping missions.[3] This resulted in the foundation of a department of evaluations at the

MOD that was given the twofold mission of informing Dutch politicians on operations as well as adapting the armed forces' procedures and processes to the requirements of future operations. The experiences of a decade of peacekeeping operations ultimately led to organizational adaptation of the Netherlands' Armed Forces; operational command was centralized under the Chief of the Defence Staff, and the troops were organized and received additional means in order to create a force capable of providing a sustainable contribution to international expeditionary missions.

The actual form these contributions took varied from small contingents of a few soldiers taking part in observation missions to enhanced battalions with robust means, as was the case in Bosnia, Ethiopia-Eritrea, and Iraq. Although the armed forces as a whole adapted to the organizational requirements of these new challenges, the centralized position of the department of evaluations caused a neglect of institutionalization of operational lessons, which were traditionally the domain of the specific operational services.[4] In 1996 for the first time a military doctrine emerged from these services (the army—the others followed later); the formal institutionalization of operational experiences, however, had never been a trait of the system. The Dutch mission in the Iraqi province of Al Muthanna (2003–5) revealed the consequences of this, as there were huge—sometimes contrasting—differences in the modus operandi of the different rotations.[5]

Thus, when the Dutch Armed Forces in 2006 were about to mount their most demanding venture since the Korean War, the deployment of a brigade-size task force to Afghanistan's Uruzgan Province, they constituted a small military (a total strength of fifty-one thousand) that had adapted to the organizational challenges of expeditionary missions. However, although a lot of experience on such operations was gained during the previous decade, operational lessons were noted but not further systematically documented, analyzed, incorporated in formal doctrines, and thus institutionalized. Adaptation in the Netherlands' Armed Forces —especially the army—was, apart from the larger organizational issues, a matter of individual units in specific operations.

This chapter explores how this small military went through a major experience, as the mission in Uruzgan was the largest Dutch military operation since the war of decolonization in the former Netherlands East Indies. Initially the mission in Uruzgan would last until 2008, but after fierce political debates it was prolonged to 2010. The debate over yet another—though much smaller—extension led to the fall of the Dutch cabinet in February 2010, and consequently it was decided that the mission would be terminated. Consequently, the specially

commissioned Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) took over the lead from American forces in August 2006 and transferred command to its—again—American successors in August 2010.

Being responsible for all operations on the task force level required efforts that were new to the Dutch soldiers. The TFU clearly needed a larger operational framework and an organization fit to its tasks. Moreover, while the Dutch mission in Uruzgan was politically framed as a security and reconstruction undertaking (which will be discussed below), the reality on the ground can be best described as a counterinsurgency campaign.[6] This also required the Dutch soldiers to adapt to the challenges of population-centric counterinsurgency warfare. Therefore the Dutch military encountered two adaptation challenges in Uruzgan. First, it needed to conduct a campaign of unprecedented size and scope, and, second, the troops had to perform counterinsurgency tasks in addition to launching Stabilization and Reconstruction activities.

Studying these two major adaptation challenges encountered by a military that lacks a formalized lessons learned process and in which adaptation traditionally is an issue of individual units is difficult. In order to tackle this problem we will not focus on the kaleidoscope of units that contributed to the mission, but we will study the construct under which all these units operated: the TFU. This excludes specifically the substantial contribution made by transport and attack helicopter and F-16 units, which have encountered significant tactical and logistical challenges, resulting in interesting bottom-up innovations (such as the employment of iPads by pilots for assisting them in Close Air Support [CAS] missions and successful employment of the F-16 reconnaissance system to detect the placement of roadside Improvised Explosive Devices [IEDs]). A longitudinal analysis of four years of TFU campaigning allows us to identify the process through which the Dutch military tried to close perceived performance gaps and improve its performance. The main focus in this chapter, therefore, is on the operational aspects of the mission. We will explore changes in TFU strategy, organization, intelligence, operations, and training. Moreover, in the conclusion of this chapter the overall impact of the major TFU experience will be assessed by taking a look at recent MOD policy developments concerning the learning and evaluation process of the Netherlands Armed Forces. Before submerging in this all we will start this chapter with a discussion of the political and operational environment that shaped the Dutch mission in Uruzgan. Let us first start with the most elementary question" Why did the Netherlands' government deploy a task force to Uruzgan?

STRATEGIC MOTIVES

From the great variety of outlets such as parliamentary letters, scientific publications, and the media, one can discern a wide set of strategic motives why the Dutch deployed troops to Uruzgan. It betrays the features of the Netherlands' strategic culture, which abhors the notion of war, fosters the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) and wants to be seen as a member of NATO's "A-team," is strongly Atlanticist, always justifies military missions in terms of humanitarian concerns, harps on international stability and the rule of law, invests in international institutions, and adopts a comprehensive 3D approach for the solution of security issues.[7]

One of the most prominent motives was to address the threats posed by terrorism. The terrorist attacks in New York, London, and Madrid seriously hit the world economy and thereby the Dutch, given its focus on services and logistics (for example, with the importance of Rotterdam harbor). The deployment to Uruzgan was therefore partly legitimized as the Dutch share of the burden.

This closely relates to the argument of NATO solidarity. The Dutch government highly valued its relationships with the United States, and NATO and believed—and still believes—this to be the most important fundament below its security policy. Despite Dutch acknowledgment of the American right to self-defense after 9/11, few Dutch politicians supported the mission Enduring Freedom. The Afghanistan case was, however, crucial for the cohesion and future of NATO. Some even boldly stated that *failure was not an option*. Pressure from the NATO headquarters, but also from Washington, Ottawa, and London to participate was therefore intense. And contributing to ISAF seemed like an appropriate way out for the Dutch government. Rather than a harsh antiterrorism mission, ISAF offered the perspective of stabilization and reconstruction.[8]

Within this perspective the next strategic motive was embedded—namely, to kick start the democratization of Afghanistan through stabilization and reconstruction. Without having a close connection with Afghanistan in a historical, economic, diplomatic, or emotional sense, the moral argument of the responsibility to protect was launched. It was our responsibility to assist the Afghan population. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Verhagen, commented on this:

> Look at the history of Afghanistan: thirty years of war, the disastrous Taliban regime, horrendous violations of human rights and oppression of women. When you acknowledge the importance of human rights, then it is of great importance that the international community stays committed.[9]

The fact that it was a mission mandated by the United Nations (UN) and executed by NATO on the invitation of President Karzai also swayed the left side of the political spectrum. The mission met the requirement of an international legal mandate to contribute to the rule of law.[10] In the words of then Minister of Defence Henk Kamp, the various motives combined when he stated that

> the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan, particularly in the south where the Taliban's roots lie, [are] of great importance to improving the international law and combating international terrorism which also threatens Europe.[11]

When the operation evolved the consequence that participation had on the reputation and influence of the Netherlands were openly introduced as a motive. It is difficult to establish direct causal relations, but the significant contribution to ISAF seems to have resulted in many benefits. The Netherlands participated in the G20 of economically powerful countries. Moreover, in March 2009 the Dutch were granted the organization of the important Afghanistan conference in The Hague. Former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated that the large contribution of the Netherlands made it easy for him to let Prime Minister Balkenende speak fifth or sixth at this and other important Afghanistan conferences with almost fifty countries participating.[12] In 2007, while discussing the extension of two years in Uruzgan, De Hoop Scheffer was also the one who put high pressure on the Dutch government:

> Don't do this to me. If the Netherlands will not extend their deployment it will make me, in my position, feel very awkward.[13]

Similarly, concern for diminished international standing was voiced in October 2009 by then Minister of Defence Middelkoop.[14]

The Dutch defense forces themselves constituted a final strategic motive in favor of the deployment in 2006. As the missions in the former Yugoslavia were unwinding, and the contribution to operations in Iraq had ended, Afghanistan offered a new area of operations. At a time of ongoing cutbacks this meant a new raison d'etre for the defense forces. Moreover, it offered an opportunity to operate in a relatively high intensity conflict area, a wish on the part of some top officials. With such a wide set of strategic motives, the TFU was sent to Uruzgan, a very complex province in Afghanistan's south, as we will see in the next section.

THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: URUZGAN'S FRAGMENTED SOCIETY

Uruzgan's populace consists of an estimated 395,000 mainly rural inhabitants.[15] The vast majority of this population is ethnic Pashtun (91 percent), with Hazara (8 percent) and other ethnicities (1 percent) making up the minorities.[16] As the Dutch task force was deployed in the almost exclusively Pashtun-inhabited southern part of the province, we will focus on the Pashtun population. The Uruzgan Pashtun can be divided along three tribal confederations, the Zirak Durrani (57.5 percent), Panjpai Durrani (18.5 percent), and Ghilzai (9 percent), as well as some other tribes (6 percent).[17] Originally Uruzgan was dominated by the Ghilzai, but as Afghanistan historically was ruled by Durrani Pashtun, Durrani tribes were moved to Uruzgan at the end of the nineteenth century in order to end Ghilzai dominance.[18] This resulted in the Ghilzai being marginalized throughout the province, and today the district surrounding the provincial capital of Tirin Kot is the only area where Pashtun of both Ghilzai and Durrani descent are living. The Ghilzai-Durrani divide still forms a relevant source of tribal grievance in Tirin Kot District, as the former consider themselves victims of years of Durrani oppression.

Another societal cleavage resulting from this policy of Ghilzai marginalization is that between Zirak and Panjpai Durrani. The latter confederation is a construct created by the Zirak Durrani in order to assimilate Ghilzai tribes, and therefore Panjpai are often considered second-class Durrani. Especially in Uruzgan's western district of Deh Rawud this divide is "hot," as the Panjpai constitute the majority of the population, while governmental rule has traditionally rested with the Zirak. It therefore comes without surprise that the Taliban insurgency has found fertile soil in the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani areas surrounding Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud. It should also be noted that Mullah Omar, the overall Taliban leader, is a Ghilzai tribesman from Uruzgan.

To make things more complicated, the divides between different tribal confederations are important, but not as important as the affiliation with subtribes, which form the main solidarity groups and thereby define "patterns of loyalty, conflict and obligations of patronage."[19] When the communist government sought to establish control over Uruzgan by eliminating traditional tribal confederation leaders, local *mujahedeen* commanders rebelled against the communist governance and their Soviet allies. Since the demise of the communist regime, these commanders, who are organized along subtribal lines, have become the most influential power-holders in the province. As the different subtribe

commanders each control specific areas and maintain their own supportive networks, Uruzgan's society has suffered from an increasing degree of fragmentation. In addition to traditional tribal grievances following the confederation divide, the process of fragmentation has led to conflicts within boundaries of confederations and subtribes. The result is a chaotic situation in which subtribe commanders fight against or alongside each other depending on what serves their interest best.

Former Uruzgan governor and Karzai trustee Jan Mohammed Khan might be considered the champion of these subtribe commanders.[20] Jan Mohammed became a prominent Popalzai (President Karzai's subtribe and part of the Zirak Durrani) militia commander during the communist era. After the fall of the communist regime he claimed his position as a Popalzai leader and succeeded in neutralizing the numerically superior subtribes of the Zirak Durrani by playing divide and rule, as well as in that he succeeded in subjecting the subtribes of the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani to suppressive measures.[21] He thereby effectively secured political leadership for the Popalzai, who account for only 10.5 percent of Uruzgan's population.[22] Jan Mohammed functioned as provincial governor until 1999, when he was imprisoned by the Taliban regime; he then resumed this position in 2003 with the use of the same methods that had brought him governmental power. Now, however, his position was stronger than ever before, as he enjoyed the support of President Karzai's Popalzai-dominated government, and US Special Forces fought alongside his militia against what Jan Mohammed labeled the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani "Taliban."[23] Thus when the Dutch were to deploy to Uruzgan they were confronted with a Popalzai provincial governor who had caused antigovernment resentment among a substantial part of the local population by exploiting traditional tribal grievances as well as subtribal conflicts in order to secure his rule. This complex environment of societal fragmentation and accompanying violent contention would be the TFU's arena for the next four years.

STRATEGY: POLITICS AND THE "DUTCH APPROACH"

The strategy of the TFU was only partly a reflection of this complex environment. One element shaping the ideas for the approach to be implemented was a keen political interest in differing from the US approach, which was considered too much focused on kinetic actions, too aggressive, too enemy-centric, too much informed by counterinsurgency (COIN) thinking, and too much associated with counterterrorism. Also in order to sway public support, the Netherlands wanted to de-emphasize the combat element, avoid search-and-

destroy tactics and the use of air strikes, and put the focus on stabilization. As the Minister of Defence wrote to Parliament:

> Among large parts of the population there is no support for the behavior of coalition forces which is considered to be inappropriate. Their actions seem to impact the local situation negatively instead of positively. An operating style of ISAF, explicitly focused on winning the hearts and minds of the population is therefore necessary.[24]

In a similar vein the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Parliament that "the international military presence over the past years has been directed at combating the Opposing Military Forces instead of improving the living conditions of the population." Hence the Dutch Approach would stress the Stabilization and Reconstruction (S&R) side of the mission.

This was entirely in line with the centrality of stability and a broad perspective on security. Stability projection was a key idea in a Defence White Paper of 2000 that put military missions in a larger scope of efforts to promote stability, such as development aid and economic policy. As the 2000 White Paper noted:

> The prevention and control of crises demands a broad, integrated approach. . . . An integrated approach is necessary also for stabilization and reconstruction after cessation of fighting. Diplomatic, economic, humanitarian and, if needed, military instruments need to be deployed in an integrated fashion. . . . Defense and development aid go hand in hand.[25]

In 2004 this approach was reinforced in a document formulating the Netherlands' "broad and integrated security policy," which became known as the 3D-approach.[26] This document also built on the Dutch experiences in the Balkans, Iraq (where Dutch units participated in SFIR—Stabilization Force in Iraq), and northern Afghanistan (where a Provincial Reconstruction Team, or PRT, had been deployed in 2003), and its earliest roots can be traced to an interdepartmental foreign policy review of 1995 which concluded that security and stability create essential preconditions for political, economic, and social development. The military was there to set the proper conditions.[27]

The Uruzgan strategy was a direct descendant of a white paper drafted in 2005 by the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Economic Affairs.[28] This policy paper outlined Dutch policy in future missions in failing states and identified three dimensions for an effective approach: (1) safety and stability, (2) governance, and (3) socioeconomic development. The letter that

was sent by the Dutch cabinet to inform the Parliament on its intentions to deploy a mission to Uruzgan was based on this white paper.[29] It foresaw a deployment of two years to Uruzgan Province and stressed that positive developments in the area were expected, but that one could not realistically expect Uruzgan to be self-sufficient within such a short period of time.

It came to be labeled as the "Dutch Approach." As then Chief of Defence Staff General Dick Berlijn stated in 2006, "[It] is an operating style marked by knowledge of and respect for the local culture." It would not close its eyes to operational risks and would provide for sufficiently robust rules of engagement,[30] a hard lesson of the Srebrenica era. It acknowledged that the S&R mission might entail intense fighting for force protection, but it specifically was *not* to be confused with COIN, a term that was expressly avoided also in parliamentary debates, for it had too much of an offensive connotation that would undermine public support.[31] Reality within a few years would catch up with political wishful thinking.

THE TFU CAMPAIGN PLAN

In addition to these high-level policy guidelines, strategy in practice was informed by bottom-up planning. In preparation for the deployment the Dutch Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs commissioned The Liaison Office (TLO), an Afghan research-based nongovernmental organization (NGO), to carry out a civil assessment. Although the increased knowledge on the operational environment led to a replacement of Jan Mohammed as governor, the extensive analysis of the civil assessment and the policy framework did not lead to a clear strategy at the start of the operation. As a matter of fact the actual strategy was formulated in the field, during the first months of the deployment. Colonel Vleugels, commander of TFU 1, commented on this:

> We didn't have a campaign plan when we started, but later we got one from my higher headquarters that was close to ours, which is not surprising, as *they told us to do what we told them we would do.*[32]

The final strategy of TFU was laid down in the TFU Master Plan. In this document, the mission of the TFU was defined as:

> TFU assists the local government in building its capacity, authority and influence and prioritising and synchronising reconstruction and development programs with assisting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in order to set the conditions for a secure and stable Uruzgan Province.[33]

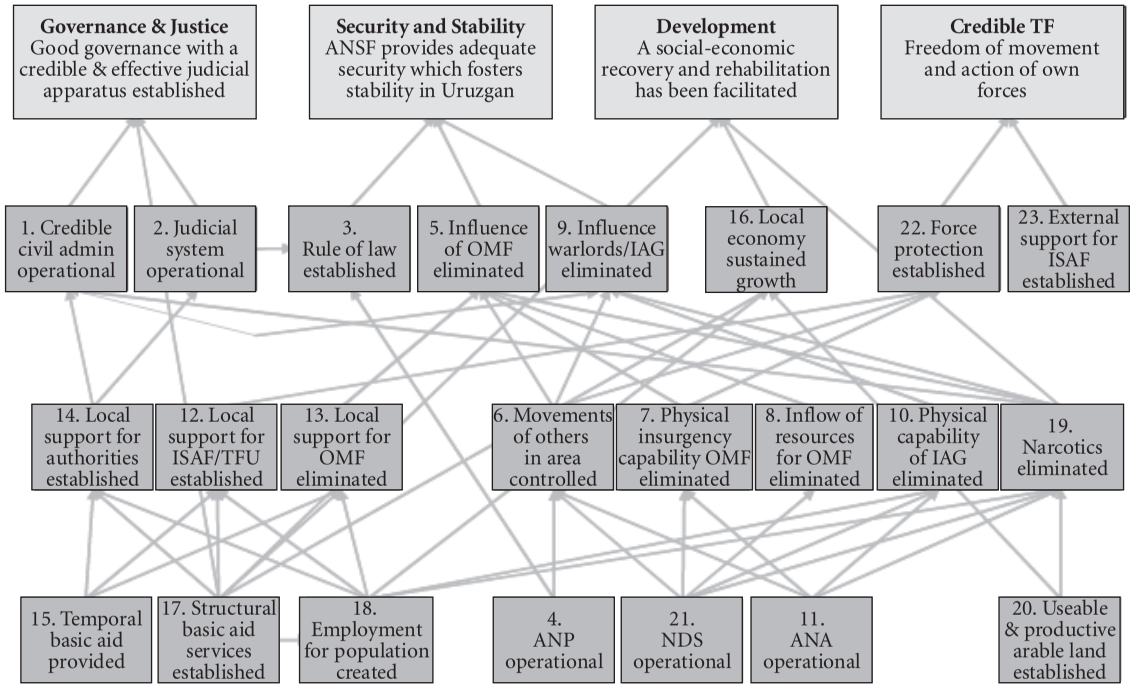

FIG. 1. The Effects of the Dutch Task Force Uruzgan[34]

The Master Plan functioned as a guideline for the planning and execution of the mission. Using an effects-based approach, the document focused on the overall effects that played a key role in the mission. The lines of operation (light grey blocks) and the desired effects (dark grey bocks) are illustrated in Figure 1.

The Afghan Development Zones (ADZs) concept played a crucial role in TFU's strategy. An ADZ is a geographical area in which improvements in security, governance, and development are delivered through an integrated approach by all relevant actors. Its aim is to rapidly meet the Afghan people's expectations in order to improve their confidence in the government of Afghanistan and the international community. The plan was to take a phased approach to the ADZ establishment. The first phase was to disrupt the opposing military forces (OMF) and to provide essential security. Having created a stronghold, subsequent operations would be conducted to secure and dominate the selected areas. These operations were aimed at convincing the local population of the legitimacy of the Afghan government and at promoting the development and reconstruction benefits.

The principle of the ADZ forced concentration of effort in an initial area, gradually expanding to other areas. For Uruzgan, the capital Tirin Kot and surroundings were identified as primary ADZ, and the town of Deh Rawud as a secondary ADZ. It was the objective to let the ANSF be the main responsible force for security within the ADZs. The TFU, together with the ANSF, would operate on the boundaries of the ADZ to establish security, while the Special Forces were to disrupt the OMF in the outer area.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE MILITARY REALITY: A COIN ORIENTED TFU PLAN

During the first two years, however, it soon became clear that the strategy and objectives as laid down in the Master Plan were too ambitious and not feasible with the available capacity. There was only limited geographical expansion, and most of the twenty-three defined effects were not met as planned. After heavy debate, in early 2008 the Dutch Parliament extended the deployment of the Dutch troops with an additional two years, until summer 2010. This led to the development of the second main strategy document, the so-called Focal Paper,[35] in which the strategy and objectives were updated and the time horizon extended until August 2010. In the Focal Paper the mission of TFU became as follows:

> TFU, as part of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), in co-operation with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and in co-ordination with coalition forces is to conduct counter insurgency (COIN) operations resulting to the expansion of the Afghan Development Zones (Focal Areas) of Tarin Kowt, Chora and Dah Rawod in order to neutralise insurgency influence.

This adapted mission statement indicated an awareness that the scope in geographical area as well as nature of activities had changed and had to be changed. It reflected the tough experiences of the first two years. Already on February 3, 2006, Minister Kamp admitted that Taliban and Al Qaeda elements had to be eliminated in Uruzgan. By 2007 several daily journals ran articles highlighting the intense fighting that often went on. It also echoed previous comments of TFU commanders such as Colonel Theo Vleugels, commander of TFU-1, who in 2006 dispelled the notion that this was to be purely an S&R mission when he stated that "we'll do what is necessary and what is feasible." TFU-2 Commander Colonel Van Griensven in 2007 similarly had tried to circumvent the obvious naivety within the political debate when he noted that the dichotomy of reconstruction versus combat mission has no grounding in accepted doctrine. Also in 2007 Major-General van Loon explained that there was no tension between reconstruction and fighting because fighting might be required in order to establish security so as to allow reconstruction. While all military commanders acknowledged that activities for S&R generically dovetailed with those for COIN missions, they emphasized from the beginning that the actual operational environment in Uruzgan dictated operating more in the military dimension of the mission.[36] In 2009 the commander of Battle Group 8 explicitly conceptualized the comprehensive approach as the way to conduct the COIN mission he was asked to lead.[37] For the military it was and had been from the start a COIN mission.

Subsequently, while the TFU Master Plan tried to extend the ADZs to the outer regions of Uruzgan such as Khas Uruzgan, the Focal Paper clearly bounded this to three ADZs—namely, Tirin Kot, Chora, and Deh Rawud. And while the Master Plan referred to assisting the local government, the Focal Paper specifically focused on the conduct of COIN. The Focal Paper further stated that:

> In order to give the different actors, such as TFU, GoU [Government of Uruzgan] and NGOs/IOs [International Organizations], clarity on the effects and milestones to accomplish, the Focal Paper translates the three Endstates [safe and secure environment; socioeconomic development, governance] into seven detailed Lines of Effects (LoE): (1) security apparatus, (2) secure areas, (3) in-

> frastructure, (4) basic living conditions, (5) health & education, (6) economic diversity and (7) governance support & capacity.[38]

All seven lines contain a series of desired effects, milestones, and objectives that must be achieved in order to reach the endstate. It is interesting to state that a total of ninety-one desired effects were formulated underlying the seven lines of operation.

When it became clear that the mandate most probably would not be extended for another period, the TFU began formulating a plan for transfer of its authorities. This plan, labeled the Uruzgan Campaign Plan (UCP), was delivered in mid-2009. The UCP

> is to provide a common ground for TFU and its Afghan and international partners within the province. In other words, the UCP is to facilitate, cooperation and to create unity of effort, which becomes even more important in a multinational context and with the increase of Afghan capacity and involvement in the mission . . . . The TFU campaign objective, within the context of the UCP, as part of ISAF, in partnership with ANSF and in coordination with GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the International Community, is to contribute to a reliable and effective government that can bring the government and the people closer together, and is able to provide a stable and secure environment and development progress in Uruzgan, in due course without ISAF support.[39]

The UCP also identified three major lines of operation, which were further subdivided into Reconstruction and Development (R&D) themes on which progress was desired. These R&D themes corresponded with the eight pillars of the Afghan National Development Strategy, with the exception that the pillar governance was split into governance and rule of law. The R&D themes were laid down in an *intellectual framework,* together with disablers hampering and enablers enhancing the progress on these R&D themes. Figure 2 illustrates this intellectual framework of the UCP.

Although the UCP clearly states that it provides a common ground, the document is by and large crafted by TFU personnel. After completion, the UCP became classified as NATO Secret, which made it very difficult if not impossible in cases to share it with other actors.

In sum, one observes a change in strategy driven by the adaptation of objectives and goals during the four year deployment of TFU. While the Master Plan

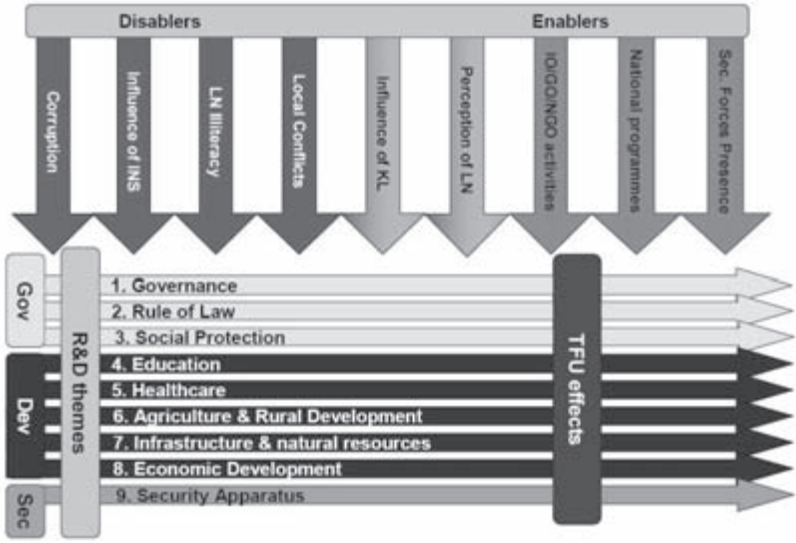

FIG. 2. Intellectual Framework of UCP[40]

was designed to foster security and development in the entire province within two years, the Focal Paper provided a much needed adaptation to the harsh reality of campaigning in Uruzgan. The Focal Paper not only acknowledged that the military was not merely providing security and development assistance, but actually involved in counterinsurgency, and also set some more realistic targets by focusing TFU efforts for the additional two years of the mission to the three main ADZs. Finally the UCP was formulated to arrange a smooth transfer of authority from the Dutch TFU to the local government and the ISAF successors. While the political climate initially dominated strategic thinking, and the need to develop the UCP, already early on bottom-up detailed operational planning informed actual military plans, and over the course of four years, the realities of the operational environment continued to shape military plans, necessitating a distinct deviation from initial guidelines and political expectations.

TFU'S COMPREHENSIVE ORGANIZATION

The strategy was expected to require a robust task force consisting of approximately one thousand troops.[41] In light of the security situation on the ground and the envisioned strategy, military planners urged seriously increasing this number. As a result permanent troops numbers were increased to four-

teen hundred. This was still considered insufficient by military planners, but it was as far as Parliament would go. Until the redeployment of the TFU in August 2010, its size varied from fourteen hundred to a maximum of two thousand during peak periods such as a rotation.

The largest subordinate command of the TFU was the Battle Group (BG), which consisted of nearly six hundred combat troops. The BG was tasked to deploy in the ADZs, support the local authorities to increase their influence, support and monitor the deployment of the ANSF, provide force protection to other units of the Task Force, and prepare the activities of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), the second significant element of the TFU.[42] Aside from the BG and the PRT, the TFU had several other units under its command. These included an air detachment, a psychological element (PSE), a detachment of military police, an explosive ordnance disposal team (EOD), engineers, operational mentoring and liaison teams (OMLTs), Special Forces, and logistical capacity. In addition to the Dutch capabilities, several other countries, including Australia, Slovakia, Poland, and Singapore, contributed to the TFU.

While the BG emphasized security, the goal of the PRT was to promote good governance, and facilitate reconstruction. From 2006 until March 2009, the PRT was led by a senior military officer and consisted of approximately sixty troops. Its main capacity was made up of four so-called mission teams, each being responsible for a specific area of operation (that is, for different ADZs). In addition to military personnel, civilians from the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation were embedded in the PRT. They were political advisers, development advisers, tribal advisers (later called cultural advisers), and counternarcotics experts.

Initially only two civilians were attached to the PRT. However, throughout the operation it was realized that their number was insufficient and gradually increased to thirteen. In March 2009, the command of the PRT was handed over to a civilian representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and from then onward the PRT had a civilian director rather than a military commander.[43] This was perceived as a significant step forward. It embodied the shift of focus of the TFU from security-driven operations to reconstruction and development. Having a civilian heading the PRT, who also acted as a co-commander of the TFU, greatly improved the status and influence of the civilians in the TFU. It was simply unique and unprecedented that a civilian commanded a military unit (that is, the PRT).

At the start of the operation in 2006, there were only six civilian international

NGOs in Uruzgan. Their number however gradually increased to thirty in 2009, and to almost fifty by 2010. The five most prominent organizations, HealthNet TPO, Cordaid, Save the Children, the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA), and ZOA,[44] united themselves in the Dutch Consortium for Uruzgan (DCU). Each of these organizations had a different focus, varying from education and rural development to health care and veterinary care.[45] DCU, just like most other international NGOs in Uruzgan, operated with very little international staff, and most of its activities were therefore implemented by local partners.

The involvement of UN agencies in Uruzgan was very limited. During the first years of the Dutch deployment there was hardly any UN representative working in Uruzgan. In time, that slowly changed after the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), for example, started operations in the province. After postponing the opening of a provincial office several times, UNAMA finally became active in Uruzgan from May 2009.[46]

In sum, after an initial increase in troop numbers we observe relatively few changes in the military capacity and size during four years of deployment. A development that stands out, however, is the change of the PRT leadership from a military to a civilian representative, who also acted as a TFU co-commander. This resembles the increased number and importance of actors on the civilian side, including both the NGOs and UN organizations as well as the civilian capacity that was embedded within the TFU.

INCORPORATING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE

From the beginning the TFU incorporated ethnographic intelligence, a requirement for population centric S&R as well as COIN operations and entirely in line with policy guidelines.[47] This typically encompasses information on demographics, social and political organization, culture, religion, language, and so forth, which can be obtained through thorough ethnographical study of the local population. As already mentioned, the embassy hired an Afghan NGO to conduct ethnographic field research in May and June 2006 in order to enhance the Dutch understanding of the province.[48] This work culminated in the civil assessment of Uruzgan Province, which included a detailed context analysis of the local environment.[49]

A clear understanding of the political dynamics of Uruzgan province led to a successful lobby for the replacement of governor Jan Mohammed before the start of TFU operations.[50] When the Dutch first deployed to Uruzgan in March 2006, a new governor was installed. The insights that made possible this

move were obtained mainly through the work of the Dutch embassy in Kabul. Early reports contained fine-grained information on the tribal divides, sources of conflict in the different districts, and individual power-holders. From this we might conclude that TFU was already properly informed about Uruzgan's societal landscape upon deployment in 2006. A report by the Dutch military intelligence service also points in this direction, as it concurs with the civil assessment and clarifies not only the divide between Ghilzai, Panjpai Durrani, and Zirak Durrani confederations but also contains information on subtribal conflicts and warnings concerning the still influential Popalzai network of former Governor Jan Mohammed.[51]

On the other hand, despite Colonel Vleugels (the first TFU commander) stressing the need for a population-centric approach, the intelligence section was still optimized for and focused on gaining and processing enemy-centric intelligence only.[52] Despite the fabled Dutch Approach, TFU daily business emphasized "kinetic" operations against the Taliban, a situation that would last until 2007.[53] The potential of the civil assessment and other reports on Uruzgan's societal context remained largely unexploited. The Dutch military needed time to adapt to the challenges of population-centric warfare. With the benefit of hindsight we can conclude that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which took the initiative for the civil assessment, could have accelerated this process by adding a sufficient number of civilian experts to the TFU staff and not limiting it to the two diplomats—a political and development adviser—who were initially dispatched to reinforce the soldiers in Uruzgan.[54]

Integration of an understanding of the local society into the military intelligence process and the design of operations improved at the end of 2006 when a civilian tribal adviser was appointed. Still, this adviser, with years of experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan, sometimes encountered stiff resistance when trying to change the military mindset.[55] The so-called Battle of Chora, the largest and most intensive combat action of the Netherlands Army since the Korean War, took place from June 15–19, 2007, and created awareness and an operational sense of urgency to adapt—that is, an "adaptive moment."

The battle involved a massive Taliban attack of an estimated strength of five to fifteen hundred fighters that, because of low-level initiative, was initially countered first by the small detachment of sixty Dutch soldiers in the town of Chora. Immediate reinforcement by additional TFU troops, including Australian soldiers, resulted in a battalion-size TFU fighting force that, along with dozens of air strikes, repelled the Taliban and inflicted approximately two to

three hundred casualties upon them.[56] Not only did this make an important symbolic stand, demonstrating that the Dutch troops would indeed protect the local population if necessary (and in the process redeeming the Netherlands Army from the Srebrenica trauma) but, importantly, the TFU force was augmented by local Barakzai and Achakzai subtribal militias. The willingness of these groups to take up arms against the Taliban and support the TFU was the direct result of fruitful cooperation between the PRT and the tribal adviser, demonstrating the benefit of a proper understanding of the local population.[57]

Meanwhile, civilian and military capacities were subjected to a process of further integration and, as already discussed, the civilian staff was gradually growing. In 2008 the tribal adviser was replaced by two cultural advisers, a university professor and a Dutch-Afghan national.[58] Interestingly, the TFU command was to be shared by a "duumvirate" of the senior civil representative and the military commander. Thus, integration of military planning with tribal and political analysis became the standard, which further enhanced the understanding of the operational environment.[59]

The consequences of these measures were illustrated by Michel Rentenaar, who served as TFU "senior civil representative" from August 2009 until January 2010, when he stated that the emphasis of TFU operations had indeed shifted to "non-kinetic" operations.[60] The Dutch task force gradually learned to appreciate and use the population-centric intelligence that had already been available in 2006. Moreover, in addition to the civilian experts, military intelligence officers also became more proficient in the use of ethnographical data and methods.[61] Population-centric intelligence thus became strongly incorporated in TFU's overall intelligence picture.

OPERATIONS

The tension between the imperatives (and political expectations) of the Dutch Approach and the immediate challenges of the tactical environment that made frequent kinetic engagements with Taliban elements unavoidable was only gradually diffused. Initially, as mentioned in the previous section on intelligence, the emphasis in TFU military operations out of habit and operational necessity was on kinetic operations against the Taliban. It maintained a COIN mindset. This situation gradually changed under the influence of the enhanced availability of population-centric intelligence. Eventually nonkinetic operations became the standard.

The work-up program for the TFU elements initially did not reflect the complex S&R-oriented mission, nor the complex operating environment of Uruzgan with a great variety of (civil) actors that would call upon many competencies and skills and much cultural knowledge. Adhering, to a large extent, to existing training programs, the work-up phase of the first deployments emphasized traditional military skills. With subsequent TFU rotation, vital insights were gradually incorporated. However, rather than an institutionalized improvement of the training programs, most adaptations were the result of informal bottom-up initiatives of the respective TFU, BG, and PRT and subordinate commanders who exchanged lessons learned in an informal manner by virtue of their personal acquaintance with each other.

Only from the fourth rotation onward was the training program for PRT personnel intensified and structured in a more formal way. Apart from military skills and drills, the redesigned training program paid more attention to conceptual issues, including a week with lectures on, for example, state building, governance, and development, and a two-week Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) basic course at the Netherlands-based CIMIC Centre of Excellence. In cooperation with Dutch government officials a one-week role play named *Dutch Devotion* was developed to conclude the PRT training. A provincial governor, several mayors, and commanders of the police and fire brigades took part in this exercise and played the roles of Uruzgani key leaders. This enabled PRT personnel to practice their respective roles as if they were operating in Uruzgan.

The Battle Group training programs also initially focused primarily on infantry skills and drills. The program's center of gravity was platoon-level training, as platoons were considered the cornerstone of the organization. Already during the training programs platoons were complemented with engineers, explosive ordnance demolition experts, interpreters, and PRT personnel to practice as if they were working in Uruzgan. Issues that were heavily emphasized in the programs included dealing with ambushes (both with and without IEDs), convoy escorts, the handling of new weaponry and equipment, and improving shooting skills.[62]

Having completed their domain-specific training, the units jointly went through the final training modules. During these modules the Section Cultural Affairs and Information of the Netherlands Army provided a two-day Cultural Awareness Training.[63] On the first day the soldiers visited a mosque where they were informed about Islam. The second day consisted of role plays and lectures

on Afghan norms and values. Just before actual deployment, all TFU units went through a joint exercise, labeled *Uruzgan Integration.* In this two-week exercise the units operated in an integrated fashion, practicing real-life challenges that were to be encountered in Uruzgan. These included counter-IED, house searching, information operations, joint planning, and riding convoys.

In line with the work-up program, and despite political rhetoric and the lexicon of stabilization and reconstruction, the first TFU to deploy was (correctly) assuming it would be conducting a counterinsurgency campaign in Uruzgan. Under influence of the Battle Group, counterinsurgency ideas (derived from, among other sources, a long list of classic COIN literature) were fed into the staff process, resulting in the adoption of the "oil-spot" concept and tactical experiments with the platoon house concept.[64]

An initial troop-to-task analysis, however, had already revealed that the TFU structurally lacked the means to maintain the sustained security presence that a counterinsurgency approach required in the ADZ's surrounding Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud (which were to be covered in the initial deployment). Moreover, TFU-1 was ordered to provide substantial support to operation Medusa, a large-scale military operation in Kandahar mounted by Regional Command South (RC-S). In addition, Taliban pressure on the densely populated Chora District forced the Dutch to include the Chora ADZ in their oil-spot prematurely. Consequently the TFU was overstretched from the onset, and this forced the subsequent commanders to disband the idea of permanent security presence. Instead, continuously patrolling and meticulously planned large-scale operations that concentrated the limited means and typically involved the RC-S reserve force would be the modus operandi for the TFU during its four-year deployment.

The execution of patrols remained relatively unchanged during the whole period of the mission in Uruzgan. Typically, an extended platoon (that is, infantry combined with PRT, PsyOps, and enablers such as EOD and forward air controllers) would embark on a multiday venture in which it would make use of either fixed patrol bases or temporarily watch-over locations for rest overnight. While the hard terrain severely restricted freedom of movement—and made patrols very susceptible to IEDs and ambushes, different commanders experimented with more flexible tactics such as mounting satellite patrols by foot from a mobile patrol base, night patrols, and so forth.[65] As these tactical experiments were initiatives of various individual commanders, they cannot be considered structural adaptations. What this does show, however, is that sub-

commanders were allowed reasonable freedom of action in accordance with the doctrinally propagated "mission-type order" or *auftragstaktik* principle.

In this phase of the mission hard tactical experience forced the TFU to seriously consider force protection. The popularized and often ill-understood focus on "hearts and minds" was supposed to indicate that the Dutch contingent would operate markedly differently from the warrior-style US tactics. In line with experience in the Balkans and Iraq, patrols would be conducted dismounted or in open patrol vehicles, and not in closed armored personnel carriers, which would prohibit making contact with the local population and either intimidate or convey fear and vulnerability. For similar reasons, and only seemingly a trivial detail, troops would wear transparent ski-goggles and not dark wraparound sunglasses, which were considered culturally insensitive and introducing a barrier between the soldier and Afghan civilians.

The threat of IEDs, however, and the frequent incidents with "TICs" (troops in contact) necessitated reverting to a more robust stance, and the acquisition of twenty-five mine-resistant Bushmaster armored vehicles (using a new Fast Track Procurement process created for so-called Urgent Operational Requirements) that would offer sufficient protection against IEDs and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs).[66] In addition, F-16 fighters were equipped with a new reconnaissance pod that could detect road-side bombs. Moreover the air-ground cooperation between F-16s, Apache attack helicopters, and the Forward Air Controllers on the ground was enhanced through better training and the introduction of improved communications equipment, significantly facilitating force protection.

While patrols exposed the Dutch soldiers on the ground immediately to the reality of Uruzgan's fragmented society and tribal feuds, the primary mission they received from higher command was predominantly enemy-centric and typically concerned disruption of the Taliban, with nonkinetic tasks such as enabling PRT-actions and enhancement of the understanding of the local population only as supportive, secondary tasks.[67] This changed gradually with the growing availability of population-centric intelligence to the TFU-staff and its subordinate units. The resulting population-centric mindset is evidenced, for instance, in the following quotation:

> [T]he Taliban are less of a threat to the tottering structures of the Afghan state than feuding local tribes and predatory warlords. The Uruzgan insurgency is mixed up with a notably vicious tribal war between the Popolzai tribe and minority Ghilzai tribes. Jan Mohammad Khan, a Popolzai warlord and former

> Uruzgan governor, marginalised the Ghilzais. This seems to have created lasting turmoil which is exploited by the Taliban.[68]

Instead of anti-Taliban patrolling, from 2007 onward patrols subsequently focused increasingly on enabling PRT development activities in order to gain influence over Uruzgan's various communities and liaise the local population to the provincial government. This became the dominant operational mindset within the TFU.[69] While hard to pinpoint a single causal factor for institutionalization of this new approach, the 2008 surge in civilian personnel at least offers the suggestion that the idea of primary population-centric patrols had indeed become accepted. These additional civilian experts were instrumental in providing the hard-needed expertise to efficiently conduct nonkinetic development activities.[70] Although patrols did not evolve dramatically in their appearance during the four-year deployment, the mindset and mission radically adapted to the specifics of the operational environment. Thus patrols became a strong tool for delivering nonkinetic effects.

A similar shift occurred in large-scale operations. Initially, operations were mounted to clear an area of Taliban presence, as there were no means available for follow-up. The consequences of such sweeping actions, such as Operation Perth in July 2006 and Operation Spin Ghar in December 2007, was that the insurgents immediately returned once an operation was finished. Moreover, the local population of such an area considered the Dutch incapable of providing protection and even held ISAF responsible for the insecurity they experienced upon the return of the insurgents.[71] These operations were of limited effect and certainly did not win influence over the population. During the first years of the mission there was only one large-scale operation that definitely won the local population's hearts and minds: the Battle of Chora. As they already maintained a permanent post in the district, the Dutch soldiers were able to exploit their victory through nonkinetic efforts such as cooption with various tribal authorities.[72] This combination of kinetic operations and a nonkinetic follow-up led to a spectacular rise in governmental control and provided the Dutch with a guideline for future operations.

At the end of 2008 sufficient Afghan security forces became available to provide the follow-up for large-scale sweeping operations. Operations were now planned with a clear idea of the ultimate effect: gaining influence over the population in a target area. Although this approach was pioneered during operation Bor Barakai in October 2008, it was not yet effectively practiced, as a

follow-up patrol base was not constructed in the target valley but rather positioned at a hilltop on its boundary.[73] Operation Tura Gharin January 2009 for the first time effectively executed the new approach, as not only a patrol base was established in the middle of the cleared valley but, in addition, establishing "below the radar" contact with key tribal authorities—of whom some were even met in Quetta, Pakistan—was already initiated in the planning phase.[74]

In sum, during the four years of operations in Uruzgan two adaptation processes can be observed. First, tactics were adjusted to the demands of the environment, an environment that dictated a more COIN- and kinetic-oriented approach, in contrast with the politically sanctioned strategy, a reality that took some time for the political level to come to grips with. Second, in particular from 2008 onward, the means available, the tactical learning that had taken place, including the awareness of the utility of deep knowledge of the societal structure, allowed and inspired an approach that combined both the tenets of COIN doctrine and the demands of the S&R mission. The idea of employing force as an enabler for nonkinetic activities in order to gain control over the local population gradually became firmly accepted. Where Dutch soldiers had first cynically joked that the TFU's so-called 3D-approach (Defense, Development, and Diplomacy) was an abbreviation for "Deter, Disturb, and Destroy," the Dutch adapted their patrols and large-scale operations to the requirements of Uruzgan's operational environment and ultimately conducted military operations that embodied all the components of the true 3D-approach.

LESSONS, AND LEARNING TO LEARN

The question that remains unanswered is how, ultimately, the small Dutch military has learned from this major experience. Although operational experiences traditionally remained unprocessed, efforts have been undertaken to institutionalize the operational experiences gained by TFU. This started as early as 2007, when the army's education and training center for operations issued an information bulletin to act as a guideline for counterinsurgency operations.[75] In February 2008 a concept information bulletin entitled "Observations on Operations in Afghanistan" was prepared by army officers who had served in the first two TFUs (including the two commanders, TFU-3 was at that time in the process of rotations), as well as by some officers who served with RC-S (including one former commander).[76] This document was carefully prepared and contained observations on new experiences from the technical, tactical, and operational level. The most important issue the thirty-three-page bulletin

stressed was adaptation of the mindset from enemy-centric kinetic operations to nonkinetic population-centric counterinsurgency warfare. In accordance with the traditions of the army it was stressed that the publication should not be interpreted as a prescriptive doctrine; it rather was meant to transfer useful knowledge to future rotations and invited other officers to add their experiences in order to contribute to a new doctrine. Unfortunately, this meticulously prepared paper was never officially distributed within the armed forces, for no obvious reasons. Instead, a series of two articles were derived from it—as a result of the initiative of its authors—which were published only in mid-2009, in the military scientific magazine *Militaire Spectator*.[77] The new army doctrine, which was supposed to contain the insights mentioned in these articles, was published in November 2009, but it seems that the experiences were largely neglected; it is illustrative that the term "counterinsurgency" is scarcely mentioned in this document.[78]

Thus, the observations on operations in Afghanistan were never formally disseminated among the troops, and neither were they processed into the new doctrine. A study undertaken upon the initiative of former RC-S Commander Major-General De Kruijf also reveals this structural weakness of the Dutch military to institutionalize its lessons beyond the informal sphere of the technical and tactical level.[79] An analysis on the evolution of Information Operations and key leader engagement within the TFU illustrates this. While these nonkinetic activities rapidly became a standardized part of the tactical toolbox, the lack of structural embedding caused huge variations in the use of these instruments between the different TFU rotations.[80] Unsurprisingly, therefore, the first mentioned study urges rapid integration of recent operational experience up to the political and military strategic levels and mentions that the staff for evaluations will be strengthened.[81]

The lack of a formal, structured, and institutionalized lessons learned process has recently been acknowledged. A 2010 report lists several factors that have contributed to this state of affairs. First, not all personnel involved in the lessons learned process are actually sufficiently informed about recent developments and new operational insights. Evaluation and assessment are still often considered a secondary task. Second, and as a result, there is a somewhat skeptical attitude toward the products that those who are involved in the lessons learned process publish. It is insufficiently regarded as a tool that is of use for the tactical units, but instead regarded as a staff function where bottom-up ideas land in barren soil. Third, although key insights, results of practices, and

ideas are often discussed informally in a variety of forums, these discussions do not result in follow-up analysis, doctrinal changes, or improvements in training and operating procedures, nor other deliberate decision-making. Dissemination of key insights occurred primarily through informal processes. Fourth, there is a disconnect between the lessons learned processes of the various services with each service having its own lessons learned process, dedicated personnel (or lack thereof), and culture. The process is decentralized, and there is insufficient cross-fertilization. The lack of formal lessons learned policy does not help in this respect.

Currently it seems that this call for institutionalization has landed in fertile soil. The army has called upon all former TFU commanders to identify crucial lessons that should be preserved for future operations.[82] In a similar fashion the Department of Evaluations of the Ministry of Defence has conducted an extensive analysis of the four-year Uruzgan campaign in order to collect lessons identified and best practices. The resulting report, which appeared in July 2011, is meant to be the first step to institutionalize these experiences and process them into lessons learned to be used in future operations.[83]

At the same time, upon request of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, a committee of independent experts have carried out an extensive evaluation of the entire Dutch contribution to Uruzgan, thus including the efforts of Foreign Affairs.[84] This report, which appeared in late September 2011, focuses on the strategy of TFU, the operations, the results that were achieved, and the costs of the entire mission. The report concludes with a long list of lessons identified. A final step to improve and institutionalize the lessons learned processes will be the formation of service-specific Warfare Centers.

CONCLUSION: ADAPTATION IN URUZGAN . . . AND BEYOND?

What insights can we obtain from these analyses of various aspects of four years of campaigning in Uruzgan, which cost the Dutch taxpayer approximately 2 billion Euro? First, it is important to notice that the mission was politically framed in terms of reconstruction and development. Although the reality on the ground was that of a counterinsurgency campaign in a highly fragmented societal environment, the label of reconstruction and development linked the TFU mission to newly developed (though grounded in previous policy documents) Dutch policy on how to conduct such operations in fragile states. This conceptual framework was designed by the ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Economic Affairs and was based on experiences in previous missions.

Thus TFU strategy included providing security, fostering governance, and socioeconomic development from the onset. As such, a comprehensive approach was superficially entirely in line with the tenets of COIN doctrine, and seemingly there was no disconnect between political mandate and military strategy. However, whereas declared policy stressed the civilian side of the strategy, the military plan of necessity, and by inclination, initially emphasized the military aspects of the mission and considered it a COIN mission, a reality that only gradually was accepted at the political level. On the other hand, when the situation became more benign, the operation gradually obtained the character of the S&R mission, as originally envisioned in 2005.

During the entire campaign, strategy was formulated by the TFU staff at the grass roots level. This allowed for the initial strategy to be further developed with the reality of the operational environment as a guideline. The 2008 Focal Paper illustrates this as it adapts the initial strategy into a campaign plan for counterinsurgency in Uruzgan. In addition, the main driver for the change of strategy was the political decision from The Hague in 2008 to extend the mission, which in turn informed The Focal Paper, and the 2009 UCP was meant to provide a guideline for the transfer of authority in 2010. Thus, while TFU strategy certainly was adapted to meet the requirements of a plan for counterinsurgency in the specific operational environment of Uruzgan, domestic politics and government policy were the additional main drivers of this adaptation.

Second, a similar dually driven adaptation process can be observed concerning the organization. The TFU organization was initially tailored for a reconstruction and development mission with the BG and the PRT as its two main components. Uruzgan's contentious environment, however, forced an extension of BG assets, and thereby initially more emphasis was placed on the kinetic parts of the organization. Troop levels were increased up to a permanent contribution of fourteen hundred soldiers (a limit imposed by the political level in The Hague) and as many as six hundred temporarily deployed additional troops. Although the TFU strategy resulted from a comprehensive conceptual framework, involvement of civilian actors was minimal at first. The largest adaptation of the organizational aspect, therefore, was the influx of civilian personnel. The year 2008 especially saw a surge in civilian personnel and a radical change in the overall command structure as the senior civil representative became the commander of the PRT and the co-commander of the TFU. Moreover, the gradual increase of NGOs contributing to the mission and the

establishment of the DCU further augmented the civilian capacity needed for the execution of a comprehensive campaign.

Another significant adaptation occurred in the field of intelligence. Despite the framework of reconstruction and development and the fact that Dutch soldiers rapidly recognized that they were fighting a counterinsurgency campaign, the focus in intelligence initially remained with the enemy. In Uruzgan, however, the Taliban was not the main reason for insecurity. The divide-and-rule politics of former Governor Jan Mohammed had caused violent contention, and the true problem was to realign marginalized societal fragments with the provincial government and prevent the Taliban insurgents from exploiting local feuds. To understand this required the population-centric intelligence typical for counterinsurgency campaigns. Under influence of civilian expertise a gradual shift occurred in the intelligence process. Especially the tribal adviser, and later the cultural advisers, provided useful insights on the local society and convinced military intelligence officers of the necessity of population-centric intelligence. Thus the emphasis in intelligence shifted from the Taliban to the local population.

The field of operations witnessed a similar shift under influence of the enhanced understanding of the operational environment provided by population-centric intelligence. At first kinetic activities were considered the primary tool to realize the TFU mission as patrols and large-scale operations were mounted to restore security by inflicting damage upon the Taliban. Although these actions remained much the same in physical appearance, the rationale underlying them changed radically. As the Dutch soldier came to realize that influence over the population in this environment had to be won by nonkinetic means, the idea of the use of force as an enabler for nonkinetic activities became firmly accepted within the TFU. In addition to a better understanding of the locale, the enhanced availability of ANSF was also of pivotal importance for this adaptation of military operations for counterinsurgency purposes.

Finally, the adaptation of the predeployment training program points at a remarkable feature of the small Dutch military. Despite the lack of a formal organization to institutionalize lessons learned, informal as well as professional personal contacts led to a quick adaptation of the training program. This made possible the use of the experiences of previous rotations in order to establish a tailor-made program that prepared the troops and civilians for the conduct of an integrated counterinsurgency campaign in Uruzgan's demanding operational environment.

To conclude this chapter, we can say that the Dutch military successfully improved its operational performance by adapting to the specific requirements of the four-year Uruzgan campaign. Although the modern Dutch military had never conducted a brigade-size operation, formulating a strategy for such a unit and fielding and sustaining a capable organization did create relatively few problems. Adapting to the reality of a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign was more difficult and initially constrained by the political rhetoric and limited conceptualization of the mission, but was in the end successfully completed with the help of additional civilian support. The main drivers in the period were the political level in the Hague and the demanding operational environment in Uruzgan itself.

As of now the small Dutch military is facing another round of budget cuts. It has already been announced that tanks as a weapon system will be scrapped from the arsenal, and even the overstretched transport helicopter and F-16 fleet will suffer huge reductions. Although the Dutch military has taken its first steps to actually institutionalizing the major Uruzgan experience, the question whether or not sufficient funds will be available for this process might obstruct the completion of the learning cycle.

NOTES

1. Netherlands Ministry of Defence, *Lessons Identified ISAF, Final Report,* July 14, 2011, 60.

2. See, for instance, Netherlands Ministry of Defence, *Rapport Lessons Learned binnen Defensie* [*Report Lessons Learned within the Ministry of Defense*] (The Hague: Netherlands Ministry of Defence, February 17, 2010).

3. R. H. Sandee and P. W. W. Wijninga, "Lessen uit recente operaties," in E. R. Muller et al., eds. *Krijgsmacht, Studies over de organisatie en het optreden* ["Lessons from Recent Operations," in *Armed Forces: Studies on the Organisation and Operation*] (Alphen aan de Rijn: Kluwer, 2004), 719–20.

4. Rob de Wijk and Frans Osinga, "Innovation on a Shrinking Playing Field: Military Change in The Netherlands Armed Forces," in T. Terriff, F. Osinga, and T. Farrell, eds., *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Military Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 142.

5. Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate, *Missie in Al Muthanna, De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in Irak 2003–2005* [*Mission in Al Muthanna: The Dutch Armed Forces in Iraq 2003–2005*] (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 297–302.

6. George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf, "The Dutch COIN Approach: Three Years in Uruzgan, 2006–2009," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 21, no. 3 (2010): 435.

7. For an excellent recent analysis of the strategic culture of the Netherlands, see

Rem Korteweg, "The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally," Ph.D. diss. (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), chs. 18, 20.

8. Christ Klep, *Uruzgan: Nederlandse militairen op missie, 2005–2010* [*Uruzgan: Dutch Military at Mission, 2005–2010*] (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011).

9. NRC-Handelsblad, September 19, 2007.

10. Korteweg, "The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally," 288.

11. Letter to Parliament of the Dutch Minister of Defence, *Nederlandse Bijdrage aan ISAF in Zuid-Afghanistan* [*Dutch Contribution to ISAF in Southern Afghanistan*], The Hague, December 22, 2005, 3–4.

12. Klep, *Uruzgan*.

13. Jan van der Meulen, "Stemmen over Afghanistan en de risico's van het vak" ["Voices over Afghanistan and the Risks of the Job"], *Militaire Spectator* 178, no. 3 (2009): 135–45.

14. As quoted in "Nederland onder druk" ["The Netherlands under Tressure"], *NRC Handelsblad*, October 23, 2009.

15. Martine van Bijlert, "Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles," in Antonio Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 155.

16. Susanne Schmeidl, *The Man Who Would Be King: The Challenges to Strengthening Governance in Uruzgan* (The Hague: Cingendael, 2010), 10.

17. The Liaison Office, *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006–2010* (Kabul: TLO, 2010), 3. The percentages are estimates in relation to the total population.

18. Schmeidl, *The Man Who Would Be King*, 10.

19. van Bijlert, "Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles," 156–57; Martine van Bijlert, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, Tarin Kowt, November 16, 2008.

20. Jan Mohammed was assassinated on July 17, 2011.

21. Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 56–58. See also van Bijlert, "Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles," 156–58; and Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan, De weg van Hamid Karzai naar het paleis* [*Expedition Uruzgan: Hamid Karzai's Road to the Palace*] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 2009), 37–40.

22. Schmeidl, *The Man Who Would Be King*, 51.

23. van Bijlert, "Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles," 158.

24. Dutch Minister of Defence, *Nederlandse Bijdrage aan ISAF in Zuid-Afghanistan* [*Dutch Contribution to ISAF in Southern Afghanistan*], The Hague, December 22, 2005, 10.

25. Netherlands Ministry of Defence, "Defensienota 2000" ["Defense White Paper 2000"], The Hague, 26.

26. Tweede Kamer, *Nederlandse Deelname aan de Vredesmissies* [*Dutch Participation in Peace Operations*], vergaderjaar 2003–4, 29521, nr. 1, April 8, 2004.

27. Tweede Kamer, *Herijking van het Buitenlands Beleid: Brief van de Ministers van*

Buitenlandse Zaken, van Economische Zaken, voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, van Defensie en van Financiën [*Alignment of Foreign Policy: Letter of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs, Defence and Finance*], 24337, nr. 2—1994–1995.

28. Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Economic Affairs, *Notitie: wederopbouw na gewapend conflict* [*White Paper on Post-conflict Reconstruction*] (The Hague: Koninklijke De Swart, 2005).

29. Dutch Minister of Defence, *Dutch Contribution to ISAF in Southern Afghanistan.*

30. General Dick Berlijn, speech at the departure of the F-16 detachment to Afghanistan, January 9, 2006.

31. Korteweg, "The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally," 294.

32. Hans de Vreij (RNW), *Briljant citaat* [*Brilliant Quotation*], March 6, 2009, http://blogs.rnw.nl/vredeenveiligheid/2009/03/06/briljant-citaat, accessed May 24, 2011.

33. Task Force Uruzgan, *1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force URUZGAN MASTER PLAN* (Tarin Kowt: TFU, 2006); Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008* [*Interim Evaluation ISAF 2008*] (The Hague: Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, 2008).

34. Task Force Uruzgan, *1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force URUZGAN MASTER PLAN;* B. J. E. Smeenk, R. W. G. Gouweleeuw, and H. C. van der Have, "Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan. Van het schaakbord naar een bord spaghetti" ["Effects-based Approach in Uruzgan: From Chess-board to Plate of Spaghetti"], *Militaire Spectator* 176, no. 12 (2007): 550–59.

35. Task Force Uruzgan, *Focal Paper: Foundations for the Future* (Tarin Kowt: TFU, 2008).

36. All quoted in G. R. Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf, "De Nederlandse COIN-aanpak: 3 jaar Uruzgan, 2006–2009," *Militaire Spectator* 178, no. 11 (2009): 616.

37. J. R. Schwillens, "Comprehensive Approach: de praktijk" ["Comprehensive Approach: The Practice"], *Militaire Spectator* 178, no. 11 (2009): 578–89.

38. The formulation is interesting, as it presumes a prescription of the Dutch ministries to the Government of Uruzgan that effects and milestones should be pursued.

39. Task Force Uruzgan, *Uruzgan Campaign Plan 2010* (Tarin Kowt: TFU, 2008); I. E. van Bemmel, A. R. Eikelboom, and P. G. F. Hoefsloot, "Comprehensive and Iterative Planning in Uruzgan," *Militaire Spectator* 179, no. 4 (2010): 196–209.

40. Task Force Uruzgan, *Uruzgan Campaign Plan 2010*; van Bemmel et al., "Comprehensive and Iterative Planning in Uruzgan." In the figure, LN means local national, and KL means key leader.

41. B. R. Bot, H. G. J. Kamp, and A. M. A. van Ardenne—Van der Hoeven, *Kamerbrief 22 December 2005: Nederlandse Bijdrage aan ISAF in Zuid-Afghanistan* [*Letter to Parliament 22 December 2005: The Dutch Contribution to ISAF in Southern Afghanistan*] (The Hague: Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Cooperation, 2005).

42. Piet van der Sar, "Kick the Enemy Where It Hurts Most," *Carré* 1 (2007): 10–17.

43. Kees Mathijssen and Peter Mollema, *De civiele organisatie in Task Force Uruzgan: Het Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) van de Task Force Uruzgan onder civiele Leiding* [*The Civil Organization in Task Force Uruzgan: The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) of the Task Force Uruzgan under Civil Command*] (Tirin Kot: TFU, 2008).

44. Or "Zuidoost-Azië," meaning "Southeast Asia" in Dutch. The ZOA website points out that the increased geographical reach of ZOA beyond their original area of operations has meant this acronym has "lost some of its original meaning." See ZOA Profile: available at http://www.zoa-international.com/content/profile, accessed July 12, 2012.

45. ZOA Projects: available at http://www.zoa.nl/home/projecten/afghanistan/, accessed May 18, 2011.

46. Available at http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/RMOI-7RVHZG?OpenDocument, accessed May 13, 2011.

47. David Kilcullen, "Intelligence," in Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney, eds., *Understanding Counterinsurgency, Doctrines, Operations and Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2010), 142–43, 157.

48. Tweede Kamer, *Kamerstuk 2005–2006* [*Parliamentary Letter 2005–2006*], *27925, no. 221*; see also Anonymous, "A Survey of Uruzgan Province," unpublished report (Kabul, 2006).

49. See Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Civil Assessment* (Kabul, 2006); and Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis Uruzgan Province* (Kabul, 2006).

50. Kamer, *Kamerstuk 2005–2006, no. 213*; see also The Liaison Office, *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan*, 29.

51. Militaire Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdients (MIVD), "SupIntrep Afghanistan, Stamverhoudingen in Uruzgan" ["SupIntrep Afghanistan, Tribal Relations in Uruzgan"], unpublished report (The Hague, 2006).

52. See Anonymous, "Leven in het Oude Testament" ["Living in the Old Testament"], in Wiebren Tabak, ed., *3D, de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan* [*3D: The Dutch Military Engagement in Afghanistan*] (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 15–16; and Smeenk et al., "Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan," 555.

53. Hans Ariëns, "Dutch Approach klinkt nogal zelfvoldaan" ["Dutch Approach Sounds Kind of Smug"], *Internationale Samenwerking* 2010–11: available at http://www.ismagazine.nl/2010/02/17/dutch-approach-klinkt-nogal-zelfvoldaan/, accessed October 27, 2011.

54. Kamer, *Kamerstuk 2005–2006, no. 201*, 46.

55. Anonymous tribal adviser, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, The Hague, March 1, 2010.

56. For detailed accounts of this important event, see Noël van Bemmel, "Infanteristen, commando's: iedereen vecht tegen Taliban" ["Infantry, Special Forces: Everybody Fights the Taliban"], *Volkskrant*, June 23, 2007; Nicolas Asfouri, "Over 100 Die in South-

ern Afghan Battle," *USA Today*, June 19, 2007; Paul Brill, "Ze schoten een magazijn op me leeg" ["They Shot a Round at Me"], *Volkskrant*, June 28, 2007; "Taliban hielden als beesten huis in Chora" ["Taliban Were Behaving like Animals in Chora"], *De Telegraaf*, June 22, 2007; Eric Vrijsen, "Uruzgan: het gevecht om Chora" ["Uruzgan, the Battle for Chora"], *Elsevier*, January 2007.

57. Commander PRT-3, Colonel Gino van der Voet, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, The Hague, March 9, 2010, and Anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, Wezep, September 21, 2009.

58. Ariëns, "Dutch Approach klinkt nogal zelfvoldaan."

59. Tweede Kamer, "Tussentijdse Evaluatie ISAF 2008" ["Interim Evaluation ISAF 2008"], annex of *Kamerstuk 2008–2009, 27925, no. 357*, 33–34.

60. Hans Ariëns, "Interview Michiel Rentenaar" ["Interview with Senior Civil Representative Michiel Rentenaar"], *Internationale Samenwerking,* 2010–3.

61. It must be mentioned that throughout the mission there was only one dedicated military human factors analyst in the TFU staff's vast intelligence section. Typically this would be an academically schooled junior officer. When awareness of the importance of population-centric intelligence grew, other intelligence officers also became involved with so-called white plate (population-centric) intelligence.

62. van der Sar, "Kick the Enemy Where It Hurts Most," 10–17.

63. Bas Ooink, "Cross Cultural Training: een nieuw model voor cultuurtrainingen" ["Cross Cultural Training: A New Model for Cultural Training"], *Militaire Spectator* 179, no. 3 (2010): 133–45.

64. Brigadier Theo Vleugels, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, Utrecht, November 12, 2009; Colonel Piet van der Sar and Captain Ralph Coenen, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, Weert, September 28, 2009.

65. Colonel Richard van Harskamp, "Observaties van Commandant Task Force Uruzgan IV" ["Observations of Commander Task Force Uruzgan IV"], *Infanterie* 14, no. 1 (2009): 7; Captain Ralph Coenen, interviewed by Martijn Kitzen, Tirin Kot, November 20, 2008; Martijn Kitzen, "Uruzgan Field Notes" (unpublished personal record, Tirin Kot, 2008), 45–48; Jerry Meyerle et al., *Counterinsurgency on the Ground in Afghanistan: How Different Units Adapted to Local Conditions* (Alexandria, Va.: CNAS, 2010), 145–50.

66. Korteweg, "The Superpower, the Bridge-builder and the Hesitant Ally," 295.

67. See, for instance, Lieutenant Colonel Andy van Dijk, "Personal Diary" (unpublished personal record, Tirin Kot, 2007); and Captain Gijs-Jan Schüssler, "Experiences Platoon Commander TF-7 in Uruzgan" (unpublished presentation for *13 Mechanized Brigade Counterinsurgency Seminar*, Breda, September 3, 2008).

68. Anonymous, "The Dutch Model," *Economist* (March 12, 2009).

69. Ariëns, "Dutch Approach klinkt nogal zelfvoldaan."

70. Peter Mollema and Cees Matthijssen, "Uruzgan: op de goede weg, civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie" ["Uruzgan: On the

Right Track, Civil-military Cooperation in a Complex Counterinsurgency Operation"], *Militaire Spectator* 178, nos. 7/8 (2009): 402.

71. Dimitriu and De Graaf, "The Dutch COIN Approach," 441.

72. Martijn Kitzen, "Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind: The Implementation of Co-option as a Tool for De-escalation of Conflict: The Case of the Netherlands in Afghanistan's Uruzgan Province," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 5 (2012): 725–26.

73. Kitzen, "Uruzgan Field Notes," 106–7.

74. Kitzen, "Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind."

75. Education and Training Centre for Operations, "Informatiebulletin 07/2, Counter-Insurgency (COIN) en de Militaire Bijdrage" ["Information Bulletin 07/2, Counter Insurgency (COIN) and the Military Contribution"] (unpublished Army Information Bulletin, Amersfoort, 2008).

76. See Education and Training Centre for Operations, "Concept Informatie Bulletin 08/01, Observaties over Operaties in Afghanistan" ["Concept Information Bulletin 08/01, Observations on the Operations in Afghanistan"] (unpublished Army Study, Amersfoort, 2008).

77. See Lieutenant-Colonel P. B. Soldaat et al., "Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan I and II" ["Observation on the Operations in Afghanistan"], *Militaire Spectator* 178, nos. 5/6 (2009): 252–66, 340–49.

78. See Education and Training Centre for Operations, *Land Doctrine Publicatie, Militaire Doctrine voor het Landoptreden* [*Land Doctrinal Publication, Military Doctrine for Land Based Operations*] (Amersfoort: OTCOpn, 2009).

79. Defence Staff, *Van Eredivisie naar Europees Voetbal* [*From Premier League to European Soccer*] (unpublished Nota, The Hague, 2010), 76.

80. See Lieutenant-Colonel Hans van Dalen, "Key Leader Engagement, Influence by Proxy" (unpublished thesis, The Hague, 2010), 139–47.

81. Defence Staff, *Van Eredivisie naar Europees Voetbal*, 76.

82. An initial confidential report was promulgated on November 15, 2010.

83. *Lessons Identified ISAF*, Internal Report, The Hague, July 14, 2011. This report incidentally confirms many of the observations made in this chapter. As the report is classified, no specific reference can be made.

84. A. de Ruijter, P. C. Feith, J. Gruiters, and M. L. M. Urlings, *Eindevaluatie Nederlandse Bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006–2010* ["Final Evaluation of the Dutch Contribution to ISAF, 2006–2010"] (The Hague: Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, 2011).