The crucible of war: Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

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Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Task Force Helmand and its impact on the British Army

5.1: Introduction

The British mission in Helmand (see map on page 231) under ISAF lasted from 2006 to 2014. Within the British armed forces, the Helmand campaign is colloquially referred to as "Operation Herrick".[959] Like the Dutch mission in the adjacent province, the deployment into Helmand can be described as a seminal experience for the British armed forces.[960] Still, despite the proximity of Helmand and Uruzgan and comparable local dynamics the intensity of the conflict was markedly greater in the British area of operations. The total number of fatalities, 456, among British service members and civilians in Afghanistan, in this regard, is a telling indicator.[961] Moreover, Helmand province eventually became the focal point of the ISAF-campaign and housed the largest number of coalition troops.[962]

The structure of this chapter closely resembles that of the previous one on the Dutch mission in Uruzgan and likewise consists of three main parts. The first section forms a preamble to the Helmand campaign by examining the strategic and organizational cultures of the United Kingdom, recent missions, contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine and the decision to deploy to Helmand. Subsequently, the second section offers a concise overview of the campaign and the developments relevant to the learning process of the British Army. Furthermore, the established themes from chapter 3 are elaborated upon in vignettes. The third section assesses the impact of Operation Herrick on the British army by revisiting the vignettes, studying evaluation processes and other organizational and conceptual developments in the British armed forces.

5.2: The road to Helmand: prior experiences and preparation

The conduct of the Helmand campaign by British forces was naturally shaped by the dynamics of the Afghan conflict and the Western intervention since 2001. Additionally, internal British factors also profoundly influenced the mission. For instance, the deployment into Helmand was affected by British cultural factors, recent missions, and the decision-making process for the deployment itself. These factors, along with contemporary British doctrine will be explored in this section to assess their impact on the mission further on in this chapter.

959 Technically, the moniker "Operation Herrick" refers to the wider British military contribution in Afghanistan at that stage and began in 2005. Yet, the mission in Helmand was the centerpiece of the contribution and both terms are generally used interchangeably.

960 British Army. (2015). *Operation HERRICK Campaign Study*. Warminster: Directorate Land Warfare, p. iii.

961 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 1.

962 Rajiv Chandrasekaran (2012). *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 62-66.

5.2.1: Culture

5.2.1.1: Strategic culture

As a former empire and a permanent member of the United Nations security council, the United Kingdom regards itself as an influential power.[963] The enduring relation with its former colonies means that there are few limitations to what it perceives to be its strategic interests. Given the legacy of empire and the grand ambitions of foreign policy, the British public and political elite are generally at ease with deploying its armed forces to defend British interests.[964]

A crucial element in the actual employment of the UK's military is the "Royal Prerogative". This means that the Prime Minister and by extension the Cabinet can decide to deploy the UK's armed forces abroad without consulting Parliament.[965] Nevertheless, support by a majority in Parliament is considered as desirable. As such, the House of Commons is generally informed of the intention to deploy on a mission. Over the last years, this prerogative has been challenged as the lack of oversight for military missions forms a democratic deficit.[966] From his installment as Prime Minister in 1996, Tony Blair has used his Royal Prerogative on several occasions such as the interventions in Sierra Leone (1997-1999), Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001 and onwards). As an exception, the invasion in Iraq was put up to a vote in parliament.[967]

The prolific employment of the UK's military under Blair can be ascribed to two themes in British strategic culture: the UK's ambition to be "a force for good" and the 'special relationship' with the United States.[968] In April 1999, during the Kosovo War, Blair outlined his 'Doctrine of the International Community' in a speech. He argued that the international community could intervene to prevent "acts of genocide". Interestingly, he also stated that "[o]ne state should not feel it has the right to change the political system of another [...]".[969] Recognizing that the international community could not intervene in all internal conflicts, Blair listed five preconditions for military action:

963 Paul Cornish (2013). United Kingdom. In H. Biehl, B. Giecherig, & A. Jonas (Eds.), *Strategic Cultures in Europe : Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent* (pp. 372-385). Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 372-373.

964 Malena Britz (2016). Continuity or Change? British Strategic Culture and International Military Operations. In M. Britz (Ed.), *European Participation in International Operations* (pp. 151-175). London: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 161.

965 House of Lords: Select Committee on the Constitution. (2006). *Waging war: Parliament's role and responsibility.* London: The Stationery Office Limited, p. 8-9.

966 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*. p. 106.

967 House of lords. *Waging war*, p. 45-46.

968 Britz. Continuity or Change?, p. 153-154; Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 102-103.

969 Lawrence Freedman (2017). Force and the International Relations community: Blair's Chicago speech and the criteria for intervention. *International Relations, 31*(2), p. 115.

> *"First, are we sure of our case? [...] Second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options? [...] Third, on the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake? Fourth, are we prepared for the long term? [...] And finally, do we have national interests involved?"*[970]

With this doctrine, the UK was willing to deploy its military in foreign conflicts and act as a force for good. Although Blair had specified conditions for such interventions, the new interventions in the Twenty-first century did not meet these criteria.[971] This willingness to forego the preconditions have been ascribed to Blair's wish to maintain the 'special relationship' with the United States.[972]

The special relationship has been a dominant theme in British foreign policy since the Second World War. Generally, it deploys its armed forces alongside the Americans'.[973] Furthermore, the UK has sought to be the transatlantic link between the United States as its principal ally and continental Europe.[974] After the 9/11 attacks, Blair professed the UK's solidarity with the United States. If the Americans would go to war, the British would follow. Coupled with his vision for 'liberal interventionism', Blair committed the UK to the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.[975] As a loyal junior partner, the UK hoped to influence the United States by acting "as a Greece to Rome".[976] At the beginning of the Twenty-first century, the UK's international security policy was one geared towards foreign interventions due to its global commitments, doctrine of 'liberal interventionism' and the reinforced 'special relationship' with the United States. In this context, the organizational culture of the British armed forces will now be explored.

5.2.1.2: *Organizational culture*

Within this context of strategic culture, the British armed forces were a relative constant factor as the military had a tradition of obedience, or even "docility", to the civilian masters. Furthermore, officers were generally apolitical and professional in the sense that the military

970 Ibidem, p. 117-118.

971 Jonathan Bailey (2013). The Political Context: Why We Went to War and the Mismatch of Ends, Ways and Means. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate, p. 11.

972 Christopher Eliott (2015). *High Command: British Military Leadership in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. London: Hurst & Company, p. 98; Bailey. The Political Context, p. 13.

973 Paul Cornish (2013). Strategic Culture in the United Kingdom. In H. Biehl, B. Giegerich, & A. Jonas (Eds.), *Strategic Cultures in Europe: Security and Defence Politics Across the Continent*. Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 377.

974 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 102.

975 Bailey. The Political Context, p. 13-15.

976 Elliott, *High Command*, p. 98.

was an all-volunteer force since 1960.[977] Beyond these common traits the British armed forces were far from a monolithical organization. At the advent of the new millennium, the services that constitute the British armed forces had vastly different outlooks. Naturally, there was always some inter-service rivalry over budget and prominence. The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were focused on the procurement of new platforms and adopting novel technologies to ensure their readiness.[978] For the British Army, the situation was more diffuse. While the other services had been deployed to missions, the brunt of those had fallen on the Army. In particular, elements of the army had recently conducted stabilization and peace support operations in Northern Ireland (see section 5.2.2.1.) and the Balkans. However, another significant part of the army had largely fulfilled garrison duty in the "British Army of the Rhine "(BAOR) during the Cold War and beyond. The BAOR was forward-deployed in Germany to bolster NATO defenses in a potential attack by the Warsaw Pact. In 1991 the army fielded a division to fight in the ground campaign of the Gulf War (operation Granby). After the Cold War ended, a smaller British force remained in Germany.[979] Thus the army combined in it two distinct strands of experiences: one of training for conventional war and another of conducting stabilization or peace support operations.

By and large, the dominant strand in British Army culture was that of war fighting. Like other armies, the Army had to balance training for conventional war while deploying in peace operations.[980] As Anthony King notes, the "warfighting ethos" is fundamental to British service members. Moreover, British officers are generally expected to demonstrate qualities associated with conventional combat such as initiative, decisiveness and offensive action. Not only are such elements central to officer education, but they are also prerequisite for promotion.[981] Combined with the "Adaptive Foundational Training" that focused on combat skills, the conventional war fighting mindset was ingrained in the army's personnel.[982] Potentially, this war fighting ethos could become problematic in other types of conflict in which deliberation, political astuteness and a thorough understanding of the environment are called for. However, this predilection to conventional warfare is disputed by others who argue that it "remains a colonial army at heart", based on the memorabilia from the imperial era displayed in regimental messes.[983] Yet, exhibiting traditions and trinkets from irregular wars gone-by do not equate to proficiency in them. Moreover, the traits of the regimental

977 Cornish. Strategic Culture, p. 380-382.

978 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 61-71.

979 Austin Long, *Soul of Armies*, p 176-178; Frank Ledwidge (2017). *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars.* New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 156-157.

980 David Ucko and Robert Egnell (2013). *Counterinsurgency in Crisis: Britain and the Challenges of modern warfare.* New York: Columbia University Press, p 38-40.

981 Anthony King (2010). Understanding the Helmand Campaign. *International Affairs, 86*(2), p. 323-325.

982 King. Helmand Campaign, p 313; See also Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 154-156.

983 Warren Chin (2010). Colonial Warfare in a Post-Colonial State: British Military Operations in Helmand. *Defence Studies, 10*(1-2), p. 241.

forebears that are celebrated are audacity and initiative rather than keen understanding and a measured approach.

Interestingly, at the time the British Army was more extolled for its proficiency in fighting irregular wars. Throughout its imperial period and the era of decolonization, the British Army had accumulated experience in fighting irregular wars. British scholars stated for instance that "the British Army has traditionally been culturally attuned to small wars"[984] and that the British Army "excelled in [...] anti-guerilla warfare [and] other aspects of counterinsurgency".[985] Another important proponent of this premise is the US officer John Nagl. In his book "Learning to eat soup with a knife" he favorably contrasts the British counterinsurgency performance in Malaya to the American experience in Vietnam. To be sure, Nagl does not posit that the British Army had some innate traits that produced positive results, but rather that it was a learning organization that was able to enhance its performance and overcome earlier mistakes.[986] However, from such readings of the British historical experience emerged the idea that this experience had coalesced into institutional memory.[987] Moreover, a central aspect in the understanding of British counterinsurgency campaigns in the 20th century was that there was a distinct British approach which emphasized the use of minimum force. Ostensibly, this contrasted with the more brutal conduct of French forces during their (unsuccessful) wars of decolonization.[988] However, more recent historical research shows that British (proxy) forces used considerable coercive measures in counterinsurgency wars such as Kenya and Malaysia.[989] Furthermore, beyond the oft-flaunted cases of Malaysia and Northern Ireland, the British success rate in modern counterinsurgency campaign was slimmer than previously stated. [990] However, by the beginning of the 21st century, these nuances were largely glossed over.

Beyond its recent experiences and general warfighting ethos, examining the British Army's culture is a difficult proposition. Like most armies, it is divided into different arms and branches with specific roles on the battlefield. However, in the British Army, the manoeuvre units are further subdivided into regiments that have their own sense of history and tradition. Every army soldier, whether an officer or enlisted, is first and foremost part of a regiment or

984 Alexander Alderson (2010). United Kingdom. In T. Rid, & T. Keaney (Eds.), *Understanding Counterinsurgency*. London: Routledge, p. 29.

985 Thomas Mockaitis (1995). *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era: War, Armed Forces and Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 146.

986 Nagl, *Soup with a Knife*, p. 192-198.

987 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 24-26.

988 Bruno Reis (2011). The Myth of British Minimum Force in Counterinsurgency Campaigns during Decolonisation (1945–1970). *Journal of Strategic Studies, 34*(2), p. 247-249.

989 See for instance Karl Hack (2018). 'Devils that suck the blood of the Malayan People': The Case for Post-Revisionist Analysis of Counter-insurgency Violence. *War in History, 25*(2), p. 222-224; Huw Bennet (2007). The Other Side of the COIN: Minimum and Exemplary Force in British Army Counterinsurgency in Kenya. *Small Wars and Insurgencies, 18*(4), p. 647-651.

990 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 29

corps.[991] Between the various infantry and cavalry regiments there existed some informal stratification and intense rivalry.[992] Some peace time aspects of this regimental identity, such as mess-rules and dress uniforms are seemingly archaic and have little relevance for performance on operations.[993] Still, this sense of shared identity is regarded as fostering unit cohesion, which is of course essential on operations and during combat.[994] When units are deployed on operations, this regimental, and sub-unit cohesion is often reinforced by the concept of "mission command" that combines centralized intent and decentralized execution and promotes initiative on lower tactical levels. Of course, mission command is familiar to most Western militaries. However, as Edward Burke shows, in Northern Ireland the combination of strong regimental identity and decentralized execution of operations can produce disparate results when the intent is ambiguous or not properly enforced.[995] A further potential pitfall of the strong British regimental system with its intraservice rivalries was the regiment was the prime conduit of information and experience. Not only could this impede formal learning processes across the army, but it also made it more difficult to enforce change that went against the grain of the institutions.[996] As such, the British Army entered the 21st century predominantly focused on conventional warfare, despite an apparent knack for irregular conflicts. Although the counterinsurgency experiences were not at the forefront of military thought at the time, some of this knowledge had been confided to doctrine.

5.2.2: Counterinsurgency doctrine

The conceptual foundation for counterinsurgency operations by the British Army at the beginning of the twenty-first century could have been the Army Field Manual 1-10: Counter Insurgency Operations (Strategic and Operational Guidelines). Published in July 2001, the AFM preceded the Western interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the lack of practical application of the field manual during operations will be examined further on in this chapter, this section assesses its contents and sources of inspiration.

The AFM defines insurgency as "the actions of a minority group within a state who are intent on forcing political change by means of a mixture of subversion, propaganda and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate the broad mass of people to accept such a

991 Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 149.

992 See Edward Burke (2018). *An Army of Tribes: British Army Cohesion, Deviancy and Murder in Northern Ireland*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, p. 41-42; Simon Akam (2021). *The Changing of the Guard: The British Army since 9/11*. London: Scribe, p. 113-119.

993 See Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 46-49. Bury, (2017). Barossa Night: cohesion in the British Army officer corps. *The British Journal Of Sociology, 68*(2), p. 318-319.

994 Patrick Bury and Anthony King (2015). A Profession of Love: Cohesion in a British Platoon in Afghanistan. In A. King (Ed.), *Frontline: combat and cohesion in the 21st century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 205-210; Burke, *Army of Tribes*, p. 41-42.

995 Edward Burke, *Army of Tribes*, p. 334-339. See also Anthony King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p 324-325.

996 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 41-42.

change."[997] It recognizes that insurgencies can have different causes such as nationalism, separatism, "maladministration" or "unfulfilled expectations".[998] With regard to religious extremism as driver for insurrection, the AFM was rather prescient in stating: "in the past few years another form of militant tendency has reappeared on the international scene; that of Islamic fundamentalism [...]this form of militant opposition to secular governments and regimes has taken much of the limelight."[999] The specific tenets of Islamism in a counterinsurgency context were further explored in an annex to the doctrine.[1000]

Although the AFM posits that the "experience of numerous 'small wars' has provided the British Army with a unique insight into this demanding form of conflict", it cautioned against using the Northern Ireland experience as a constraint to thinking about counterinsurgency. Not only was the domestic environment particular to this conflict, the intensity of the later years of Operation Banner were categorized as "Military Assistance to Civilian Authorities". While pertinent lessons could be learnt from Northern Ireland or from other British experiences, effective counterinsurgency approaches could be gleaned from other countries. Furthermore, as insurgencies continued to evolve, counterinsurgency must also continually adapt.[1001]

In order to address an insurgency, the AFM acknowledged the supporting role played by the military to a political solution. Central to any counterinsurgency effort is the contest for popular support. In this light, the tactical activities by the armed forces must be focused on severing the link between the insurgents and the population.[1002] To pursue this task successfully, military commanders must contemplate on six counterinsurgency principles (see table 5.1). The lineage from classical counterinsurgency prescriptions is clear in this list when compared to the earlier writings (see chapter 3).

997 British Army. (2001). *Army Field Manual 1-10: Counter Insurgency Operations (Strategic and Operational Guidelines)*, p. A-1-1.

998 British Army. *AFM 1-10*, p. A-1-2.

999 Ibidem, p. A-1-A-6.

1000 Ibidem, p. A-1-G-1.

1001 Ibidem, p. B-2-1.

1002 Ibidem, p. B-3-8.

Counterinsurgency principles AFM 1-10 (2001)
Political Primacy and Political Aim
Coordinated Government Machinery.
Intelligence and Information
Separating the Insurgent from his Support
Neutralising the Insurgent
Longer Term Post-Insurgency Planning

Table 5.1: Counterinsurgency principles (2001)

An additional point of interest in the 2001 AFM is the significant weight awarded to what it calls "Command and Control Warfare" (C2W), which aims to "influence, degrade or destroy" the insurgents' C2-capability while simultaneously protecting friendly capabilities. The notion of C2W encompasses integrating psychological operations, all-source intelligence, deception, electronic warfare, and physical destruction to disrupt the enemy's activities.[1003] rather than the population. Although information operations, or propaganda, should be used to win the support of the population, this integration of non-kinetic effects (in concert with kinetic activities) was predominantly aimed at the insurgents. In the same vein the field manual has an extensive section on the eminence of intelligence in counterinsurgency. Here the function of intelligence is to inform precise operations against the insurgents. Acquiring contextual knowledge of the environment is not mentioned.[1004]

With the benefit of two decades of hindsight, the most conspicuous omission in the AFM with regard to information operations is the lack of contemplation on nascent media such as the internet. While digitalization and Network Centric Warfare featured heavily in thinking on future conventional war at the time, it is notably absent in AFM 1-10. Still, with its emphasis on non-kinetic activities and the attention awarded to the role of Islamic fundamentalism, the 2001 version of AFM 1-10 offered a conceptual foundation for counterinsurgency operations in the twenty-first century.

5.2.3: Previous deployments

As the Army Field Manual of 2001 describes, the British Army had extensive experience with 'small wars'. Before deploying to Helmand in 2006, the Army had recently been engaged in

1003 Ibidem, p. B-2-9.

1004 Ibidem, p. B-6-2.

a domestic conflict spanning more than 30 years in Northern Ireland, contributed to both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and helped invade Iraq in 2003 before becoming embroiled in a vicious insurgency in Basra. By describing these recent experiences and the salient observations, the impact of the missions on the army on the eve of the Helmand campaign can be gauged.

5.2.3.1: Operation Banner: counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland

Lasting from 1969 to 2007, the British Army's campaign in Northern Ireland was its longest in modern history. Operation Banner, as the army called the campaign, saw approximately 300,000 service members deployed to the conflict over the years.[1005] At the height of the campaign in the early 1970's, 28,000 troops were active in Northern Ireland. Throughout Operation Banner, over 600 British service members were killed by enemy activity.[1006]

After an eruption of violence and civilian unrest in 1969, the army was called in to separate Irish republican nationalists and British loyalists. Initially, the deployment of several army battalions helped to restore a modicum of calm to the area, although intermittent rioting continued. However, during 1970 the situation deteriorated, and this escalated in 1971. By this time, the British Army referred to the violence as a classic insurgency waged by Irish republicans. This led to large clearance operations in catholic "no-go areas" that culminated in Operation Motorman in the latter half of 1972. During Motorman, thousands of army troops and security forces flooded these areas and rounded up hundreds of Irish republican militants. Ultimately, the operation was a success as it restored British authority over these areas. At the end of 1972, the "Official Irish Republican Army" declared a cease-fire.[1007] Still, the "Provisional Irish Republican Army" (PIRA) persisted in fighting British dominance and shifted towards a campaign waged through assassination and bombing with varying levels of discrimination. This continued throughout the remainder of the 1970's and 1980's. To be sure, acts of violence were also perpetrated by loyalists.[1008] Furthermore, the British Army has been subject to critique for heavy-handed and counterproductive responses such as interments and "Bloody Sunday" on which 12 catholic protesters were killed.[1009]

1005 Nick van der Bijl (2009). *Operation Banner: The British Army in Northern Ireland*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books., p. 229.

1006 British Army. (2006). *Operation Banner: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland*. Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, p. 1-2.

1007 A. Sanders and I. Wood (2012). *Times of Troubles: Britain's War in Northern Ireland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 62-64: Van der Bijl. *Operation Banner*, p. 65.

1008 Van der Bijl. *Operation Banner*, p. 151-154.

1009 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 2-7.

The violence subsided in the 1990's and the PIRA declared a cease-fire in November 1994. Eventually, a political settlement was reached in 1998 under the "Good Friday Agreement".[1010] Although the British Army was largely a bystander in keeping the peace after 1998, Operation Banner continued as a stabilization mission until 2007.

With the exception of the 'insurgency phase' in the early 1970's, Operation Banner was regarded by the army as a "large scale instance of military assistance to the civil power." In theory this meant that the army supported the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). In practice, the RUC largely was on its own in rural areas while army units had to take the lead in restive urban areas.[1011] This led to a somewhat diffuse situation in which the army had a mostly subservient role but was nonetheless a conspicuous presence in the most volatile parts of Northern Ireland. At the same time, coordination with the RUC and the police was often difficult. Interestingly, the army itself did not draw up a campaign plan for Operation Banner. According to the army itself, this was a consequence of the fact that no general officer had the authority to impose a campaign plan across all lines of operations.[1012]

To command its operations in Northern Ireland, the army established permanent brigade headquarters. These brigades commanded both "resident battalions" that deployed for two years and "roulement battalions" that rotated every four and a half months. With this schedule, the resident battalions could acquire a thorough understanding of the area of operations, while the roulement units were used in the more volatile neighborhoods. With this mixture of rotation schedules the army intended to ensure campaign continuity and lessen pressure on the readiness for other contingencies for the rest of the army.[1013]

From 1972 and onwards, units deploying to Operation Banner received special training that was administered by the Northern Ireland Training Advisory Team (NITAT). Over time, NITAT became proficient in delivering the predeployment training as it focused on the mission, with even providing bespoke preparation for specific areas of operations. Furthermore, the NITAT-staff itself often had experience in Northern Ireland and could bequeath their knowledge on the units under training. As NITAT had close relations with the headquarters in Northern Ireland, it was able to keep abreast of developments in tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) in theatre and incorporate them in the training. Additionally, deficiencies in equipment and doctrine were addressed through NITAT.[1014] In this way, the learning and dissemination mechanisms of the army were closely attuned with the operations in Northern

1010 Van der Bijl. *Operation Banner*, 217-218.

1011 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p 4-2.

1012 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 4-4.

1013 Ibidem, p. 7-1/7-2

1014 Ibidem, p. 7-8/7-9

Ireland. In the 1990's NITAT was rebranded as the Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) as the army had to prepare for other missions such as those in former Yugoslavia.

In the summer of 2006, just before its withdrawal, the British Army took stock of its experience in Northern Ireland. In a study on the operations in Northern Ireland, the Land Warfare Centre sought to capture the "high level general issues that might be applicable to any future counter insurgency or counter terrorist campaign [...].[1015] One of the most important observations according to the study was the lack of central guidance for the campaign. The coordination between the various agencies of government responsible for Northern Ireland was often poor and there was no clear strategy. For future campaigns, the need for a comprehensive plan was noted. Another observation was that the army successfully engaged the PIRA at the tactical level, but that strategic engagement was nonexistent. Furthermore, it identified the omission of unified information campaign as a strategic failure.[1016]

More successful was the incorporation of intelligence into the army's operations. Where on the onset of the campaign little actionable intelligence was available, the army intensified its intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination. Highly specialized units were established to gather human intelligence while concurrently regular infantry units also were tasked with surveillance operations.[1017] Another identified best practice was the extensive use of permanent observation posts. Somewhat akin to guard towers at elevated terrain features, the posts allowed for persistent surveillance and establishing of 'pattern of life' assessments.[1018] With the increasing quality of intelligence, helped by the local knowledge that accrued over time, the army was able to detain high ranking members of the PIRA and curtail its operational effectiveness.[1019]

During Operation Banner, the main threat for British service members were Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). As the campaign progressed, the PIRA became more adept in manufacturing highly sophisticated IEDs. In turn, British troops adapted to this threat by developing TTPs to discover IEDs and mitigate their effects. In particular, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel were at the forefront of this fight and they devised doctrine and equipment to counter this threat.[1020]

By its own admission, the British Army was not victorious after a campaign of more than 30 years in Northern Ireland. Rather, "it achieved its desired end-state, which allowed a political

1015 Ibidem, p i.

1016 Ibidem, 8-3.

1017 Sanders and Woods. *Times of Troubles*, p 214-215.

1018 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 5-7.

1019 Ibidem, p. 5-1.

1020 Bruce Cochrane (2012). *The Development of the British Approach to Improvised Explosive Device Disposal in Northern Ireland.* Bedford: Cranfield University p. 285-286; Interview British army warrant officer 1.

process to be established without unacceptable levels of intimidation."[1021] At the close of Operation Banner, it identified the lack of a comprehensive campaign plan and use of information operations to influence perceptions as the most glaring failures of the campaign. Other observations included the centrality of intelligence and the need for restraint in a stabilization mission. A final best practice was the expedited capture and dissemination of tactical lessons from the field through NITAT/OPTAG. Although the army recognized that most lessons from Northern Ireland would not be applicable to other theatres, it argued that the aforementioned general observations should be heeded for new counterinsurgency or stabilization operations.

5.2.3.2: *Return to Afghanistan: 2001-2005*

When the United States unleashed its military might onto Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the 9/11-attacks, the United Kingdom was one of the few allies that could provide a modest contribution to the punitive expedition against Al Qaida and the Taliban-regime.[1022] Ostensibly the British were in the position to caution the Americans on the difficulty of extricating themselves from entanglements from Afghanistan, based on the three wars and multitude of skirmishes the British empire had fought in the country.[1023] Of course, the Americans were adamant that they would not repeat the mistakes made by, among others, the British empire and the Soviet Union.

With the swift defeat of the Taliban regime, the future of Afghanistan remained uncertain. In order to secure the capital Kabul, the UK deployed a force of 200 troops in November 2001 to Bagram airfield, approximately 50 kilometers north of Kabul. After the international community and various Afghan factions had ironed out an agreement on an interim government in December 2001, the focus turned towards its implementation. Prime Minister Blair was keen to provide British troops for an UN-mandated stabilization force that would be separate from the continuing American Operation Enduring Freedom. After deliberations, the UK decided to deploy a divisional and a brigade headquarters (3rd Division and 16 Air Assault Brigade) to lead the initial rotation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). 2 Para battalion formed the main British ground force. This contribution was codenamed Operation Fingal.[1024] Other countries provided additional forces to ISAF that were to provide security for Kabul.

1021 British Army. *Operation Banner*, p. 8-15.

1022 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 80-86.

1023 Eric Sangar. (2016). The pitfalls of learning from historical experience: the British Army's debate on useful lessons for the war in Afghanistan. *Contemporary Security Policy, 37*(2), p. 227-228.

1024 Interview British commanding officer 16; Ten Cate and Van der Vorm. *Callsign Nassau*, p. 97-98.

ISAF was deployed in a tense but generally calm Afghan capital. Beyond patrolling the steers of Kabul, the British troops helped provide development assistance. An additional task was the establishment of an embryonic Afghan National Army, for which the UK deployed instructors.[1025] In June 2002, the British contingent handed over command of ISAF to Turkish troops. Although the UK remained committed to the stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, much of its military focus was shifted to Iraq (see the next subsection). In the spring of 2002, several countries parceled out responsibilities for various sections of Afghan reconstruction. The UK was to become lead nation for counter-narcotics. Over the previous twenty years, Afghanistan had become the world's primary source of opium from its extensive poppy fields. The idea was to interdict the opium flow to the West at its source while at the same time removing the illicit trade as a source of instability from Afghanistan.[1026] Essentially, this plan was still-born, as the opium production in Afghanistan sky-rocketed after 2002.[1027] However, the British lead in counter-narcotics would help shape its future commitment to Afghanistan.

At the beginning of 2003, the international coalition sought to deploy further afield than Kabul. The objective was to help the interim government under Hamid Karzai to extend its writ beyond the capital. To this end, the concept of "Provincial Reconstruction Teams" (PRTs) was adopted from American examples. Relatively small, these civilian-military teams aimed to link the provinces to Kabul by initiating reconstruction projects and engaging with local authorities and security forces.[1028]

In July 2003, the UK deployed a PRT to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in the northern province Balkh. This contribution consisted of approximately 50 troops and representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID). The military component of the PRT was organized in Military Observation Teams (MOTs), comprised of six service members. [1029] Initially, the British operation (codenamed Tarrock) was separate from the ISAF-mission (Fingal).

At the start of the PRT's operations, it focused on supporting the disarmament of the various militias in the region. Furthermore, the MOTs mediated between rivaling power brokers. During their patrols, the MOTs were accompanied by American explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) personnel for counter-IED purposes. Beyond the threat of IEDs and tense situations with militias, the British PRT could operate freely. In May 2004, an additional PRT was

1025 Interview British commanding officer 16; Farrell, *Unwinnable* p. 98-99.

1026 Jack Fairweather (2015). *The Good War: Why We Couldn't Win the War or the Peace in Afghanistan*. London: Vintage, p. 98-105.

1027 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2006, September 2). *Afghan opium cultivation soars 59 percent in 2006, UNODC survey shows*. Retrieved July 27, 2021, from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/press_release_2006_09_01.html

1028 Peter Dreist, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, *From Venus to Mars*. p. 38; Jack Fairweather, *Good War*, p. 131-132.

1029 UK Parliament. (2003, May 8). Afghanistan: Volume 404. London.

established in Faryab province.[1030] Later that year, the PRTs in northern Afghanistan came under the authority of the ISAF-mission. Eventually, operations Fingal and Tarrock were merged into a single British effort: Operation Herrick. By this stage. the UK deployed an infantry battalion for force protection and other duties between the PRTs and Kabul. These rotations were known as the Afghanistan Roulement Infantry Battalion (ARIB).[1031]

Throughout the mission in Northern Afghanistan, the British PRTs would grow to 300 troops and civil servants. The civilian staff of the PRTs acted mainly as advisers to Afghan authorities. Reconstruction efforts were limited, partly due to a lack of funds.[1032] Six months before the end of the mission, FCO and DFID withdrew their personnel from the operation, thereby ending the interagency character of the PRTs.[1033] In the meantime, detachments from the military component started to visit the southern provinces as the UK started to ponder operations in that area as part of a further ISAF-expansion.[1034] In the northern provinces, the situation was relatively calm but started to show signs of deterioration at the end of 2005. One British soldier was killed in October 2005 in Mazar-e-Sharif. In March 2006, the British PRT (Herrick 3) in Mazar-e-Sharif handed over its responsibilities to its Swedish successors. Operation Herrick would continue in the southern province of Helmand, albeit in a vastly different environment.[1035]

5.2.3.3: Operation TELIC: British experiences in Basra

Much has been written about the British decision to support the American invasion in Iraq.[1036] This has been designated as the ultimate manifestation of the United Kingdom's professed interventionist foreign policy under Tony Blair. Furthermore, the wish to maintain the UK's special relationship with the US was a key reason for the British support.[1037] For the purpose of this study, the political controversy surrounding the United Kingdom's participation in the venture to topple Saddam Hussein's regime does not need to be reconstructed. Still, as

1030 Guy Harrison (2014). The time before Helmand: British engagement in northern Afghanistan. In B. Chiari (Ed.), *From Venus to Mars?: Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the European Military Experience in Afghanistan, 2001-2014*. Freiburg: Rombach Verlag, p. 124-126; Farrell, *Unwinnable* p. 134-135.

1031 Harrisson. Time before Helmand, p. 128.

1032 Barbara Stapleton (2015). The civil-military approaches developed by the United Kingdom under its PRTs in Mazar-e Sharif and Lashkar Gah. In W. Maley, & S. Schmeidl (Eds.), *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-military experiences in comparative perspective*. Abingdon: Routledge p. 27-28

1033 Harrisson. Time before Helmand, p. 132.

1034 Interview British army staff officer 18

1035 Harrisson. Time before Helmand, p. 132-133.

1036 See for example The Iraq Inquiry. (2016). *The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary.* London; Patrick Porter (2018). *Blunder: Britain's War in Iraq*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

1037 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 104.

will be discussed throughout this chapter, the political dimension of the participation in the invasion of Iraq had a profound impact on the operations in Helmand.

The main British contribution to the combat phase of the war consisted of a nominal armored division whose objective was to capture the southern city of Basra, home to approximately 1.6 million people. Although the British troops were apprehensive about engaging in urban warfare, they succeeded in capturing the city without becoming embroiled in intense street fighting. When the conventional combat operations ceased at the end of April 2003, the now infamous stabilization phase commenced.[1038]

For the British, responsible for the southeastern provinces of Iraq (or Multi-National Division South-East), the security situation was relatively calm in 2003 and 2004. To some extent, this could be attributed to a genuine relief that Saddam's regime was gone within the Shia-dominated population. According to some voices in the British military this was also a result of its measured approach in and around Basra. Here the British units operated in a manner reminiscent of the peace support operations in former Yugoslavia or the later stages of Operation Banner in Northern Ireland.[1039]

This was in marked contrast to the often heavy-handed conduct by American forces who were faced with intense resistance in places like Bagdad, Ramadi and Fallujah.[1040] According to some observers, both British and American, this difference could be explained by the British Army's aptitude in low intensity conflict, honed over long years of experience in counterinsurgency operations.[1041] Where American forces took on an enemy-centric approach, the British prided themselves on a more friendly posture towards the population. This sentiment was vented by senior British officers like Mike Jackson who was quoted as: "[...] we must be able to fight with the Americans. That does not equal we must fight as the Americans."[1042] Another British critique on the American approach was published by brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster. He stated that the American conventional prowess had led to an overly kinetic approach that "exacerbated the task [of stabilization] it now faces by alienating significant sections of the population."[1043]

However, the apparent benign security situation in Multi-National Division Southeast (MND-SE) was deceptive and had little to do with the ostensibly sophisticated approach by the

1038 Geraint Hughes (2012). Iraqnophobia. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(6), p. 57.

1039 Andrew Stewart. 2013). Southern Iraq 2003-2004: Multi-National Command. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate., p. 79; Alexander Alderson (2012). The British Approach to COIN and Stabilisation: A Retrospective on Developments since 2001. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(4), p. 64-65.

1040 Hughes, Iraqnophobia, p. 57.

1041 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in crisis*, p. 45-46.

1042 House of Commons. (2004, April 20). Defence - Minutes of Evidence. London, Q257.

1043 Nigel Aylwin-Foster (2005). Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations. *Military Review*, 85(6), p. 14.

British troops. The city of Basra was subject to widespread looting and lawlessness. As the British contingent was continually reduced after the invasion, the troops were too thin on the ground to provide security.[1044] Furthermore, some troops in MND-SE became engaged in heavy fighting in the spring of 2004. In particular, the Shia firebrand Moqtada al-Sadr and his militia, *Jaysh al-Madhi* (the Madhi's Army or JAM) asserted themselves across the south. The British commander of MND SE opted to enter negotiations rather than try to engage the militia by force,[1045] much to the chagrin of the American commanders in theatre who advocated a more forceful response.[1046] Essentially, the British troops slowly lost control of MND SE while their numbers continued to dwindle.

Beyond the shrinking military capacity, the British operations were hampered by the near absence of civilian capabilities for reconstruction and governance. Especially DfID had distanced itself from the invasion and subsequent occupation. Representation by civil servants was scarce in Iraq. Recognizing the need for civilian engagement in stability operations, and its interest to share burdens across departments, the Ministry of Defence pushed for enhanced interagency cooperation.[1047] In 2004, the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) was established to foster interdepartmental cooperation. However, the enthusiasm for the PCRU was tepid within the FCO and DfiD. While it was touted as the UK government's agency for stabilization, it was hamstrung by the fact that it answered to the three departments and had no clear mandate of its own.[1048] A first manifestation of the increased civilian contribution was the establishment of a PRT in Basra in the spring of 2006. This proved to be no panacea as the British had generally lost the goodwill of the population and the PRT had teething problems regarding mandate, staffing and resources.[1049]

In 2005 and 2006, the British bases increasingly became subject to shelling by rockets and mortars while militias such as JAM expanded their control over Basra. The remaining 7000 British troops took on a more confrontational stance against the militias, but this only inflamed the violence. By the summer of 2006, the British military assessed that its activities were stoking unrest rather than preventing it. Accordingly, the British were operations in MND SE were curtailed.[1050] Yet, when major-general Richard Shirreff took command of the British contingent in July 2006, he initiated an ambitious plan to retake the city from the militias. Originally called Operation Salamanca, the plan called for a counterinsurgency

1044 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 52-53; Warren Chin 2008). Why Did It All Go Wrong? Reassessing British Counterinsurgency in Iraq. *Strategic Studies Quarterly, 2*(4), p. 128-129.

1045 Andrew Stewart (2013). Southern Iraq 2003-2004: Multi-National Command. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (pp. 79-88). Farnham: Ashgate, p. 85.

1046 Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchack, (Eds.). (2019). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume I: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War, 2003-2006*. Carlisle: United States Army War College Press, p. 300-301.

1047 Daniel Korski (2009). British civil-military integration: the history and steps. *The RUSI Journal, 154*(6), p. 16-17

1048 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 112-113.

1049 Ibidem, p. 60.

1050 David Ucko (2010). Lessons from Basra: The Future of British Counter-insurgency. *Survival, 52*(4), p. 140-141.

approach in which districts of the city were cleared and subsequently small reconstruction activities started. However, the plan was infeasible without additional British resources that were not forthcoming. Furthermore, the Iraqi government did not back the Salamanca plan. Eventually, the plan was scaled-back and by September 2006, the revised Operation Sinbad was launched. Unable to hold territory, the clearing operations failed to make a lasting impact on the security situation in Basra. Still, the British military claimed success while the government declared a further troop reduction (towards 4,500) for 2007. This coincided with the decision by the United States to try to salvage the moribund campaign by "surging" its forces in Iraq and adopting a "population centric counterinsurgency" approach.[1051]

Although the UK faced American political pressure to maintain its troop levels, it persisted in the proposed timeline for withdrawing its commitment to Iraq and to shift its focus to the operations in Afghanistan. In 2007 consecutive British commanders drew up plans to remove British troops from the city of Basra and consolidate at the airport. Bases in the city were to be transferred to Iraqi security forces. British commanders argued that Iraqi forces would not take over responsibility unless British forces left. This withdrawal from Basra, named Operation Zenith, was also part of an agreement with JAM in which the UK curtailed its operations in the city. In return, the JAM agreed to not target the British forces. Effectively, this accommodation and the move to the airport, completed in December 2007 ceded control over Basra to the militias.[1052]

Not beholden to the agreement with the British, JAM strengthened its grip on Basra, as a substantial number of the Iraqi security forces had been infiltrated by the militias. Meanwhile, the British contingent at the outskirts of the city was unable to intervene and continuously received indirect fire. Frustrated with the British impotence, Prime Minister Maliki sought to deliver Basra from its state of lawlessness. Rather impetuously, Maliki launched Operation Charge of the Knights with American support to reclaim the southern city. Plagued by dogged resistance from the militias and lack of preparation, the operation was eventually successful in reestablishing the Iraqi government writ over Basra.[1053] After initial inaction, British troops made a modest contribution to Operation Charge of the Knights. For the remainder of the campaign, the British took on a more active role in mentoring Iraqi forces. Still, the British contingent in southern Iraq grew smaller as the commitment to Afghanistan increased. In the summer of 2009, the last British commander handed over authority to Iraqi and American forces.[1054]

1051 Daniel Marston (2019). Operation TELIC VIII to XI: Difficulties of twenty-first-century command. *Journal of Strategic Studies, 44*(1), p. 65-66.

1052 Joel Rayburn and Frank Sobchak (Eds.). (2019). *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume II: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011*. Carlisle: United States Army War College Press, p. 352-353; Marston. Operation TELIC, p. 69-71.

1053 Rayburn and Sobchak. *US Army in Iraq, Vol II*, p. 360-368.

1054 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 71.

The British contribution to Iraq was a strategic failure. The British troops were unable to bring security to MND SE. Even though they eventually took steps to retake control of Basra, they were not effective due to a lack of resources. With the new campaign planned for Helmand, the United Kingdom proved unwilling and unable to match the American efforts in Iraq. The absence of strategy and scarcity of resources could be attributed to the British political dimensions of the conflict. The British military itself suffered reputational damage from its prosecution of the war, in particular with the American allies.[1055]

The end of British Operations in Iraq heralded a number of evaluations. Of these, the Chilcot Inquiry that examined the political decision-making processes before and during the war is the most well-known. Commissioned in 2009 by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, the "Chilcot Report" proved to be a protracted process and was finally published in 2016.[1056] A main finding in the eventual report was that the British government had chosen to resort to military action in Iraq without exhausting other options. Moreover, it had failed to attain its strategic objectives. It revealed a wide gap between the ambitions and the resources made available, while the British government had failed to reappraise its strategy over the years. Furthermore, there was a lack of coordination amongst the relevant government institutions.[1057] Beyond the political dimension, the Chilcot Report also looked at the role of senior military leadership in the Iraq war, finding that the start of Operation Herrick in Afghanistan from 2006 had overstretched the military in terms of personnel and capabilities. Additionally, the Ministry of Defence was unresponsive in recognizing and addressing capability gaps. [1058] However, the main critique of the Chilcot Inquiry remained directed at the governmental level.

Besides the public Chilcot Inquiry, two internal post-mortems were initiated in the Ministry of Defence. At the departmental level, an "Operation Telic lessons compendium" for the strategic echelons was drafted by lieutenant-general Chris Brown in 2010. Key findings of the report included the lack of a coalition strategy after the initial invasion, the absence of a comprehensive approach across government and "widespread sense that Operation Telic was a temporary distraction from normal Defence business [...].[1059] The latter observation was compounded by the six-month rotation schedule that hindered campaign continuity. A further interesting observation was that the British military "was complacent and slow in recognising and adapting to changing circumstances" and that after "a relatively benign

1055 See Jonathan Bailey, Richard Iron and Hew Strachan (Eds.). (2013). *British Generals in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate p. 332-333; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 72-74.

1056 Simon Akam, *The Changing of the Guard*, p. 512-517.

1057 Iraq Inquiry. *Executive Summary*, p. 109-110.

1058 Ibidem, p. 126-127.

1059 Iraq Study Group. (2011). *Operation TELIC lessons compendium*. London: available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16787/operation_telic_lessons_compendium.pdf

decade of peacekeeping in Northern Ireland and the Balkans" it was unable to take on the challenge posed by the insurgency in Iraq.[1060]

The other internal evaluation report was instigated by the Land Warfare Centre of the British Army and published in 2010. Written in the same vein as the Operations Banner evaluation, the remit was at the tactical level.[1061] The report, published in 2010 posited that some experiences from Iraq held relevant lessons for Afghanistan but potentially also for future operations. In the summary of the events from the period from January 2005 to the withdrawal in 2009, there was no real judgment on decisions made by British commanders on the ground.[1062] Essentially, it reads as if divisional and brigade commanders were subject to external forces like the US, the Iraqi government, local militias and their own government. As a result, the extent of genuine scrutiny at the command levels in MND-SE was limited.

Still, the evaluation identified institutional failings that contributed to the difficulties the British contingents faced in Iraq. First of all, there was the misdiagnosis of the character of the conflict. The British troops in general did not recognize that they were facing an insurgency in MND SE and act accordingly. Instead, they focused on Security Sector Reform (SSR) and transitioning authority to Iraqi authorities. In large part, this was driven by the continuous pressure of reducing the troop levels in Iraq. Yet, this focus on SSR was not only misguided, but it also suffered from the inability of British troops to embed with Iraqi units due to political constraints for reducing risks. It was not until Operation Charge of the Knights that combat mentoring was allowed. [1063] Another observation was that the understanding of formal counterinsurgency doctrine was limited and mostly based on informal individual experiences from the later phases of Operation Banner. As a result, initially the campaign was approached as a peace support operation in which the army's role was more indirect.[1064] Other identified deficiencies were inadequate campaign continuity, scarcity of trained linguists and cultural understanding.[1065]

A further prime observation was that the intelligence picture was inadequate. Commanders and their units were unable to discern and target the insurgent networks across MND SE. This was caused by a lack of preparation, under-trained intelligence personnel, over-centralization of intelligence capabilities and lack of databases to ensure the building of a knowledge repository.[1066] Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were considered to be the main threat for

1060 Ibidem

1061 Actually, this evaluation comprises three volumes: the conventional phase, operations in 2004-2005 and the rotations from 2006 to 2009. The third volume is publicly available

1062 British Army. (2010). *Operations in Iraq: An Analysis from a Land Perspective.* Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, p, ii.

1063 British Army. *Operations in Iraq*, p. 73-75.

1064 Ibidem, p 1-3/1-4.

1065 Ibidem, p. 1-5/1-8.

1066 Ibidem, p. 2-2/2-5.

the British troops, especially technological sophisticated shaped charges that were provided by Iran to the insurgents. Although the army implemented new drills and eventually added better protected vehicles to its inventory, in general the counter-IED effort was deemed as insufficient. For instance, offensive operations to target the networks behind the IEDs were inadequate.[1067] Although the report is relatively mild on the Army's performance in Iraq, it states: "it appears that for every successful adaptation for Op TELIC there was an equivalent failure to adapt."[1068] Moreover, with regard to the value of intelligence, the army had failed to institutionalize this hard-won lesson from its colonial campaigns and Northern Ireland.[1069]

Both these MoD-sanctioned reports were for internal consumption and were only later made available to the wider public after requests under the "Freedom of Information Act" and in a slightly redacted form.[1070] An interesting side-note to the Iraq Compendium by general Brown is that the Ministry of Defence explicitly stated that it did not share all the judgments therein.[1071] Furthermore, the public dissemination of the LWC report was initiated by its main author, brigadier Ben Barry.[1072] As these evaluations were published in the middle of the Helmand campaign, the lessons they contained chimed with the initial observations from Op Herrick. As will be described in subsection 5.3.3, the British military increased its efforts to implement lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan from 2009.

5.2.4: Decision to deploy and preparation

Operations in Iraq loomed large over the deployment to Helmand. As the following subsections will show, the decision for the mission itself was influenced by the unpopularity of the British presence in Iraq. Furthermore, the enduring commitment to Iraq constrained the resources available to the Afghan campaign.

5.2.4.1: The political decision

In comparison to the contentious decision to invade Iraq, the political run-up to Helmand was not extensively debated in the public domain. Part of this difference was that British troops had already been deployed to Afghanistan and the campaign there was considered the 'good

1067 Ibidem, p. 4-11/4-13.

1068 Ibidem, p. 11-4.

1069 Ibidem, p 11-9.

1070 Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 502-504.

1071 Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Operation TELIC Lessons Compendium - MOD Statement (5th April 2011)*. London available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16786/operation_telic_lessons_compendiumMOD_statement_05042011.pdf

1072 Iraq Study Group. (2011). *Operation TELIC lessons compendium*. London.

war'.[1073] As early as April 2004, Prime Minister Blair announced that the UK would increase its contribution to ISAF. The British-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) headquarters would deploy and oversee the ISAF-expansion to the southern provinces. This came as a surprise, as the ARRC was preparing for a tour in Iraq.[1074] In addition to the deployment of ARRC, the Ministry of Defence initiated planning in early 2005 to shift its operations from northern Afghanistan to the south. As such, the UK would take a lead role in ISAF Stage-III with the support of Canada and the Netherlands.[1075]

The political logic underpinning the UK's commitment to southern Afghanistan cannot be separated from the war in Iraq. While operations in southern Iraq seemed to be going well in mid-2004, domestic support for the British presence there was ever declining.[1076] Therefore the UN-mandated ISAF campaign was far less controversial. If the UK would take larger responsibility for the Afghan war it could extricate itself from Iraq. A further incentive was that the Afghan campaign had been hampered by the lack of attention as the US had shifted its focus to Iraq. With the expansion to the south, Blair hoped to revive the international mission in Afghanistan and concurrently reinforce the UK's status as the US' principal ally.[1077]

For their part, the military leadership welcomed the prospect of deployment to southern Afghanistan. Lieutenant general Robert Fry, responsible for strategic planning at the Ministry of Defence, saw Afghanistan as an opportunity to draw down British forces from Iraq while retaining its stature as partner to the US military. At this stage, although unpopular, the British operations in Iraq were still seen as a relative success.[1078] Still, the Army was keen to extricate itself from Iraq. A new deployment to Afghanistan would provide the opportunity to do so.[1079]

In January 2005, the Chiefs of Staff recommended as such to the Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon.[1080] A month later, Hoon announced the government's intention to deploy troops to southern Afghanistan to parliament. In contrast to the Netherlands, this declaration did not spark a fraught debate at the time.[1081] Later on, the decision to commit forces to Helmand

1073 Nick Beadle (2011). Afghanistan and the Context of Iraq. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-2006* (pp. 73-80). Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute, p. 74-75; Jack Fairweather, *The Good War*, p. xxi-xiv

1074 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p.140-141

1075 Michael Clarke (2011). The Helmand Decision. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-2006* (pp. 5-29). Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute, p. 15-16.

1076 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 153-154.

1077 Matt Cavanagh (2012). Ministerial Decision-Making in the Run-Up to the Helmand Deployment. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(2), p. 50-51.

1078 Fairweather, *Good War*, p. 146-148.

1079 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 147-148.

1080 Ibidem, p. 141.

1081 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 155-156.

became more contentious when this process was debated during the Chilcott-inquiry. Within the government and armed forces, it was felt that a British deployment was essential to the success of the ISAF-mission. By extension, NATO's efforts in Afghanistan were seen as crucial for the functioning of the transatlantic alliance.[1082]

Although early planning efforts had already begun in 2004, the preparation to the UK's swing to southern Afghanistan shifted into higher gear in the spring of 2005. However, the choice for the area of operations was pre-empted by Canada who opted for Kandahar as a non-negotiable condition for its troop contribution.[1083] British officers saw Kandahar as the most important province in the south and thus as the right area for the British deployment. However, the deployment of a Canadian task force was crucial for the viability of ISAF-Stage III and thus the UK relented and chose to deploy to Helmand instead.[1084] As this adjacent province held the largest acreage for poppy cultivation, this aligned with the UK's role as lead nation for counter-narcotics in Afghanistan.[1085] In the literature, the choice for Helmand has been derided due to the historical enmity the population felt for the British within the area. In 1880, during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, a British brigade was annihilated by Pashtun tribe members in the Battle of Maiwand. Twenty-first century Helmandis saw the return of the British as them seeking revenge for this defeat.[1086] Of course, this would not have been different in Kandahar province where the battle actually took place. In any case there was no real alternative for the British to deploy to Helmand, given the political considerations within the alliance.

The initial strength of the first rotation to Helmand was capped at 3,150 troops, based on the advice from military planners. As described in the literature, this number was considered as "what the market would bear". Furthermore, no more troops were available at the time due to the enduring commitment in Iraq.[1087] Although there was some apprehension within the Ministry of Defence that this number was too small for the task at hand, the military leadership signed off on this number as viable. Capabilities that were in short supply such as helicopters and intelligence assets would cause some "pain and grief".[1088] With this consent of the military advisers, the government's plan to deploy to Helmand could proceed.

1082 Cavanagh. Ministerial Decision-Making, p. 50.

1083 Matthew Willis (2012). Canada in Regional Command South: Alliance Dynamics and National Imperatives. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers*. Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute p. 58-62.

1084 Elliot. *High Command*, p. 130-132.

1085 Fairweather. *The Good War*, 159-161.

1086 See Mike Martin (2017). *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict*. London: Hurst & Co, *p. 159.*; this is repeated by Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 107. and Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 156.

1087 Elliot. *High Command*, p. 163; Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 158-159.

1088 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2011, July 6). Operations in Afghanistan Fourth Report of Session 2010–12. London, Q450.

Still, the actual decision was postponed, in part by the heated parliamentary debate in the Netherlands on its deployment to Uruzgan. Within the British government, the concurrent deployment of Canadian and Dutch forces was seen as critical to the feasibility of the British mission in Helmand. Further preconditions raised by Reid were that the deployment was financed in full by the Treasury and the funding for development program would be furnished by DfID and the Americans.[1089] Satisfied that the Dutch would deploy, Reid presented the plan for deployment to a Cabinet meeting in January 2006 and secured its approval.[1090] Reid announced the deployment of the British Task Force to Helmand on 26 January 2005, although the Dutch deliberations had not yet concluded. This timing meant that deployment itself was pushed back to commence in April.[1091]

Although Parliament had not been consulted prior to the decision, the House of Commons Defence Committee did query aspects of the Helmand deployment.[1092] The British objectives as communicated to parliament were: "Enhancing stability and security through the deployment of the 16 Air Assault Brigade; Long term reconstruction through the Provincial Reconstruction Team based at Lashkar Gar (sic.); and containment of the opium trade by working with and developing the capability of the Afghan National Army."[1093] Issues that were raised included the coordination with US forces (Operation Enduring Freedom), the deployment of allies and the security situation in southern Afghanistan. While some of the questions by the committee were not resolved by the Cabinet, it generally supported the mission.[1094] While the political decision was reached over the winter of 2005-2006, the Ministry of Defence and the other relevant departments were drafting the plans for deploying into Helmand.

5.2.4.2: The Joint UK Plan for Helmand and force configuration

As the decision to deploy was pondered, the selection for Helmand province had to a certain extent been forced upon the UK. Preliminary operations for Helmand started in September 2005. Intelligence on the province was scarce at the time. The only coalition troops present in Helmand consisted of an American special forces detachment with a PRT. With the narrow scope of hunting Al Qaeda-operatives, the Americans had little understanding of the local dynamics in the largest of Afghan provinces. As such, there was little knowledge to

1089 Ibidem, p. 24-25.

1090 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 138.

1091 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 178.

1092 Ibidem, p. 178-19.

1093 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2006, April 6). The UK deployment to Afghanistan: Fifth Report of Session 2005–06 HC 558. London, p. 16.

1094 Ibidem, p. 29-31.

be transferred to the British planners.[1095] Reconnaissance missions earlier in the year had garnered some insight on the terrain, expected resistance and governance of the province.[1096] Subsequent reports advised the deployment of a 6,000 strong task force. However, this advice was rebuffed as being politically unfeasible.[1097]

The province, Afghanistan's largest in terms of land mass, consists mainly of arid desert which are more mountainous in the north. It is dominated by the river Helmand that runs from north to south, with the Helmand basin providing the water for the irrigation works that sustain the population of 1.5 million. Ideally suited for poppy cultivation, Helmand has been one of the foremost centers of opium production worldwide.[1098] Along with drug trafficking, lack of access to scarce water, inter-tribal rivalries and shifting allegiances contributed to a patchwork of local conflicts of which the British were largely unaware.

In December 2005, the UK made the fateful decision of lobbying for the removal of the incumbent provincial governor, Sher Mohammed Akhunzada. A friend of President Hamid Karzai, Akhunzada was considered a source of instability in the province as he used his militia and the police - to a considerable extent these were interchangeable - to extort the population and eliminate rival power brokers. Moreover, Akhunzada was a key player in the drug trade. Based on this intelligence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office asked Karzai to replace him as the governor of Helmand. Although the analysis on Akhunzada was correct, the effects of this decision were not thought through. He was replaced by Mohammed Daoud, a technocrat without meaningful connections in the province. In the meantime, the formal sacking of Akhunzada did little to diminish his informal influence in the province. Yet he claimed that he no longer could support his fighters who subsequently changed sides to the 'Taliban' and would fight the British troops in the next year.[1099] The effect of this British interference in local politics would have severe repercussions in 2006.

PJHQ initiated a reconnaissance and planning mission for Helmand in October. Based in Kandahar, a team comprised of 70 service members set out to draw up a campaign plan. A month later, the military contingent was joined by a planning team from the newly established PCRU. The two teams quickly coupled their efforts. With this interagency collaboration one of the key deficiencies of the planning for the Iraq War seemed to be addressed, albeit in an

1095 Valentina Soria (2011). Flawed 'Comprehensiveness': The Joint Plan for Helmand. In M. Clarke (Ed.), *The Afghan Papers: Committing Britain to War in Helmand, 2005-2006*. Abingdon: Royal United Services Institute. p. 36; Chin, Colonial Warfare, p. 230

1096 Ed Butler (2015). Setting Ourselves up for a Fall in Afghanistan: Where Does Accountability Lie for Decision-Making in Helmand in 2005–06? *RUSI Journal*, *160*(1), p. 47.

1097 Interview British army staff officer 18; Grandia. *Deadly Embrace*, p. 163-164; See also Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars*, p. 164.

1098 Elliot, *High Command*, p. 132.

1099 Martin, *An Intimate War*, p. 153-154.

informal fashion.[1100] For their part, the FCO and DfID were reluctant to contribute to the planning and the mission itself.[1101]

The planning assumption for the Joint Helmand Plan was that the mission focus would be one of stabilization and reconstruction. Further guidance from Whitehall was limited to the constraints of the cap on force levels, a mission period of three years, a budget of 1.3 billion pounds and the inclusion of a counter-narcotics element. The interagency planners argued that, given the time frame and resources, it was unrealistic to attain the government's "Interim Aim for Afghanistan". Those goals were paraphrased as: "an effective representative government in Afghanistan, with security forces capable of providing an environment in which sustainable economic and social development can occur, without substantial security support by the international community". Moreover, the interagency planning team stated that it lacked sufficient intelligence about the province to draw up a sustainable plan. However, the planners were rebuffed by London and told that neither the aim nor the resources would be adjusted.[1102] Beyond these understandable misgivings, a more fundamental question was how the mission in Helmand would help attain these ambitious objectives.

Nevertheless, a Joint UK Plan for Helmand was produced in December 2005 that sought to work within the imposed constraints. The plan envisioned the creation of an Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) in a "lozenge" around Camp Bastion, the main British FOB, and the towns of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk in central Helmand. As the most populous part of the province, this was the natural focus for the British operations. By concentrating forces and reconstruction efforts in the ADZ, the plan envisioned to foster economic activity and improve governance within a secure environment. From here, the ADZ could be expanded over time, thereby enlarging the writ of the Afghan authorities.[1103] As such it adhered to a classical "ink-spot" approach.[1104] Despite this counterinsurgency connotation, the Joint Helmand Plan was developed for a relatively permissive environment akin to a peace support operation.

By their own admission, the planners saw that the Joint Helmand Plan was insufficiently detailed to serve as a campaign plan. Moreover, the JUKPH was based on an inadequate intelligence picture. Therefore, they recommended extended reconnaissance and intelligence gathering during the preliminary phase so that the plan could be adjusted while

1100 Grandia. *Deadly Embrace* p. 174-175.

1101 Tom Rodwell (2011). *Between the idea and the reality: the evolution and application of the Comprehensive Approach. Hollow men and doctrine in Helmand?* London: King's College, p.19; Soria, Flawed Comprehensiveness, p. 32-33.

1102 Rodwell. *Idea and the reality*, p. 20.

1103 Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon (2009). COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal*, 154(3), p. 20.

1104 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_2.

the mission was being established.[1105] However, the focus of preliminary operations in early 2006 was the construction of Camp Bastion, and intelligence assets were scarce due to the commitment to Iraq. Of course, at the same time the removal of Akhunzada eliminated a potential source of information for the UK. Although warning signs about a resurgent Taliban were communicated by sources on the ground, these did not lead to an adjustment of plans.[1106] Finally, despite the good cooperation in Afghanistan, the JUKPH was not well received in London. It was regarded as too cautious. Furthermore, the Cabinet Office was incredulous about the professed lack of intelligence on Helmand.[1107] Both aspects signify the divide between expectations in the UK and the personnel on the ground. Perhaps even more injuring to the plan was that none of the various ministries took ownership of it. Consequently, the JUKPH devolved into "an amalgamation of [...] departmental plans, stitched together at the seams."[1108]

As a consequence, the augurs for the JUKPH did not bode well. It was to be implemented by two separate entities: the interagency Helmand PRT and the military Task Force Helmand (TFH). The PRT, led by the FCO was responsible for development, governance and counternarcotics. Its initial strength was comprised of around 50 personnel from the FCO, DfiD, PCRU and the military. Still, the contribution of civil servants was limited.[1109] The PRT was collocated with the military Task Force Helmand (TFH)-staff in Lashkar Gah. To coordinate the activities of the PRT and TFH, a "Helmand Executive Group" (HEG) was established. However, there was variance in the level of buy-in from the various ministries to this HEG, while all members still had to report to their respective hierarchies.[1110]

16 Air Assault Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Ed Butler, was to form the first rotation (Herrick 4) of TFH and was thus responsible for providing security in the ADZ. It received the warning order in August 2005 to deploy in the beginning of 2006.[1111] The organization of the military task force consisted of a single battle group, formed around 3 battalion of the Parachute Regiment. Although it was augmented with light armored fighting vehicles such as the Scimitar and Spartan, the battle group relied for ground mobility mostly on soft-skinned Land Rover vehicles. A battery of 105mm light guns would provide fire support. [1112] Additionally, Task Force Helmand (TFH) included a unit of engineers, explosive ordinance disposal teams, intelligence support and combat service support elements. An Operational

1105 Rodwell. *Idea and the Reality*, p. 21.

1106 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 160-162.

1107 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 157.

1108 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2010, March 18). The Comprehensive Approach: the point of war is not just to win but to make a better peace HC 224. London, Ev. 140 paragraph 22.

1109 Rodwell. *Idea and the Reality*, p. 24: Soria. Flawed Comprehensiveness, p. 40.

1110 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_2.

1111 Ed Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 50.

1112 Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 156.

Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) formed the linkage to the Afghan National Army in the province.[1113] a Danish reconnaissance squadron and an Estonian mechanized infantry company supported the British forces. Both contingents were fully integrated into the TFH without national caveats.[1114] A Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) provided air mobility with four Lynx and six CH-47 Chinook helicopters. Eight AH-64 Apache attack helicopters were attached for air support.[1115] Furthermore, GR-7 Harrier jets were deployed for fixed wing air support. Overall, just 800 of the troops of TFH were available for operations (and these not even concurrently). The rest of the Task Force was made up of staff and combat service support.

From the perspective of Task Force Helmand, the trepidation with regard to the force configuration was felt even more keenly than back in London. Brigadier Butler and his staff continuously reported the inadequacies of the force levels. Beyond increasing levels of chagrin in London, the reporting by TFH produced little result.[1116] Another cause of disagreement for the designated task force was the lack of a campaign plan. 16 Brigade was inadequately represented in the joint planning team and had therefore no ownership of the Joint Helmand Plan. Instead, Butler and his staff produced their own plan. Although it subscribed to the ADZ and the ink-spot approach, 16 Brigade was concerned about the level of resistance it would encounter.[1117] The first rotation of TFH saw its mission as to "conduct security and stabilisation operations within Helmand [...], jointly with Afghan institutions, other government departments and multi-national partners in order to support Government of Afghanistan and development objectives."[1118]

A complicating issue for the mission from the military perspective was the Daedalian national and coalition command structure. Although the staff of 16 Brigade was to be deployed, brigadier Butler would work from Kabul as national commander for the British troops in Afghanistan and thus reporting to PJHQ. In his stead, TFH would be led by a colonel, Charlie Knaggs. This decision was based on the fact that the TFH-commander would report to Regional Command South in Kandahar that was led by the Canadian brigadier-general David Fraser. Until 1 August 2006, the forces were still under command of Operation Enduring Freedom. Consequently, in the initial months TFH would operate under OEF rather than ISAF. Simultaneously, Knaggs and his staff would in practice also report to PJHQ.[1119] Combined with the divided tasks between the PRT and TFH these command-and-control arrangements precluded a unity of command.

1113 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 48-49.

1114 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-2_2.

1115 Ibidem, p. 3-5_3.

1116 See Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 157-158, Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 50-51

1117 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 49-50.

1118 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_3

1119 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, 1-1_4 - 1-1_5; Rodwell. *Idea and the Reality*, p. 22; Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 169-170.

Thus, the Joint Helmand Plan suffered from three fundamental defects. First of all, it was based on a sketchy understanding of the local environment and the nature of the conflict. Secondly, it was too ambitious in what it could achieve in the span of three years with the resources available to the mission. A third flaw was that it was not sufficiently coordinated with the military Task Force Helmand (TFH) that was to deploy to Helmand in the spring of 2006 and responsible for delivering the security for the ADZ.

5.2.5: Sub conclusion

Before the British troops were deployed to Helmand, the mission was mortgaged due to several factors. On the political front, the deployment was the result of a combination of liberal interventionism and the wish to augment the special relationship with the United States. Both aspects were prime political considerations during the governments of Tony Blair. At the time of the decision, deployment to Southern Afghanistan seemed to provide an exit from the unpopular campaign in Iraq. As Afghanistan was considered to be the "good war", this deployment did not lead to a contentious political debate. From the perspective of the armed forces, and in particular the British Army, the move to southern Afghanistan was welcomed as they felt constrained in Iraq. Operations there were hampered by a lack of resources, negligible interagency support and ever-decreasing political attention.

Ostensibly, the British Army was well placed to conduct a stabilization mission in Afghanistan based on its extensive experience in Northern-Ireland. The lessons from this campaign were enshrined in a recent counterinsurgency doctrine. However, as events in Iraq later proved, this knowledge was applied selectively if at all. Despite the vaunted British knack for 'small wars', the army's culture was more conducive to conventional warfare. Its war fighting ethos, underpinned by the "manoeuvrist approach" and "mission command", espouses initiative and offensive action. After 2005, the British inability to contain the violence in Basra showed that there was no innate proficiency for counterinsurgency in the army. Instead, the situation there started to highlight some of the deficiencies such as understanding of the environment and non-kinetic capabilities.

However, as the British Army sought to deploy to Helmand, the enduring operations in Iraq constrained its resources. Consequently, the Task Force was capped at slightly more than 3,000 service members, of which approximately 600 were available for patrolling. Despite misgivings of military planners and the brigade that was to deploy, the military leadership was unwilling to challenge their political masters and signed off on these numbers. In an attempt to redress a deficiency in Iraq, the UK also deployed a PRT to support TFH with fostering governance and economic development. The newly established Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit even assisted the military planners for the Helmand deployment.

Together, the civilian and military planners wrote an ambitious plan for Helmand yet warned that the mission was under-resourced and still lacked a clear intelligence picture on the local dynamics. However, the Cabinet could not be discouraged from its ambitions nor moved to provide more personnel. Therefore, the mission to Helmand was weighed down from the outset by an overoptimistic outlook of what the British troops could achieve there.

5.3: The Campaign

With the context of the British deployment established, the examination of learning processes at the campaign level largely follows the structure of the Dutch case study. Again, a broad overview of the British operations is provided to analyze the adaptations at the campaign level. Furthermore, attempts to develop a form of operational analysis are assessed. The final part of this section analyzes the conscious effort by the British Army to enhance its learning process through Operation Entirety and its effects. All these aspects are naturally examined through the theoretical lens offered in chapter 2.

5.3.1: Overview of the campaign and its plans

5.3.1.1: Initial rotations, 2006 -2007

The decision to postpone the deployment of Task Force Helmand due to the Dutch handwringing in parliament had adverse effects on the security situation in the province. With the removal of Akhunzada, the internecine rivalries in Helmand caused a power vacuum that anti-government forces could exploit. In the first half of 2006, outlying district centers in Helmand were on the verge of being overrun by insurgents. Compounding the security situation was that the former governor, Sher Mohammed Akhunzada, had cut his powerful militia loose and set his men to work against the British forces. Ironically, the well-intentioned removal of Akhunzada thus further destabilized the province.[1120]

Beset by a degrading security situation and lacking a power base of his own, the new provincial governor Daoud was dependent on the British forces to help exert his authority. However, the troops slowly trickled in from April 2006 and thus their operational reach was limited. Moreover, an incredulous Daoud found out that just a small portion of TFH was available for combat operations. Still, the governor cajoled the British to move to the beleaguered district centers in northern Helmand. Eventually, Butler relented and dispatched troops in May to Now Zad and Musa Qalah in the north. Subsequently, Daoud asked for British troops

1120 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p 153-154.

to help secure Sangin, a district to the northeast of the ADZ. Later on, Kajaki in the North and Garmsir in the south were graced by British presence in small outposts.[1121]

Much has been written on the decision to parcel out the available troops in platoon houses in northern Helmand, including individuals in military hierarchy.[1122] However, as Butler himself and others have indicated, the decision to move beyond the "lozenge" was not taken in isolation.[1123] As fateful as this move was, the exact attribution of the decision in itself is not relevant for the purpose of this study. Instead, it is indicative of the command-and-control structure in which the British forces operated.[1124] In his own words on the decision on platoon houses Butler was probably correct when he stated that 16 AASB would be: "damned if we did, damned if we didn't".[1125] It is hard to fathom what the political repercussions of denying Daoud's requests would have been.

Over the summer, the various platoon houses came under heavy assault by insurgents. The British soldiers came under siege in their outposts in the far-flung district centers. Although some of these locations came close to being overrun, the troops held fast. However, the heavy fighting wrought much destruction in the vicinity of their small bases, especially as the British forces had to rely on air support and indirect fire to beat back the assaults.[1126] For instance, the town of Now Zad was virtually razed.[1127] In this way, fire power had to compensate for the lack of troops on the ground. Furthermore, the platoon house concept fixed the British troops in place, thereby ceding the initiative to the adversary. An additional strain on the British was the need to resupply the platoon houses; often, the only viable way was to ferry supplies by the scarce helicopters as the roads were too insecure.[1128]

As such, the occupation of the platoon houses had profound effects on the fledgling campaign. First of all, the gradual approach as envisioned in the Joint Helmand Plan was immediately jettisoned. This impeded the ability to develop the ADZ around Lashkar Gah and Gereshk as most troop were committed to the attempt to secure peripheral districts.[1129] Secondly, the heavy fighting over the outposts had wrought much destruction and displaced many Helmandi citizens. As such, the British presence had a destabilizing effect

1121 Elliott. *High Command*, p. 134

1122 See Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 54; David Richards (2014). *Taking Command*. London: Headline Publishing Group, p. 207 and 243. Michael Clarke and Valentina Soria (2011). Charging up the Valley: British Decisions in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal*, *156*(4), p. 84-85.

1123 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 54.; Elliott. *High Command*, p. 135.

1124 Clarke and Soria, Charging up the Valley, p. 86.

1125 Butler. Setting ourselves up, p. 54-55.

1126 Chin, Colonial Warfare, p. 236-237.

1127 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 191.

1128 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p.175-178.

1129 Antony King (2010). Understanding the Helmand Campaign. *International Affairs*, *86*(2), p. 315.

on the province. Naturally, these effects were at odds with the professed stabilization and reconstruction mission. A third consequence was that after the summer of hard fighting, the platoon houses could not be easily abandoned lest this was seen as a defeat for the British and the wider ISAF-effort.[1130] To be sure, in Musa Qala an accommodation was reached with local elders that allowed British troops to withdraw from the district under the condition that they would keep the Taliban at arm's length. Crucially, governor Daoud supported such agreements, although other Afghan authorities had their misgivings. However, in the winter of 2006-2007 it became clear that the Taliban roamed Musa Qala at will and the elder that had brokered the deal had been murdered.[1131] By then, President Karzai had sacked governor Daoud and replaced him with Asadullah Wafah

In the meantime, 16 Air Assault Brigade was succeeded by 3 Commando Brigade in October 2006. TFH's headquarters was now relocated from Kandahar airfield to Gereshk. As a further course correction, the commanding officer of 3 Cdo Brigade was to command TFH in theater.[1132] This formation had 5200 troops under command in recognition of the adverse security situation. Although 3 Cdo Brigade had largely prepared for a stabilization mission, according to the commander classical counterinsurgency concepts had nevertheless been integrated throughout the preparation phase. When fighting erupted in Helmand, the brigade was just conducting its final exercise at Salisbury Plains. This timing precluded an overhaul of predeployment training at the eleventh hour.[1133]

Undeterred, the new Herrick rotation opted for a change of tack as its staff sought to retake the initiative against the insurgents. The incoming commander was free to develop his own campaign plan for the rotation.[1134] Instead of becoming fixed in platoon houses, 3 Cdo Brigade created company-sized "Mobile Operations Groups" (MOGs). Although the "MOG-concept" allowed for aggressive operations, the insurgents still initiated most engagements. Moreover, British presence was inherently transitory as the MOGs were unable to hold ground and control areas for development.[1135] The second rotation had even more firefights with the enemy than 16 Brigade. As a result, the focus was on combat rather than development.[1136]

This did not change with the incoming rotation by 12 Mechanised Brigade. Again, the new rotation (Herrick 6) saw an increase in strength as it numbered 6,500 troops with three battle groups. In addition to numbers, adjustments were made in terms of equipment that were indicative of the character of the mission. First of all, a number of newly acquired Mastiff-

1130 Clarke and Soria. Charging up the Valley, p. 84. See also Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 81-83.

1131 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 166-167.

1132 See in: British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, section 1-1: "Command and Control".

1133 Interview British commanding officer 4.

1134 Interview British commanding officer 4.

1135 King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p. 317, Chin. Colonial Warfare, p. 235.

1136 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 200.

vehicles were brought into theatre to protect troops against the growing IED-threat (see section ....). Secondly, TFH received a Guided Multiple Rocket Launch System (GLMRS). This indirect fire system was able to deliver high explosives over vast distances.[1137] Dispatching the GLMRS to Helmand further reinforced the notion that the mission was a far cry from the envisioned stabilization mission.

The new rotation saw a novel approach to the mission. 12 Brigade was to focus on the ADZ and Sangin to maintain a "persistent presence" among these more populous areas. The staff of TFH professed that counterinsurgency theory had been at the forefront of their conceptual preparation.[1138] In reality, the battle groups were often conducting offensive operations. During this rotation, more patrol bases were established, but this did not translate into increased security, let alone development.[1139] If anything, the level of violence only increased from approximately 500 attacks during 16 Brigade's tour to more than 1000 during 12 Brigade's rotation. Despite the increase in troop levels, the British were spread too thinly to hold the ground they cleared. This was further compounded by the lack of capable Afghan security forces and the lackadaisical attitude of governor Wafa. Furthermore, the reinforcement of the British PRT to 30 civil servants had a limited effect as the security conditions precluded development work in the province.[1140] Therefore, 12 Brigade's commander lamented that the operations had no lasting effect and were like "mowing the grass".[1141]

The arrival of 52 Infantry Brigade in October 2007 under Brigadier Andrew Mackay has been hailed as a step change in the campaign.[1142] 52 Brigade was a "regional brigade" based in Edinburgh, responsible for logistical and administrative tasks. Given the ongoing commitment in Iraq, 52 Brigade was activated for Helmand. This formation was expanded to almost 8,000 troops.[1143] When the new rotation arrived in Helmand, Mackay set out to write his operational design for his tour, as directed by PJHQ.[1144] Yet, guidance from PJHQ or further up the chain of command was not forthcoming.[1145]As with his predecessors, Mackay utilized classical counterinsurgency texts but acknowledged that hitherto the campaign had been too focused on kinetic operations. Although the operational design did not deny the

1137 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 201-202.

1138 Theo Farrell, (2010). Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006–2009. *Jornal of Strategic Studies, 33*(4), p. 577-578.

1139 Chin. *Colonial Warfare*, p. 235

1140 Farrell, unwinnable. p. 204-205.

1141 Anthony King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p. 317.

1142 See Tom Dyson (2020). *Organisational Learning and the Modern Army: a new model for lessons-learned processes.* Abingdon: Routledge, p. 109-110; Farrell. Improving in War, p. 581-582, Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p 96-97.

1143 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 207.

1144 Interview British commanding officer 2

1145 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 209.

value of enemy attrition, it stated that "body counts are a particularly corrupt measurement of success". Instead, the local population was the prize and had to be won over.[1146]

To an extent, David Petraeus had influenced Mackay's thinking, as he had collaborated with Petraeus in Iraq. Later, Petraeus sent Mackay an early copy of FM 3-24.[1147] The influence on Mackay's operational design is apparent as it emphasized the "clear, hold and build"-sequence. Furthermore, it included the American manual's paradoxes that "the more force is used the less effective it is and counterintuitively the more we engage in force protection the less secure we may be."[1148] To win over the population, the British forces essentially had to conduct an influence campaign, based on thorough understanding of the local dynamics. As such, all operations, including the use of force should be working towards effects in the information environment. In support of this operational design, 52 Brigade introduced two innovations: the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF) and the Non-Kinetic Effect Teams (NKET). The former represents an effort to acquire an enhanced understanding of the environment throughout TFH, while the latter implemented non-kinetic influence operations at company level. Importantly, the influence campaign was centrally overseen within the TFH-staff.[1149] These novel aspects in the mission will be analyzed in-depth further on in this chapter.

As a vignette of 52 Brigade's approach, the operation to reestablish control over Musa Qala (operation Mar Karadad) stands out.[1150] It was initiated on request of President Karzai, who had been approached by a certain Mullah Salam in October 2007, posing as a prominent Taliban commander. Salam indicated that he was willing to join the government and could assist in retaking the town under the condition that ISAF would launch an operation to this effect. Moreover, Salam demanded to be named as district governor.[1151]

Despite some misgivings on the British side, Task Force Helmand initiated Operation Mar Karadad to oust the Taliban from Musa Qala. Although the operation was to be led by international forces, TFH was adamant that the Afghan National Army would be the first to enter the town and take credit for the operation. In the preparation phase, Mackay and his OMLT coordinated with the ANA to plan the operation.[1152] True to its rhetoric on the centrality of influence rather than kinetic action, 52 Brigade deployed in force around Musa Qala in November, in a bid to discourage resistance by the Taliban. This was not successful,

1146 Operational Design 52 Brigade

1147 Interview British commanding officer 2

1148 Commander British Forces Op HERRICK 7. (2008). *Counterinsurgency in Helmand Task Force Operational Design*. Lashkar Gah; see also Theo Farrell, unwinnable, p. 211.

1149 Interview British commanding officer 2; British army staff officer 7; American Scholar 1

1150 To be sure, this operation preceded the publication 52 Brigade's operational design.

1151 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 253.

1152 Interview British commanding officer 1; British commanding officer 2.

as the insurgents ramped up violence across the province. Moreover, the operation did not commence in earnest until December as the required Afghan and American forces were not available before then. The operation saw three days of intense fighting before the Taliban skulked away. As had been the plan, the ANA-brigade drove into the town on 12 December.[1153] Ostensibly, the military part of operation Mar Karadad had been successful.

However, as the British leadership in theater recognized, the political aspect was paramount in counterinsurgency. Unfortunately, the venture had been fundamentally derailed on the political plane. First, Mullah Salam was a fraud. Bearing the same name as a more influential Taliban commander, the Salam that was installed after the operation could boast a following of a mere 30 fighters. However, he was well-connected to Sher Mohammed Akhunzada who had vouched for him to Karzai. In the end, Salam proved an ineffective district governor, whose militia clashed with other local powerbrokers such as the new district chief of police.[1154] The effect of the Musa Qala operation was further derailed by the scuttling of the reconciliation process by governor Wafa. In anticipation of rehabilitating former Taliban fighters, a plan was drawn up by the Afghan government and the UN to provide them with vocational training to help their reintegration. This was supported by TFH who prepared to build a camp for this purpose. However, governor Wafa vetoed this and through Karzai had the UN-representatives expelled.[1155] Consequently, operation Mar Karadad's effects were negligible. It shows that despite sound preparation and measured execution, the British understanding of the environment remained woefully inadequate. Moreover, influencing the actions of local authorities proved complicated.

Despite this setback, 52 Brigade, in collaboration with the PRT, endeavored to make a more lasting impact on the mission by drafting a new campaign plan. This Helmand Road Map was based on the operational design and sought to align the British civilian and military activities within a counterinsurgency context. As was the case with his predecessors, Mackay lamented the deficient collaboration between the military and civilian partners.[1156] It lowered expectations from the Joint Helmand Plan to more realistic levels and encompassed the "understand-shape-clear-hold-build"-concept. As such it was more in tune with counterinsurgency concepts than the 2006 Helmand Plan. The Road Map coordinated the activities within nine themes: "Governance and Politics; Rule of Law; Counter-Narcotics; Population Engagement; Health; Education; Agriculture; Infrastructure and Private Sector Development".[1157] Through these themes, the population had to gain trust in the local (informal) authorities and subsequently be linked to formal government structures.

1153 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh; Farrell, unwinnable, p. 219-221.

1154 Mike Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 169-170.

1155 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 221-223.

1156 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh.

1157 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3.

The military effort was to provide security to the communities so that governance and development could take root.[1158] The plan, essentially a bottom-up project, was bought-into across Whitehall. One of the most visible effects was that from 2008 a senior civil servant (equivalent to the rank of major-general) would be the head of the PRT and thus, at least nominally, be responsible for TFH. Additionally, the civilian contingent was increased.[1159] A crucial element of this civilian reinforcement was that Stability Advisers were assigned to districts and cooperated with the Battle Groups there.[1160]

The drafting of the Helmand Road Map forms an, albeit arbitrary, end to the first two years of the Helmand Campaign, spanning four rotations. When the Joint Helmand Plan did not survive its contact with reality on the ground, the successive rotations struggled to come to grips with the increasing violence in the province. As has been described extensively in the literature on the campaign, the rotations had distinct approaches for their mission, sometimes based on regimental culture.[1161] Campaign continuity, or lack thereof, was recognized as a core deficiency in the British mission by the Army.[1162] However, suggestions to remedy this situation by extending or changing the rotation system fell on deaf ears as this would affect unit cohesion within the brigades and the timetable of predeployment training.[1163] Thus this problem was identified, but remained unaddressed. In the meantime, the violence in Helmand only escalated and the kinetic response had a further destabilizing effect. When 52 Brigade emphasized the integration of non-kinetic effects, this was an informal adaptation that could take place through a lack of guidance and campaign supervision. However, the operation to retake Musa Qala proved that, despite a more measured approach, critical factors remained beyond the influence of the British forces. Furthermore, if this change were to bear fruit the British and their coalition partners had to ensure campaign continuity. Whether the Helmand Road Map marked a new phase in the campaign will be explored in the following section.

5.3.1.2: The campaign in limbo, 2008-2009

In the spring of 2008, 16 Air Assault Brigade returned to Helmand. By this time, TFH had grown to more than 8,500 troops. The commander of the brigade, Mark Carlton-Smith,

1158 Farrell and Gordon. COIN Machine, p. 21.

1159 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 231.

1160 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1161 See King. Understanding the Helmand Campaign, p. 325-326; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p 144.

1162 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_11; Interviews British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 1; British commanding officer 2; British commanding officer 14; British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 13.

1163 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p 258; David Betz and Anthony Cormack (2009). Hot War, Cold Comfort: A Less Optimistic Take on the British Military in Afghanistan. *The RUSI Journal*, 154(4), p 27.

stated before his deployment that instead of fighting the insurgents, he sought to undermine their influence. Securing population centers and enhancing governance would be the focus of the new rotation.[1164] With this outlook 16 Brigade would adhere to the Helmand Road Map and continue the approach taken by 52 Brigade. [1165] A seemingly positive development for the British was that the erratic Wafa was replaced by the more competent Gulab Mangal as provincial governor. However, Mangal's past as a communist was regarded negatively among the Helmand population.[1166]

Simultaneously, an American Marine Expeditionary Unit arrived in Helmand to secure southern Garmsir district. The 1,200 U.S. Marines with organic fire support and aircraft were tasked to seal off the border with Pakistan that the ISAF headquarters considered the Taliban gateway into Afghanistan. Although the MEU temporarily provided more boots on the ground, the British were apprehensive about the presumed kinetic focus of the Americans. When they were unleashed in May, the Marines encountered fierce resistance. With eventual support from British forces, the Americans dislodged the Taliban from Garmsir.[1167] In the aftermath, the American troops garrisoned the district until they were relieved by British and Afghan forces in September. This American tactical success underlined the British inability to muster sufficient personnel and resources to secure the province.[1168]

For its part, the new TFH rotation focused on kinetic operations from the start, despite the Helmand Road Map and the rhetoric preceding the tour. In June, the British had yet again mounted an offensive to bring Musa Qala under control, as the reconstruction process never came off the ground due to Afghan politicking. Ultimately, 16 Brigade cannot be blamed for this situation, but it was indicative that TFH was still not able to "hold" and "build".[1169] Other actions by 16 Brigade were more conscious departures from their predecessors; for instance, TCAF was discarded after a few months as unworkable and superfluous.[1170]

More iconic, and unfortunate was 16 Brigade's effort to transport a hydroelectric turbine to the Kajaki dam. The operation, Oqab Tsuka (Eagle's Summit), was a well-intentioned exercise in futility. The idea underpinning the operation was that with a new turbine in place, the Kajaki dam could increase its output and provide over a million Afghans with electricity, help drive development across the south and instrumental in winning the support of the

1164 Farrell and Gordon. COIN Machine, p. 22-23.

1165 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 233.

1166 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 175.

1167 Carter Malkasian (2016). *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 120-124.

1168 Ibidem, p. 128-129.

1169 Chin. Colonial Warfare, p. 236.

1170 See David Wilson and Gareth Conway (2009). The Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework: A Short-lived Panacea. *RUSI Journal*, *154*(1), p. 15.

population.[1171] Misgivings by the PRT and the British ambassador that this project would not deliver on its promises for the foreseeable future went unheeded and the operation was launched in August 2008. As Theo Farrell shows, Carlton-Smith's decision was at least partly informed by the wish to forestall further American critique about British performance.[1172]

To deliver the turbine component from Kandahar Airfield up to Kajaki, a convoy of over a hundred vehicles had to traverse the most volatile parts of Afghanistan. More than 4,000 coalition and Afghan troops were needed for the transport and its security. After a road move of five days, the convoy reached the Kajaki dam. However, the turbine would never be installed and in 2015, the Taliban conquered the district. As such, operation Oqab Tsuka was a drain on scarce personnel that consequently were not available for development and reconstruction activities by TFH. Moreover, as an influencing operation, it displayed the wrong message as it proved the impotence of the international mission to develop Afghanistan. At the end of his tour Carleton-Smith was realistic in his assessment that the war in Afghanistan could not be won militarily but had to be brought to a manageable level to facilitate a political settlement.[1173]

The resilience of the insurgency was demonstrated in subsequent rotations. When 3 Cdo Brigade arrived for their second tour in October 2008, the Taliban launched an offensive against Lashkar Gah. The disposition of TFH's battle groups meant that they were placed in the outlying districts of the province. As such, the Brigade headquarters had to scramble to defend its position. Although the assault was defeated, primarily through employing Apache gunships, it drove home the precarious position of the British in the province. Commanded by one of the authors of the Joint Helmand Plan, the brigade had prepared to focus on protecting the population and fostering development. Again, the conditions in Helmand quickly derailed these plans. To secure the area around Lashkar Gah, TFH launched operation Sond Chara in December 2008.[1174] After heavy fighting, TFH established additional patrol bases to ensure presence in the district of Nad-e Ali. While this stretched the British troops even thinner, it was seen as a start to develop the area and bring it under government control. It shifted the focus from northern Helmand to the central area of the province. To this end, a new battle group was formed, assisted by a stability adviser. Shura's were held with local elders to advertise ISAF's willingness to help them. However, the police commander that the British had in tow was hated by the population and did nothing to endear the international forces. Before long, the British troops were fixed in their new patrol bases by the deployment

1171 See N. Arjomand (2013, January 25). *Eagle's Summit Revisted*. Retrieved July 23, 2021, from Afghanistan Analyst's Network: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02/20130125_Arjomand_Kajaki_Dam_final1.pd

1172 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 239.

1173 Ibidem, p. 240-243.

1174 Ibidem, p. 244-250.

of IEDs.[1175] Yet again, the aftermath of operation Sond Chara demonstrated the ephemeral effects of such operations and the limited ability to secure areas.

The incoming rotation by 19 Light Brigade sought to continue the work by 3 Cdo by focusing on central Helmand. As had become custom by now, the 19 Brigade launched a totemic operation, Panchai Palang (Panther's Claw). The preparation for this operation was helped by the arrival of a new Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) in May 2009. This new American contingent was part of a first step of increased American commitment to Afghanistan by the new US president Barack Obama who wanted to salvage the moribund ISAF-mission.[1176] Numbering over 10,000 troops, the MEB at first deployed to Garmsir and Now Zad, thereby freeing up British units for the new offensive.[1177] Panchai Palang would take place in the vicinity of Nad-e Ali where a number of villages had not been under control of the Afghan government. By clearing this area, TFH aspired to enable its population to vote for the upcoming presidential elections in the summer.[1178]

Panchai Palang was launched mid-June 2009. The operation was met with stiff resistance and the British incurred heavy losses. Panchai Palang was concluded at the end of July with dubious results; July 2009 proved to be the bloodiest month of the Helmand campaign with 22 British soldiers killed. That less than half of those had died during Panchai Palang was indicative of the level of violence throughout the province.[1179] Most emblematic of these was the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Thorneloe, battalion commander of the Welsh Guards. Thorneloe and his driver were killed on 2 July when an IED struck their Viking-vehicle, which was not designed to withstand such blasts.[1180] These sacrifices notwithstanding, TFH could mark little progress. Between the areas that were the objectives of operations Sond Chara and Panchai Palang, less than a thousand Afghans, a small percentage, registered to vote in the presidential elections of August 2009.[1181] Even more damaging to the international effort, although beyond the competency of national task forces, was the widespread fraud in the election which saw Hamid Karzai re-elected.[1182]

Back in the UK, the combination of heavy losses and an apparent lack of progress caused a severe decline in public support for the mission. Although this unpopularity did not extend to the troops themselves, the Helmand campaign was a political liability for the Labour

1175 Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 183-189.

1176 See Bob Woodward. (2010). *Obama's Wars*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 11-12.

1177 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 314-318.

1178 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 255-257.

1179 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 320-326.

1180 See Toby Harnden (2011). *Dead Men Risen: The Welsh Guards and the Real Story of Britain's War in Afghanistan*. London: Quercus Publishing

1181 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 262-263.

1182 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 330-350; Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 263.

government. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who took over from Blair in 2007, had inherited a war in which he did not himself believe.[1183] Furthermore, the ever-increasing costs of the mission had to be balanced against other concerns in the light of the ongoing global financial crisis.[1184]

Meanwhile, the military leadership kept requesting additional resources such as extra troops. Although Brown initially denied those requests, the generals took an indirect approach by letting the Americans ask for additional British troops in 2009. With the arrival of the US Marines in Helmand, Brown relented and over the year troop levels were raised up to 9,500 personnel. However, this did not prevent a public fall-out between the government and military leadership in the summer. As Chief of the General Staff, general Richard Dannatt had been vocal in requesting additional resources for the mission to the government. Not satisfied by its response, Dannatt then went to the opposition and media to vent his frustration over the political unwillingness to resource the war adequately. By his comments, Dannatt brought the issues with the Helmand campaign further into the public domain.[1185] These remarks were indicative of strained civil-military relations at the time in which the military asked for additional resources to pursue the campaign. Although the military received additional material resources, domestic political considerations precluded increasing the troop levels to the requested levels for the increasingly unpopular mission.[1186] However, military leadership, of which Dannatt was a prominent member, shared much of the blame. To be fair to general Dannatt, he had recognized the need for institutional change in the British Army for counterinsurgency operations, yet he was unable to remedy identified shortcomings.[1187]

Ironically, his eventual successor general David Richards felt compelled to put the Army on a genuine campaign footing in April 2009, as he found that a part of the Army was "in denial that we were in a war".[1188] To resolve this deficiency, Richards initiated Operation Entirety (see section 5.3.2.). 2009 would prove to be a pivotal year for the Helmand campaign. On the ground, the British mission seemed to be stuck in a rut. Throughout the campaign TFH tried to stamp out resistance in ever new places but was largely unable to hold and develop previously cleared areas. Although TFH grew to 9,500 troops and the Helmand Road Map was drafted, the campaign had still no viable road to success. If the summer of 2009 was the nadir of the British mission in Afghanistan, developments as the initiation of operation Entirety; the American decision to "surge" its commitment to Afghanistan and the proposed

1183 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 269.

1184 See National Audit Office. (2009). *Support to High Intensity Operations.* London, p. 6-7; Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 127-28.

1185 See for instance Max Hastings (2009, July 20). General Dannatt is a principled man guilty of telling the truth. *Daily Mail.*

1186 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 272

1187 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 130-131.

1188 David Richards cited in: British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxv.

implementation of population-centric counterinsurgency held the promise of improvement. The effects of these changes will be explored below.

5.3.1.3: Surge, concentration, and transition, 2009-2014

In June 2009, just before operation Panchai Palang, President Obama had replaced general David McKiernan with General Stanley McChrystal as commander of ISAF. McKiernan was sacked as Obama was not confident in his ability to reinvigorate the mission through employment of the vaunted population-centric counterinsurgency approach that had been successful in Iraq.[1189] In truth, McKiernan had emphasized counterinsurgency concepts in ISAF plans throughout his command; what was lacking at this stage from a military perspective was a unity of effort within ISAF. The various national task forces operated in their provinces as if they were national fiefdoms with accompanying caveats.[1190] The British troops' somewhat flippant referral to "Helmandshire" had a serious undertone that was indicative of this general ailment of the ISAF-mission. While this had operational consequences, McKiernan's remit to address this political issue was inherently limited.

As the incoming ISAF-commander, McChrystal was confident the situation in Afghanistan could be resolved. In his initial assessment he stated: "While the situation is serious, success is still achievable".[1191] The key objective was to win over the Afghan population. To achieve this, a comprehensive campaign was needed that combined military efforts towards security with economic development and enhancing governance by inter-agency partners.[1192] In July 2009, McChrystal issued a tactical directive for his troops, emphasizing that the war in Afghanistan was not a conventional battle for territory but one for the support of the Afghan people. To this end, he asked that ISAF-personnel exercise restraint in the use of force.[1193] Within ISAF this directive became known as 'courageous restraint' which was somewhat controversial as it increased the risks to the international troops.[1194] Furthermore, new directives iterated that each operation had to be conducted with Afghan Security Forces.[1195] This meant that international troops not only had to engage with Afghan forces in training and combat mentoring through OMLTs but also had to include them in the planning processes. For TFH this meant that the OMLTs had to be expanded to a Brigade Advisory Group to also mentor

1189 See David Barno and Nora Bensahel (2020). *Adaptation under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 220-225

1190 Soria. Flawed comprehensiveness, p. 45.

1191 Commander ISAF (2009, September 21). *COMISAF Initial Assessment (Unclassified)*. Retrieved July 23, 2021, from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.htm

1192 Ibidem

1193 Headquarters International Security Assistance Force. (2009, July 6). Tactical Directive. Kabul.

1194 See Sergio Catagnani (2012). 'Getting COIN' at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army. *Journal of Strategic Studies, 35*(4), p. 531-532; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 153-154.

1195 Interview British commanding officer 5

the ANA-brigade and its staff functions. The idea was that this should help the ANA-brigade to become self-sufficient over time.[1196]

These ideas were not novel, but McChrystal's hand was strengthened by the fact that President Obama staked considerable political capital on the Afghan war. Of course, Obama's willingness to commit resources to Afghanistan was far from limitless. Overall, the American troop levels were raised with 30,000 additional forces assigned, although this was less than McChrystal had requested.[1197] Furthermore, in his address to announce the new American policy for Afghanistan in December 2009, the President explicitly stated the limits of American resolve by announcing that US troop levels would start to draw down after 18 months.[1198] For Helmand, this meant that close to 10,000 US Marines would be deployed there. With this reinforcement the American contribution eclipsed TFH by a wide margin.[1199]

While the Americans debated their role in Afghanistan, the UK took over command of Regional Command South in Kandahar. Under Major-General Nick Carter, RC-South would try to stabilize the provinces and integrate the influx of the additional American forces. As McChrystal's sub-commander, Carter aligned with the new ISAF-directives,[1200] having the Helmand Road Map updated into the "Helmand Implementation Plan" to reflect this. Its most significant shift was the emphasis on "transition of all civil governance and development processes to sovereign [Afghan] agencies and the transfer of all security to licit indigenous government forces."[1201] Crucially, the plan was coordinated with Afghan authorities.

While the new ISAF-leadership tried to revive the mission, a new TFH-rotation by 11 Light Brigade deployed in September 2009. Its commander, Brigadier James Cowan, had drawn-up the rotations campaign plan in accordance with Nick Carter. As such there was more cohesion between the plans at the various levels of command than previously.[1202] While 11 Brigade subscribed to the notion of courageous restraint, fighting in Helmand continued unabated and over its tour, the brigade lost 64 service members.

A central concern for ISAF and TFH was the lack of trustworthy Afghan police officers. As Mike Martin describes the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Helmand were often the cause for conflict rather than the solution. In an attempt to enhance the ANP, Brigadier Cowan and Governor Mangal established a police academy in-province. Interestingly, this was not

1196 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p. 2-4_2

1197 Woodward. *Obama's Wars*, p. 300-306.

1198 See: Barack Obama (2009, December 1). *The New Way Forward - The President's Address*. Retrieved from Obama Whitehouse: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/12/01/new-way-forward-presidents-address

1199 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 367.

1200 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 296.

1201 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3

1202 Interview British commanding officer 14

coordinated with the Afghan Ministry of Interior, but the academy was later embraced. The result was a somewhat improved cadre of police officers that acted as a paramilitary force.[1203] Although TFH had mentored the Afghan Police over the years, it now became a more concerted effort and for the next rotation a Police Mentoring and Advisory Group (PMAG) was established.[1204]

Meanwhile, central Helmand continued to be an irritant to the international troops despite the large clearance operations of 2008 and 2009. In February 2010, operation Moshtarak ("Together") was launched to secure Marjah (by US Marines) and Nad-e Ali (by TFH). Although it was part of a larger effort to secure Kandahar-city, this operation was perceived to be a litmus test for the new approach under McChrystal.[1205] Planned in collaboration with the Afghan security forces, operation Moshtarak was the largest offensive in the Afghan war to date with over 15,000 troops. Underpinning the operation was the thesis that, with the additional troops, ground could be held 'indefinitely,' and its population brought under control by fostering development and governance. In McChrystal's confident words: "We've got government in a box, ready to roll out".[1206] To limit the risks to civilians and give insurgents the chance to lay down their weapons, the offensive was announced publicly before it started. [1207]

When operation Moshtarak was launched, it met with some resistance, but no coordinated defense was mounted by the insurgents. Thus, coalition forces were able to install a new district government in Marjah. However, the Afghan support for the operation was tepid and there was a shortage of capable administrators for the district. When unpacked, the contents of the 'box' proved to be less complete as had been flaunted. To make matters worse, resistance was stiffer in Marjah's hinterlands.[1208] In Nad-e Ali, efforts by TFH fared better. Through key-leader engagement prior to the operation, TFH was able to secure parts of the district by identifying and targeting insurgents with the consent of local elders. The collaboration with the new ANA-brigade's headquarters left much to be desired, but its establishment provided TFH with a genuine partner formation. Regarding reconstruction, the Helmand PRT planned its activities in an integrated way with TFH. This combination of non-kinetic engagement measured security operations and a competent district administration paid dividends. After

1203 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2011, July 17). Operations in Afghanistan Fourth Report of Session 2010–12 HC 554. London p. 48; Interview British commanding officer 14

1204 British Army, *Herrick Campaign study*, p. 2-4_3.

1205 Anthony King. (2021). Operation Moshtarak: Counter-insurgency command in Kandahar 2009-10. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *44*(1), p. 41-43.

1206 Dexter Filkins (2010, February 12). Afghan Offensive is New War Model. *The New York Times*.; See also: Antony Cordesman (2010). *The Afghan Test Bed in "Marja": Key tests of victory are still months and years away.* Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

1207 Thomas Ruttig (2010, February 13). *An Offensive Foretold.* Retrieved July 23, 2021, from Afghanistan Analysts Network: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/an-offensive-foretold/

1208 Fairweather, *Good* War, p. 380-387. Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 320-324.

Moshtarak, violence in Nad-e Ali dropped to around 15 percent of the incidents that were recorded before the operation.[1209] As such, the operation yielded a mixed picture: it was not as successful as advertised but also showed that progress was attainable.

As more US Marines poured into Helmand, the dynamics of the British mission changed profoundly. First, the Americans took over most of the districts that the British had clung onto. After Garmsir, the British handed over the responsibility over Musa Qala, Kajaki, Sangin and other districts. Accordingly, the British TFH area of operations contracted to the central districts of Helmand. This allowed the British to finally concentrate their forces. Of course, there was some irony here as the eventual British area of operations resembled the "lozenge" that had been in the initial plan in 2006. Another change was that 'Helmandshire' was subsumed by 'Marineistan' in May 2010. With the influx of thousands of Marines, ISAF redrew its lines and created a new Regional Command South-West (RC-SW) that encompassed Helmand and desolate Nimroz. RC-SW was to be led by a two-star American Marine General. This owed more to American inter-service rivalry than to operational considerations as the US Marines sought their own discrete battle space. However, it further cemented the importance afforded to Helmand province in the Afghan campaign that was out of proportion to its actual strategic significance.[1210]

For TFH, the arrival of the Marines manifested that the British troops were now the junior partner in Helmand. Domestically, political changes were afoot as David Cameron from the Conservative Party became Prime Minister in May 2010. Cameron inherited the war from his Labour predecessors, but largely subscribed to the British presence in light of the American surge. Maintaining the UK's standing as a dependable partner continued to be paramount for the Cabinet. Still, Cameron announced in July 2010 that British forces would cease combat operations before 2015. In large part this decision was based on the combination of the increasing unpopularity of the campaign among the British public and by its ever-rising costs. Furthermore, new British parliamentary elections were scheduled for 2015. Not wanting to withdraw abruptly, the UK would continue its operations and further help improve the Afghan security forces. President Karzai agreed with this proposal. At a NATO summit in November 2010, the troop contributing nations to ISAF had drawn up a gradual transition plan.[1211] While the transition was nominally "conditions-based", such as on the competence of Afghan authorities and security forces, the international timetable was the prime consideration.

4 Infantry Brigade (Herrick 12) deployed in this new environment. The brigade commander appreciated this and stated that the brigade had to consolidate the gains made by previous

1209 Theo Farrell (2010). Appraising Moshtarak. *RUSI Briefing Note*, p. 7-9.

1210 Chandrasekaran. *Little America*, p. 57-60.

1211 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, 372-373.

rotations rather than engage in new "totemic operations". Despite this outlook, Helmand remained intensely violent as 4 Brigade suffered 55 soldiers killed in action.[1212] During 4 Brigade's rotation, McChrystal was sacked by Obama over the infamous article in Rolling Stone magazine. He was replaced by general David Petraeus in June 2010.[1213] With this change, ISAF's approach shifted as well. 'Courageous restraint' was replaced by 'relentless pursuit' of the insurgents. Petraeus' new emphasis seemed to be a change in nuance, as he was the preeminent progenitor of population-centric counterinsurgency but in essence promoted kinetic operations. By killing or capturing large numbers of insurgents, ISAF attempted to mark progress. As a result of ramped-up targeting operations, increasing numbers of innocent Afghan civilians were killed. Unsurprisingly this fueled Afghan resentment against the international forces, not in the least by President Karzai.[1214]

Mirroring the new ISAF-approach under Petraeus, 16 Brigade discarded 'courageous restraint' and replaced it with 'front-footed precision'. The emphasis on restraining the use of force had always sat uneasily within TFH, as soldiers felt that this incongruent with the volatility of Helmand.[1215] As the British intelligence processes improved, in part due to better surveillance equipment, TFH was increasingly able to identify and target insurgent leadership. Besides strike operations by special forces, insurgents were also targeted by attack helicopters and artillery. Given the destructive power of the weapons used, the targeting process hinged on the accuracy of intelligence and margins of error were slim. Despite apparent successes, the insurgent proved to be resilient and often returned to previously cleared areas.[1216] This is not to say that TFH just unleashed its kinetic capabilities on its area of operations; non-kinetic influencing became more pronounced and reconstruction efforts had improved (see sections 5.3.4.1 and 5.3.4.3). Moreover, precise targeting was to be fused with non-kinetic influencing, based on understanding the environment.[1217] However, as Sergio Catignani demonstrates, troops at the battle group-level and below were often skeptical about some the aspects of population-centric counterinsurgency. Furthermore, offensive operations were more in line with much of their training.[1218]

For British operations in Helmand, from the latter half of 2010 the situation seemed to be improving. In September 2010, 16 Air Assault Brigade returned for its third tour in Helmand. At this stage, TFH was at a "highwater-mark" in the campaign: [1219] Operation Entirety had

1212 Interview British commanding officer 6; Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p 325-326.

1213 See Michael Hastings (2012). *The Operators: The Wild and Terrifying Inside Story of America's War in Afghanistan*. London: Blue Rider Press.

1214 Fairweather. *The Good War*, p. 390-392.

1215 See Catagnani. Getting COIN, p. 531-532.

1216 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 353-355.

1217 Task Force Helmand. (Undated). COIN Conceptual Model (Herrick 14). Lashkar Gah.

1218 Catagnani. Getting COIN, p. 533.

1219 Interview British commanding officer 6.

improved the predeployment training, copious quantities of new equipment had been delivered into theater and the influx of US Marines had allowed TFH to concentrate in Central Helmand. By now TFH numbered approximately 10,000 troops. Still under the command of a brigadier, the task force encompassed six ground holding battle groups (including one Danish), a Brigade Reconnaissance force and two further battalions responsible for mentoring and advising the Afghan army and police. Moreover, the brigade had access to a panoply of capabilities normally reserved for the divisional or even corps levels of command. In particular, the access to ISTAR-assets (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) were a novelty for the brigade level. As such, TFH was described as "a brigade on steroids."[1220] Additionally, throughout campaign the battle groups and even companies saw many further capabilities bestowed upon them in order to operate as independently as possible in their areas of operations. Thus, there was a trend that commanders acquired a wider remit and had to coordinate more capabilities such as stabilization, non-kinetic influence, additional intelligence assets and local partner forces during their tour.

A further development during this rotation was the establishment of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in Helmand. The ALP had been an initiative under Petraeus in which local militias would be coopted or formed to protect their villages. The idea was that the ALP would be answerable to local *shuras* and thereby have more legitimacy than the Afghan National Police. At the same time, ISAF would oversee and train these sanctioned militias while the Afghan authorities would sustain them. The first ALP-unit in Helmand was formed late 2010. Subsequently, the number of ALP-units grew, although they had a mixed record of success.[1221]

3 Cdo Brigade adopted 'Front-footed precision' when they returned for their third tour in the spring of 2011. By now the campaign had matured and continuity between rotations was enhanced.[1222] Furthermore, the capability of the partnered ANA-brigade was enhanced, and plans were made for transferring the responsibility for security of Lashkar Gah to the Afghan authorities later that year. This was part of the international community's decision to end combat operations by the end of 2014. To enable the international withdrawal, the Afghan security had to take over the security role in selected districts. Lashkar Gah was identified as one of seven districts across Afghanistan as a showcase for this transition.[1223] Situated in the most violent province, Lashkar Gah was to be a symbol for progress. At the same time, by the spring of 2011, Lashkar Gah was essentially a garrisoned town with a forward perimeter by

1220 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_8. Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 13.

1221 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p 377-380.

1222 Interviews British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 6.

1223 House of Commons. (2012, July 9). Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition. London, p. 9.

30,000 international troops. Nevertheless, an attack on governor Mangals motorcade in May 2011 showed that the security was far from impregnable.[1224]

For TFH, the transition plans meant that its role changed from providing security to enabling Afghan security forces to take over this responsibility. This became the overriding consideration for British operations. Central to the mission, therefore, was the need to develop the capabilities of the partnered ANA-brigade to ensure that they could operate independently before the British troops left. As a result, the later TFH rotations worked ever more closely with the ANA-brigade, including at the staff-levels. Although operations against insurgents continued, the ANA would be in the lead to plan and execute them.[1225] With its sophisticated capabilities, TFH could provide logistical support, air support and intelligence to these operations, as well as assistance by the battlegroups. A related task was the closure of much of the outposts and forward operating bases in Helmand. This was an intricate logistical process while TFH still had to contend with insurgent attacks and IEDs.[1226]

During this final phase of the ISAF-mission, a new threat emerged: the so-called "green-on-blue attacks". In such attacks, Afghan security (green) forces targeted international (blue) troops. From 2009 to 2012, the number of these attacks steadily rose, as did the ISAF-victims. Whether these attacks were perpetrated by disgruntled Afghans to avenge Western insensitivities or the result of deft infiltration by Taliban-operatives was a matter of debate within ISAF.[1227] Regardless, the Taliban naturally claimed these attacks as they were detrimental to the trust between international and Afghan forces. The British armed forces responded to this threat by developing new procedures and enhanced awareness of signs for an impending attack (called Operation Cardel). In 2013, the number of attacks saw a marked decline. To an extent, this was attributed to prevention measures of operation Cardel, but also to improved vetting processes and leadership within the Afghan forces.[1228]

In September 2012, the Taliban unequivocally demonstrated their continued prowess in Helmand during a bold attack on the agglomerate of bases that had grown out of Camp Bastion. Using deception and stealth, 15 insurgents infiltrated the base. Before most insurgents were killed, they managed to kill two American troops and wound a further 16 British and American service members. Moreover, they succeeded in destroying or damaging parked jets and helicopters. Although British forces were responsible for the security of the

1224 Jean Mackenzie (2011, May 27). *The Enteqal Seven (3): Lashkargah – Southern Poster Child for Transition.* Retrieved July 23, 2021, from Afghanistan Analysts Network: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/the-enteqal-seven-3-lashkargah-southern-poster-child-for-transition

1225 Interviews British commanding officer 13; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 12.

1226 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p. 6-5_1.

1227 Farrel. *Unwinnable*, p. 380-381.

1228 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 6-2_1.

complex, no disciplinary action was taken by the British armed forces. This stood in stark contrast to the US Marines where two general officers were asked to resign.[1229]

Thus, while the insurgents remained a force to be reckoned with, the later Herrick rotations continued their operations while at the same time the end of TFH approached inexorably. By now, PJHQ ensured campaign continuity and the commanders of the later rotations coordinated among themselves to this end.[1230] Gradually, force levels were reduced, and capabilities withdrawn from theater. In June 2013 Afghan authorities took over responsibility for security from ISAF across the country while the eighteenth Herrick-rotation was in theater.[1231] Officially, ISAF-troops were limited to "train, advise and assist" Afghan security forces. With this over watch support by ISAF, the Afghan security forces kept the insurgency at bay in 2013. Yet, the attrition rate among the government's forces was frightful. Furthermore, the ANA-brigade commander in Helmand warned that his formation lacked essential capabilities such as intelligence, medical support and counter-IED. Despite assurances otherwise, these deficiencies were never resolved for the ANA.[1232]

In the meantime, TFH further contracted. Its headquarters was moved from Lashkar Gah to Camp Bastion in August 2013. During that year's fighting season, the insurgents offensive exerted intense pressure on the Afghan security forces in Helmand. With allied assistance, the Afghan security forces held onto most of their positions.[1233] However, in 2014's offensive the government forces ceded much control of rural Helmand to the Taliban.[1234] Yet, the withdrawal of British forces was subject to other considerations than the security situation. In February 2014, the Helmand PRT was closed, while in April TFH was disbanded. A remaining British battlegroup was subordinated to RC-SW.[1235] The British mission came to a symbolic end when Camp Bastion was handed over to the ANA in October 2014 and the last British troops left Helmand for Kandahar. After 2014, the UK retained a military presence in Afghanistan under NATO's Resolute Support mission that aimed to mentor the Afghan security forces.

Thus came an end to Operation Herrick, in the most violent of Afghanistan's provinces. Over 450 British service members had lost their lives while many more were wounded. Under these conditions, the British Armed Forces had to adapt to the operational challenges, both in theater and in the UK. Beyond the effects of Operation Entirety and adaptations in relation to certain themes and capabilities, a pertinent manifestation was the increase in

1229 Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 128-130; Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 382-383.

1230 Interviews British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 13.

1231 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p. xxv.

1232 Farrell. *Unwinnable* p., 386-387.

1233 Carter Malkasian (2021). *The American War in Afghanistan: A History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 354-355.

1234 Malkasian. *The American Wars*, p. 365-372.

1235 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxv.

troop numbers over the years. Whereas TFH was initially capped at 3,150 troops, this number increased to almost 10,000 by 2009. Only with the influx of the US Marines and the related concentration of TFH in central Helmand did this number become sufficient. With regard to campaign plans, the UK had developed three iterations. The Joint Helmand Plan of 2006 had been a product developed by a civil-military team, but it had been hampered by political intervention that had made it overly ambitious in relation to the committed resources. Furthermore, it was drafted without taking into account the perspective of the unit that would initially deploy. As a result, the plan was discarded almost instantly. The Helmand Road Map of 2008 had been developed in-theater by TFH and the PRT and subsequently been sanctioned across the departments. It had been updated over the next rotations until the Helmand Implementation Plan was drawn up. The main benefit of this latter plan was that it was congruent with developments in the ISAF chain of command and was sponsored by general Carter who led Regional Command-South. Furthermore, with the American surge, population-centric counterinsurgency became more feasible due to increased resources. An additional boon was that by this stage, adherence to the plans by the TFH-rotations was more enforced by PJHQ. As such, exogenous factors were more important to the efficacy of the campaign than the substance of the plans.

Learning at the campaign level	**Manifestations**	**Stage of learning**	**Influencing factors**
Campaign plans	Plans were adjusted by interagency efforts based on experiences	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, organizational culture, leadership
Strategic guidance	Disconnect between strategic level and theater: TFH rotations had significant leeway in their operational approach	Identified deficiency	Organizational culture: PJHQ was initially unable to impose campaign continuity on rotations
Troop levels	Significant quantitative and qualitative reinforcements.	Formal adaptation	Alliance politics, domestic politics,
Configuration	Increase in civilian representation and dual command (2008). More emphasis on non-kinetic aspects	Formal adaptation	Organizational culture, civil-military relations
Rotation schedule	Six-month tours to spread broad (command) experience, but detrimental to depth of knowledge	Identified deficiency	Organizational politics, culture

Table 5.2: Learning processes at the campaign level

5.3.2: Operational analysis and campaign assessment

At the initiation of operations in Helmand, assessing the efficacy of operations was included in the campaign design. To this end operational analysts were attached to the headquarters of Task Force Helmand, staffed mainly by civil servants detached from Defence Science Technology Laboratory (DSTL). Their task was to gather data in-theatre and provide advice to the headquarters of TFH.[1236] In the early rotations, the data gathering was hampered by the inability of the analysts to engage with the population due to the level of violence. Therefore, operational analysis was initially not a primary input for the commanders' decision-making process.[1237]

Interestingly, the most advertised products that the operational analysts generated in Helmand were databases that collected kinetic activities. For instance, the "Significant Actions" (SIGACTS) database recorded all enemy activities.[1238] The SIGACTS database was replaced in 2009 by the "Land Operational Reporting Database (LORD).[1239] It captured, among others, all data pertaining to IEDs that involved British troops from various sources. This provided a reach-back capability that could be interrogated throughout the Ministry of Defence. Although LORD was valued for its contents on IEDs, it had little influence on the campaign planning as it was just an indication of enemy activity. Two other initiatives on campaign assessment sought to address this: the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF) and the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP); these represented different types of approach and are described next.

Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework

An informal attempt at campaign assessment was the use of the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF) by 52 Brigade (Herrick 7). TCAF was introduced in Helmand through a serendipitous meeting of supply and demand. In an earlier deployment to Iraq, one of the staff officers at 52 Brigade, then lieutenant-colonel Richard Wardlaw had been disenchanted by the campaign assessment there. He saw that the British division used an incoherent myriad of metrics that were measuring activities instead of their impact. Moreover, Wardlaw witnessed that analysis of developments in the Iraqi theater did not represent the actual situation on the ground. Instead, progress was invariably recorded as units fulfilled their rotations, only to regress with a new rotation coming in. In turn, the new rotation

1236 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-3_1,

1237 Interview British commanding officer 4; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p- 1-3_3.

1238 See T.J. Ramjeet (2008). Operational Analysis in Support of HQ RC(S), Kandahar, Afghanistan, September 2007 to January 2008. *Cornwallis XIII: Analysis in Support of Policy*. Nova Scotia: Cornwallis Group, p. 51-61.

1239 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Background Quality Report: Improvised Explosive Device (IED) events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014*. London.

witnessed incremental improvements throughout its tour.[1240] At best, this form of campaign assessment amounted to self-delusion.

For 52 Brigade's tour in 2007-2008, Wardlaw was assigned to the J9-position in the Task Force staff, although his remit was broader than the organic staff-billet. [1241] When he met Brigadier Mackay and vented his frustration over his experience with campaign assessment, Mackay connected him with James Derleth. An American scholar working for USAID, Derleth had developed a four-questions model to assess reconstruction and development projects.[1242] During one of 52 Brigades preparatory exercises, Derleth briefed the staff on his model. Several the staff members were skeptical and raised comments. With this feedback, Wardlaw and Derleth adapted the tool for use in a conflict environment, which resulted in the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework (TCAF).[1243]

The objective of the TCAF was to identify the causes of instability and try to address them, thereby denying support for insurgency. Furthermore, it aimed to measure the impact of TFH's activities. Both aspects would combine to yield a deeper understanding of the environment and help guide TFH's operations, emphasizing non-kinetic activities.[1244] For its practical use, TCAF was designed as a tiered model that aimed to capture perceptions by posing straightforward questions to the local population. A prime consideration underpinning TCAF was that it would allow TFH to learn the perspectives of the local population instead of those of the "key leaders" with which the PRT normally engaged. As such, both approaches should be complementary.[1245] At the most basic level, TCAF sought to answer just four questions during patrols: Has the population changed and why?; What are the major problems facing your village?; Who do you believe can solve your problems?; What should be done first?[1246] The idea was that in this way any soldier could contribute to the collection of data in a consistent way. Moreover, given the relative simplicity of the questions, the data collection did not require additional patrols.[1247] Advanced questionnaires were developed for more highly-trained personnel.[1248] The acquired data was analyzed by the TCAF Analysis Working Group which consisted of personnel from intelligence, information operations, planning, PRT and operational analysts.[1249] The resulting analyses informed activities such

1240 Interview British army staff officer 7; See also Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p, 213.

1241 Generally, the J9 position is civil-military interaction, but in this instance it was called "Reconstruction and Development".

1242 Interviews American Scholar 1; British army staff officer 7; British commanding officer 2.

1243 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh, p. 13.

1244 Task Force Helmand. (2008). *Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework: Trial Report*. Lashkar Gah.

1245 British army staff officer 7; British commanding officer 2

1246 See Task Force Helmand J9. (2008, March 4). Presentation: TCAF Trend Analysis. Lashkar Gah

1247 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 10.

1248 Task Force Helmand. (Undated). TCAF: Advance Assessment Questionaire. Lashkar Gah

1249 TFH. TCAF Trend Analysis, p. 4; Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh

as operations and population engagement. As such, TCAF was used to steer another of 52 Brigade's innovations: the Non-Kinetic Effects Teams (see section 5.3.4.3).

The pilot of TCAF was rolled out in Lashkar Gah at the end of 2007; given the presence of the TFH-staff and the PRT, this was considered a natural starting point. Furthermore, security in this area was relatively good, so troops could engage with the population and pose the questions. To gauge the effects of the TCAF, a 'control-area' was established in which the framework was not implemented. In addition to processing the collected data into spreadsheets, it was plotted onto digital maps. This helped to visualize different perceptions and dynamics throughout the various areas. In their own reporting, 52 Brigade touted the effectiveness of TCAF. Within Lashkar Gah, the access to potable water was revealed as the main concern for the civilians. Over, time the centrality of this concern decreased as coincidentally water pumps had been repaired. From here TFH improved its understanding of the local dynamics and could measure the effects of its activities.[1250]

Despite the apparent strengths of TCAF, the limitations of the concept were recognized at the time. First of all, the utility of TCAF required good training, understanding and discipline, both with the collectors as with the analysts, to ensure uniform application. A second concern was the validity of the data as the TFH staff thought that the population could be inclined to provide 'agreeable' answers to the questions;[1251] even more so, because most questions were posed by heavily armed soldiers on patrol. A third limitation was demonstrated when TCAF was introduced in Sangin, where the security situation was far more volatile. Here, the violence was the overriding concern for both the British troops and the local population.[1252] In other words, violence was the main driver of instability in Sangin, and this assessment could be established without TCAF. Although TFH was cognizant of these limitations, they could not be entirely resolved. As a counterbalance, the trends derived through TCAF would have genuine value in a longitudinal analysis over the course of two years.[1253] While 52 Brigade was pleased with TCAF's results, they were keen that their successors would continue their work and suggested that TCAF should be incorporated in the new British counterinsurgency doctrine and the predeployment training for subsequent rotations.[1254]

TCAF was handed over to the subsequent rotation by 16 Air Assault Brigade in April 2008. However, its personnel had to be trained in-theater and although the personnel who oversaw the use of TCAF for 16 Brigade stated that they "embraced [TCAF] wholeheartedly",

1250 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 7-8; Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh.

1251 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 13-15.

1252 Interview British army staff officer 7.

1253 LWC. Interview Commander Herrick 7, p. 13.

1254 TFH. *Trial Report*, p. 19.

they ultimately discontinued the program.[1255] One of the further identified problems with TCAF was that it led to inconsistent data as the soldiers made variations in how they queried Afghans. Moreover, despite the simplicity of the model, soldiers were not trained sufficiently to conduct the interviews. More fundamentally, 16 Brigade questioned the reliability of the answers to questions asked by foreign troops and the self-selection of individuals who could be interviewed. Another aspect of concern for 16 Brigade was that they introduced TCAF in more insecure districts where engaging in conversation with Afghans was at odds with force protection.[1256] Finally, the detractors of TCAF argued that the framework did not measure against the lines of operation as had been set out by the new Helmand Road Map. Thus, 16 Brigade abandoned TCAF and instead opted for key-leader engagement through more in-depth conversations.[1257] The subsequent rotation by 3 Commando Brigade had been instructed on TCAF during its predeployment training by personnel of 52 Brigade. However, when this rotation arrived in theater in the autumn of 2008, its personnel found that TCAF had been rejected by their predecessors. Understandably, the TCAF-initiative withered in Helmand and was seemingly abandoned by the British Army.[1258] Curiously, TCAF did feature in the glossary of the new Army Field Manual on counterinsurgency more than a year later, but the concept did not appear anywhere else in the text.

Still, despite the failure to implement TCAF across the British Army, it was adopted by the United States. When David Petraeus visited 52 Brigade in Helmand, he was impressed by the promise of the concept. Petraeus advocated its use to the US military and other government agencies and subsequently Wardlaw and Derleth were asked to brief on their experiences with TCAF.[1259] It was quickly adopted by USAID (United States Department for International Development), who had shunned it previously, and the US military, as the Tactical Conflict Analysis and Planning Framework (TCAPF).[1260] Although it was not used for campaign-level analysis, TCAPF was extensively used by American units throughout Afghanistan. In 2010, it was renamed the District Stability Framework.[1261] Ironically, through this American connection, TCAPF even found its way back into British doctrine on operational intelligence. Here it was mentioned as a useful tool to acquire a basic understanding of the environment

1255 See Conway and Wilson. Short-lived Panacea, p. 11.

1256 Ibidem, p. 12-14.

1257 Ibidem, p. 14-15.

1258 Interview British army staff officer 7

1259 LWC. Interview Commander Herrick 7.

1260 See: Department of the Army. (2008). *FM 3.07: Stability Operations*. Washington DC: Combined Arms Center, Appenix D ;USAID Office of Military Affairs. (2009, December 15). Presentation: Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework. Washington DC; Joint Staff, J-7. (2011). *Commander's Handbook for Assessment Planning and Execution.* Suffolk, Appendixes D-G.

1261 Ben Connable (2012). *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency.* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 16.

that is to be used in conjunction with other tools.[1262] As such, TCAF became a widely used framework, albeit in a roundabout way.

Weighing the practicality and merit of TCAF during a few Operation Herrick rotations, with vastly different outlooks between them, is hard given the fleeting period that it was trialed. Of course, the framework was not a silver bullet, but with refinement and consistent application it perhaps could have provided a valuable additional source of insight on the local dynamics and the effects of TFH's activities. Indeed, the later adoption by the US military and British Army intelligence indicates that it was written off too early. Regardless, the example of TCAF provides an interesting case on the difficulty of propagating informal adaptations. Despite the efforts of 52 Brigade, TCAF was eventually rejected by 16 Brigade and fizzled out during 3 Brigade's tour. TCAF had not been adopted by the wider Army and was thus not incorporated into doctrine or predeployment training. Moreover, the application of TCAF in the field required soldiers to engage with the population, while their primary concern was for their own force protection in the more violent parts of Helmand. In other words, the long-term trend analysis from TCAF was trumped by more immediate concerns of the troops.

Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme

In early 2010, the PRT initiated the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP). Overseen by a development sector third party, Coffey International Development, the HMEP was designed to support the Helmand Implementation Plan that was being drafted.[1263] By collecting and analyzing primary data, HMEP should inform the effectiveness of the activities by the PRT. It set out to do this through several products. First, quarterly polls would be conducted to gauge the perception of the local population. A second product was a database on all reconstruction and development activities within Helmand province, including by NGOs. Thirdly, quarterly reports and ad-hoc reports were to be used to "develop new knowledge" for the PRT on the province. To facilitate this, the HMEP needed to establish a baseline of data that did not yet exist.[1264] As such, the HMEP was an indictment of earlier campaign assessment-efforts for the PRT as the campaign had been active for over three years at this point.[1265]

1262 See: 1 Military Intelligence Brigade. (2011). *Operational Intelligence Best Practice Handbook*. Bulford, p. 2-26. Here the British doctrine refers to US Army FM 3.07 Stability Operations as its source.

1263 See Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Doctrine Note 2/12: Assessment*. London, p. 3-29. HMEP was developed by Coffey International Development and executed by an Afghan company. Part of the dataset is available at https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/dataset-for-the-helmand-monitoring-and-evaluation-programme-hmep

1264 Stabilisation Unit. (2014). *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions*. London, p. 25-26.

1265 Stabilisation Unit. (2010). *Responding to Stabilisation Challenges in Hostile and insecure environments: Lessons Identified by the UK's Stabilisation Unit*. London, p13-14.

Underpinning HMEP was a "theory of change" which posited that enduring security and stability is possible if the government demonstrates that is responsive to the needs of its citizens and thereby is a viable alternative to insurgency or instability.[1266] This premise adhered to the prevalent population-centric counterinsurgency concepts of that time and thus to the Helmand Implementation Plan. In order to assess the competency of the Afghan authorities, perceptions of Helmandi citizens were polled. HMEP established numerous indicators, divided over the lines of security, governance, and development. In theory, if sufficient progress was measured in a certain district, it would become viable for transition to the responsibility of Afghan authorities.[1267]

Although the introduction of HMEP was a clear improvement from the lack of reporting on developments in Helmand, it was undercut by inherent flaws. One of the main defects was that the comprehensiveness and veracity of the collected data has been questioned. Given the insecurity in large parts of Helmand, the survey personnel could not reach all districts. Consequently, the perceptions that were polled were somewhat skewed.[1268] Furthermore, most interviewed individuals were men, as women could only be queried in a discrete fashion.[1269] Additionally, as the surveys were not conducted by PRT personnel, the veracity of information could not be checked. A further defect was that research showed that surveys of this kind produced "socially desirable" answers; in Helmand, this mechanism was even more pronounced due to the insecurity of the province. For instance, this led to assessment in which just five percent of the polled Helmandi households in 2013 indicated that they acquired revenue through opium production, whereas given the extent of poppy cultivation in the province this number seems improbable.[1270] Despite efforts for improved quality assurance, the extent to which the HMEP-data was useful for steering the campaign has been doubted.[1271] Finally, the various agencies whose activities were being examined were not always keen on candid and critical evaluations. As such, highlighting deficiencies through assessment did not always lead to improvements. [1272] Of course, this was a wider problem throughout the ISAF-mission.

1266 Sammy Ahmar and Christine Kolbe (2011). *Innovative Approach to Evaluating Interventions in Fragile and ConflictAffected States: The Case of Helmand*. London: Coffey International Development, p. 11-12.

1267 USAID. (2012). *An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems*. Washington DC, p. 27-29.

1268 Ibidem, p. 67.

1269 Ibidem, p. 29.

1270 David Mansfield (2015). *Effective Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict-affected Environments: Afghanistan Post-2014*. Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, p. 8; Interview British civil servant 7

1271 Interviews British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6; British civil servant 7; Foreign & Commonwealth Office. (2014). *Capturing the lessons from the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)*. Steyning: Wilton Park, p. 27-28.

1272 Jon Moss (2015). Basing Stabilisation Efforts on Evidence of What Works: Lessons from Afghanistan. *Small Wars Journal*, p. 2

Beyond these deficiencies, the HMEP was primarily a tool for the Helmand PRT and less so for TFH.[1273] Despite the alignment with the campaign plans of ISAF and TFH, its impact on the military operations was limited. Given the continued violence in Helmand province and the emphasis on the capacity of Afghan security forces, the perception of security was no primary consideration for TFH. Furthermore, the HMEP was seen as overly complex to be of use for TFH.[1274] Tellingly, HMEP is not mentioned in the extensive Operation Herrick Campaign Study; this is despite the finding that, in general terms the study indicated that operational analysis alone is regarded with skepticism within the military.[1275]

Thus, despite its merits, the impact of HMEP was constrained by inherent weaknesses, of which its late inception in 2010 was perhaps the most profound. One influencing factor is that, by this stage in the Afghan war, campaign assessment was highly topical. The American surge and the emphasis on security transition put additional pressure on assessments to exhibit progress.[1276] In a 2012 report, RAND Corporation analyzed the limits of current assessment practices in Afghanistan that essentially harked back to the US war in Vietnam. It argued that it was too focused on quantitative data, too centralized and therefore ill-suited for capturing the complexity of a counterinsurgency campaign.[1277]

Although the problems with campaign assessment were never resolved both within Helmand and ISAF writ large, the UK noted the lessons in a doctrinal document: Join Doctrine Note (JDN) 2/12 Assessment. This document was drafted jointly by the Ministry of Defence and the Stabilisation Unit with input from other departments. It underlined the imperative to include campaign assessment at the planning stages of a stabilization mission. According to JDN 2/12, consistent and integrated campaign assessment should support planning, evaluation, strategic communications, and the lessons learned process.[1278] With the experience of Helmand and the HMEP, the doctrine called for including training at formation level in order to ensure familiarity with assessment by commanders and their staffs.[1279] Of course, JDN 2/12 looked beyond Helmand and was of no consequence for the operations there. Overall, the formal assessment efforts had limited impact on the execution of the Helmand campaign.

Assessing these instruments, operational analysis and campaign assessment were relatively marginal therefore throughout the British Helmand campaign (table 5.3). Whether informally initiated as TCAF, or formally mandated like HMEP, the programs were generally regarded with skepticism by the British military. The continuous violence in the province meant that

1273 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 27.

1274 Stabilisation Unit. *Monitoring and Evaluation*, p. 27.

1275 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-3_3

1276 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 374.

1277 Connable. *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 208-211.

1278 Ministry of Defence. *JDN 2/12*, p. 1-2.

1279 Ministry of Defence. *JDN 2/12*, p. 3-3

the focus by TFH was very much on combat and force protection and not on gathering data. Furthermore, the utility of the resulting analyses was not always clear for the military as the programs were not linked with the campaign plans. This changed with HMEP where the instrument aligned with the Helmand Implementation Plan, but it still had limited influence on how military operations were conducted. As a result, the contribution of operational analysis and campaign assessment to the understanding of the environment by TFH was overall reduced.

Operational analysis (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Integration in TFH	Limited clout of analysis in TFH	Recognized deficiency	Distinct organizational cultures
TCAF	TCAF was central element in HERRICK 7's operational approach	Informal adaptation, discontinued in subsequent rotation	Leadership, organizational culture
HMEP	Evaluation program for Helmand PRT, limited use at TFH	Formal adaptation	Organizational culture, civil-military relations

Table 5.3: Developments in operational analysis

5.3.3: Operation Entirety: learning to adapt, adapting to learn

As established in the previous section, the British campaign in Helmand was initially prosecuted in a haphazard fashion. To be fair, this can be said of virtually all national contributions to the ISAF-mission and as a logical result, the mission itself.[1280] Yet, arguably the British forces suffered the most from this lack of direction as they were deployed to the most volatile and violent province. From May 2008, the British Army changed tack under guidance of the incoming Commander in Chief of the Land Forces Command general David Richards. As the previous ISAF-commander, Richards had firsthand knowledge of the challenges of the overall campaign. To his dismay, he found that to the British Army headquarters the war in Afghanistan "was little more than a passing distraction and there was little need to re-orientate existing plans around it."[1281] Richards asserted that this was an institutional problem and asserted that the army should be put on a campaign footing to support the troops in Helmand. The turn towards a campaign footing was to be called

1280 McChrystal. *COMISAF Initial Assessment*

1281 Richards, *Taking Command*, p. 307

Operation Entirety. This effort to salvage the mission in Helmand officially started in April 2009.[1282]

Although some formal and informal adaptations had already been initiated since 2006, these measures lacked overall coherence and institutional support. Consequently, these had only minor impact on the campaign in Helmand. Operation Entirety sought to "ensure that Land Forces are resourced, structured and prepared - conceptually, morally and physically - for success in Afghanistan and then subsequent other subsequent hybrid operations."[1283] The envisioned measures under Entirety were to be short term (1-5 years) and reversible. Furthermore, this effort took the calculated risk that the British Army would be less ready for other contingencies.[1284]

While the British Army now sought to more support the Helmand campaign more comprehensively, formations were tasked to retain knowledge and proficiency on conventional warfare and combined arms tactics.[1285] Indeed, when in 2011 the political decision was made to end combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the order for Operation Entirety was amended to increase the emphasis on future operations.[1286]

To be sure, the Army's shift to a campaign footing was not universally embraced within the organization, as skeptics felt that this would mortgage its ability to fight conventional wars.[1287] Despite the broadly felt need to change the Army's approach for executing the Helmand campaign, this apprehension was not without merit. Faced with "an austere financial environment", Operation Entirety and the concomitant measures had to be cost-neutral;[1288] in other words, the Ministry of Defence, and the Army in particular, had to reallocate its own budget to resource the war in Afghanistan. Naturally, this constrained the ability to invest in (materiel) projects for the longer term.

In essence Operation Entirety set out to accomplish two interrelated tasks. First, the predeployment preparations of the army units from task force level and downwards was to be revamped. The second tenet was the rigorous collection and "exploitation of lessons from operations, experimentation and training into the 'institution' of the Army."[1289]

1282 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxv

1283 Ibidem, p. xxxvi

1284 Ibidem, p. xxxvii

1285 Interviews British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 3; British army staff officer 9; British commanding officer 17.

1286 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxix

1287 Richards. *Taking Command*, p. 308-309; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxvi; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 130.

1288 British Army (6 May 2011) Fragmentation Order VI, Land Forces, Field Army/2900; Interviews British commanding officer 17; British commanding officer 16.

1289 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxvii

An important element in bringing about the necessary changes to the army's day-to-day operations was the establishment of Force Development and Training (FDT), commanded by a lieutenant general. With an extensive mandate, the FDT set out to harness bottom-up experience through firm top-down direction.[1290] By accommodating "force development, capability development, training, equipment, doctrine and lessons under one [...] organisation", the FDT sought to deliver improvements in the preparation and execution of the Helmand campaign.[1291] In large part, this arrangement was inspired by the *Training and Doctrine Command* (TRADOC) of the U.S. Army. Although the FDT largely mirrored TRADOC in terms of mandate, it had to assert its new authority to enact change. Fundamentally, FDT was superimposed on the organizational structure of the army to overcome bureaucratic barriers and internal reluctance.[1292]

As the effects of Operation Entirety were far-reaching, even beyond the Helmand campaign itself, the repercussions will form a recurrent theme in this chapter. In the next subsections the specific impacts on the lessons learned process, predeployment training, doctrine and equipment will be analyzed. The effects on broader capabilities in theatre and on the British Army after the conclusion of the ISAF-mission will feature further on in this chapter.

5.3.2.1: Learning mechanisms

At the onset of Operation Herrick, the British Army had a formalized learning mechanism in the form of the Mission Support Group. Established in 2003, the Mission Support Group (MSG) was the Army's institutional effort to remedy operational challenges during the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent occupation phase. It had a broad remit: improving the Army's cooperation with the other services (joint warfare); remedying health and safety issues in relation to equipment; and identifying lessons from operations to enhance tactics, techniques, and procedures across the force. In 2006, it was placed under the Land Warfare Centre which oversees collective training, doctrine, and concept development for the Army. To collect observations and adaptations from the field, the MSG conducted post-operation interviews among returning officers and reports from the Brigade commanders. Occasionally, staff from the MSG visited the theatre to actively collect lessons, but personnel caps precluded forward deploying officers to Iraq.[1293] A main product of the MSG was the so-called "Lesson Pamphlet" - short publications with lessons identified or best practices based

1290 Paul Newton, (2013). Adapt or Fail: The Challenge for the Armed Forces After Blair's Wars. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British General in Blair's Wars*. Farnham: Ashgate., p. 297.

1291 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxix

1292 Interview British commanding officer 3; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 123-124.

1293 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 78-79.

on experiences from Iraq and Afghanistan. To facilitate a wide dissemination, the pamphlets were written with enlisted personnel in mind.[1294]

Still, this institutional effort to learn from experience was considered "under-resourced and ill-conceived", as the observations were not systematically analyzed and subsequently disseminated throughout the Army.[1295] Although some improvements in equipment and doctrine were attained through the MSG, it lacked the influence to implement lessons in a coherent way. This problem was exacerbated when the British ventured into Helmand in 2006. Now the Army had to contend with challenges from two demanding theatres.[1296] As such, the MSG was stretched in terms of personnel and had limited capacity to disseminate lessons. When observations required additional resources, the efficacy of the learning process was even more constrained.[1297]

In 2008, the Army sought to improve its learning process by establishing the Lessons Exploitation Centre as a replacement for the MSG, with increased resources and expanded authority. This was mandated by Director-General Land Warfare, Major-General Andrew Kennett.[1298] Further impetus for the new Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC) came with the initiation of Operation Entirety and the establishment of the FDT-command.[1299] The head of the FDT, lieutenant-general Paul Newton, subscribed to the importance of lessons learned process and accordingly awarded increased resources to the LXC in terms of personnel and funding. At its heyday in 2012, the LXC numbered 20 officers and NCOs.[1300] Furthermore, the formal learning process was awarded an enhanced status and consequently the LXC acquired more authority within the Army's organization.[1301]

With the additional resources and improved mandate, the LXC sought to bring more coherence to the Army's learning process. To this end, monthly meetings between the various organizations responsible for distinct aspects of learning such as training, doctrine development and safety were initiated.[1302] As a result of these meetings, the LXC developed new instruments to actively collect lessons from theatre. For instance, staff officers from

1294 Interviews British staff officer 24; British army staff officer 9

1295 Robert Foley, Stuart Griffin and Helen McCartney (2011). 'Transformation in contact': learning the lessons of modern war. *International Affairs, 87*(2), p. 262.

1296 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1297 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 129

1298 Foley, et al. Transformation in contact, p. 263.

1299 Interview British commanding officer 3, British army staff officer 9

1300 Foley, et al. Transformation in contact, p. 262, British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4

1301 Interview British commanding officer 3, Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p.81

1302 Tom Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 82.

the LXC were permanently deployed to Task Force Helmand to gather observations.[1303] In Helmand, these officers worked with scientific advisers from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) and other staff officers tasked with countering threats such as IEDs. Additionally, under guidance of the FDT the Army sent out "hunting parties" to allied task forces in Afghanistan. These were essentially liaison officers that were tasked with looking out for adaptations by allies that the British could emulate.[1304]

Other learning mechanisms that were used were more passive, as these required the input by service members. For instance, the British Armed Forces use an IT-database for best practices called the Defence Lessons Identified Management System (DLIMS). Yet, the utility of this system is curtailed as its access is restricted to accredited officers.[1305] This means that other service members, in particular enlisted personnel, must go through an intermediary to record their observations and best practices. A more 'democratic' platform for knowledge sharing is the Army Knowledge Exchange (AKX) that allowed any service member to contribute to it.[1306] Introduced in 2009, the AKX was an emulation of American efforts provide a platform for open knowledge exchange. However, as some observers noted, the AKX was not rigorously moderated and the submitted knowledge was generally not utilized to implement adaptations in the organization.[1307] Although the platform is still in use and contains a wealth of observations and lessons identified, it does not have a central role in the formal learning processes.[1308]

A more structured source for observations into the learning process was instituted in the mandated evaluations by deployed units. The first of these was the Initial Deployment and Post-Training Report that units had to produce when they were six weeks into their rotation to Helmand. This allowed units, battalion level and up, to share observations about their predeployment training and issues they faced while rotating into Afghanistan. Beyond the LXC, this report was sent to the Training Branch and PJHQ's J7 who could take remedial action to identified problems. A constraining factor of this report was that the observations were limited to those made by company commanders and staff officers.[1309] Although this was a conscious decision to prevent a deluge of (redundant) observations by all personnel in a unit, the obvious inherent trade-off was that observations would be missed by the LXC.[1310] Additionally, commanding officers at the levels of the Task Force and Battlegroups were

1303 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 1 British army staff officer 2, British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 9

1304 Interview British commanding officer 3; British army staff officer 9.

1305 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p.84.

1306 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 5.

1307 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 125; Tom Dyson, p. 87.

1308 Interviews British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 5; Catagnani. Coping with knowledge, p. 54-55.

1309 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 85.

1310 Interviews British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 18.

interviewed after their tour by a retired brigadier who was contracted by the LXC.[1311] This was a marked improvement from earlier post-operation interviews at the Ministry of Defence where Task Force commanders felt they received a lack of interest in their perspective.[1312] Moreover, the LXC continued to seek to capture the experiences of officers and NCOs who had been deployed to positions at ISAF headquarters and Regional Command South.[1313]

One of the most pertinent developments in the learning process was the establishment of the "Mission Exploitation Symposium" in 2009. These were one-day events held at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst with approximately 1200 individuals in attendance. During a symposium, the returning Task Force Helmand staff and its sub-units could share their experiences with the LXC and other interested parties. Its participants included delegates from the services, PJHQ, the various Regiments and Corps, academia and Defence industry. The latter participants were included as they could seek to deliver technological solutions to challenges that were raised by the presenting Herrick rotation. According to the organizers, the initial iterations of the symposium were at maximum capacity as the interest was high.[1314] During the morning, the Task Force commander and selected officers offered their observations, identified deficiencies and best practices. In the afternoon, the participants formed syndicates to delve deeper into specific details such as intelligence, counter-IED, army aviation, and other topics. Consequently, this part of the program was more interactive and more slated towards capturing lessons and thinking about remedial actions.

The establishment of the Lesson Exploitation Centre was a crucial learning mechanism during the Helmand campaign. Under Operation Entirety it helped to capture the experiences from Afghanistan in a structured manner. Still, the process had some inherent limitations such as the (lack of) breadth of input into the process. The Army Knowledge Exchange did not remedy this, for the reasons given and furthermore because it focused on lessons for the tactical and technical levels. Operational level observations were ostensibly the mandate of the adjacent Afghanistan COIN Centre (see the next subsection). Still, the volume of lessons from Afghanistan were considerable and the (internal) political capital invested into salvaging the mission in Helmand were substantive. Moreover, the LXC personnel were faced with the pressure that unaddressed organizational deficiencies were costing lives of deployed service members. To enact the solutions provided through these mechanisms (table 5.2), improving the dissemination mechanisms of doctrine, training and equipment procurement were next crucial steps in the learning process.

1311 Interview British army staff officer 9.

1312 Interviews British commanding officer 2; British commanding officer 4

1313 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 5.

1314 Interview British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 9; British scholar 1.

Learning processes (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Learning process	Perceived to be insufficient across armed forces. Impetus for Operation Entirety	Formal adaptation	Leadership, organizational politics/ culture, resource allocation
Capturing lessons	Mission Exploitation Symposium	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation
Implementation of lessons at joint level	LXC ensured collaboration across Army and MoD.	Formal adaptation	Organizational politics

Table 5.2: Lessons learned process

5.3.2.3: Doctrine and the Afghanistan COIN Centre

As established earlier in this chapter, the British Army possessed a doctrinal publication on counterinsurgency operations. Generally, it was felt that this doctrine was "fit for purpose" but could use some updating on the character of insurgents and the influence of the 'information revolution'.[1315] Its main defect however was that it was not taught and read. According to a survey in 2009, just 31 percent of deployed British officers had read the 2001 iteration of Army Field Manual 1-10 on counterinsurgency operations.[1316] While British counterinsurgency campaigns from the past featured in lectures at Sandhurst and to some extent at the advanced career courses at Shrivenham, intellectual engagement with the concepts in a contemporary context was lacking.[1317] As a result, counterinsurgency did not always inform operational planning in the early Helmand rotations.

The Mission Support Group, headed by Colonel Alexander Alderson between 2004 and 2007, sought to deploy initiatives towards an updated counterinsurgency doctrine.[1318] Beyond the publication of a document, Alderson wanted to produce a conceptual foundation which the British Army could use to inform its campaign and operational designs.[1319] At the time, there was some sense among officers that the British Army had missed the boat with the development of the American counterinsurgency field manual.[1320] As the primary ally and

1315 Interviews British army staff officer 17; British army staff officer 24; American scholar 2.

1316 Claudia Harvey and Mark Wilkinson (2009). The Value of Doctrine: Adressing British Officers'Perspectives. *RUSI Journal*, 154(6), p. 29

1317 Interviews British civil servant 4, British army staff officer 24; American scholar 2; Alexander Alderson (2012). The British Approach to COIN and Stabilisation: A Retrospective on Developments since 2001. *The RUSI Journal*, 157(4), p. 64-65.

1318 Tom Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 98

1319 Interview British army staff officer 24: British army staff officer 17; American scholar 2.

1320 Alderson. the British Approach, p. 65.

contributor to the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Brits were the most obvious partner for a combined doctrine. Moreover, the American writing team explicitly looked at the British 2001 doctrine for inspiration. However, according to Conrad Crane, the British Army could only spare "two officers and a bulldog" for the collaborative effort and ultimately refrained from making a formal contribution.[1321] Furthermore, the newly established joint Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre opted out of the writing process as it considered its own efforts to draft doctrine on "counter irregular activity" as discrete from the American process. On an informal level, officers like Colonel Alderson received drafts of the text and provided commentary.[1322] Thus, the somewhat ironic situation emerged at the end of 2006 in which the U.S. armed forces produced a revamped counterinsurgency doctrine inspired in part by a virtually unread British publication and to which British officers made a small informal contribution, while the British Army had no equivalent document.

This did not mean that British Army doctrine writers were sitting on their hands. In June 2006, the initiative to update the 2001 AFM "Counter-Insurgency Operations" was mandated by the army. By 2007, the MSG was well underway in the process of drafting a new counterinsurgency doctrine for the army. It mirrored the American approach for FM 3-24, by extensively consulting external partners such as the U.S. Army's TRADOC and King's College London's Insurgency Research Group.[1323]

Furthermore, the British Army looked with interest at how the Americans vigorously debated counterinsurgency principles amongst themselves in an effort to salvage their campaign in Iraq. The British recognized that such an exchange of ideas was generally lacking in their own army. Furthermore, the Americans had set up a "Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence" in-theatre where commanding officers had to take a course before they moved toward their areas of operation.[1324] While the British doctrine writers recognized that an equivalent deployed education center was a bridge too far, they decried the lack of institutional enthusiasm to enroll officers for its counterinsurgency course or deploying a permanent staff member for lectures. Furthermore, they concurred that education on doctrine was crucial if it was to be applied in practice.[1325]

Despite the backing by the British Army and the example set by the Americans, the doctrine project was hampered by the lack of counterinsurgency doctrine at the joint level and disagreements on the mandate of the army to write this doctrine with DCDC. Where the MSG and by extension the Land Warfare Centre were chiefly concerned with using the lessons from

1321 See Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, p. 52-53.

1322 Alexander Alderson (2013). Too Busy to Learn: Personal Observations on British Campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. In J. Bailey, R. Iron, & H. Strachan (Eds.), *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (pp. 281-296). Farnham: Ashgate p. 288.

1323 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 115.

1324 Alderson. Too Busy to Learn, p. 290.

1325 Interview British staff officer 24; British staff officer 17; American Scholar 2,

current operations for organizational change, DCDC focused more on future capabilities in the vein of Network Centric Operations and the Revolution in Military Affairs. This resulted in a physical and conceptual disconnect between both elements that were responsible for doctrine.[1326]

At the end of 2007, this chasm between DCDC and the Land Warfare Centre proved insuperable. By this stage, the Army Doctrine and Concepts Committee had approved the draft of the new Army Field Manual, but DCDC intervened however, on the grounds that the AFM was not compatible with its publications on peace support operations and countering irregular activity. Much to the chagrin of Alderson, the army allowed DCDC to make amendments to the draft. According to the initial writing team, this made the AFM irrelevant and unfit for publication. Therefore, with the harbor in sight, the new doctrine was scuttled. [1327]

Still, the need to revamp the AFM and disseminate it remained undiminished given the concurrent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. During their deployment to Iraq in 2008, Alderson and another British officer regularly contributed to the American courses in Iraq. Based on this experience, Alderson proposed the establishment of a British COIN center in the UK. In his own words: "the Army needed a focal point to analyse, develop and teach COIN, and function as its COIN advocate."[1328] It found its champion in general Richards and gradually support was acquired throughout the Ministry of Defence's bureaucratic apparatus. An essential element in the broader support for counterinsurgency doctrine and other general measures was the widely felt sense that the British Army had not lived up to its reputation in Basra. Furthermore, the initial rotations in Helmand had not provided the success that was expected to ameliorate this image.[1329]

In the spring of 2009, close to the formal initiation of Operation Entirety and with the evident backing of the higher echelons of the British Army, the Afghanistan Counterinsurgency Centre was established as a subunit of the Land Warfare Centre.[1330] Headed by colonel Alderson, who had returned from a tour in Iraq under general Petraeus, the COIN Centre was tasked with processing higher tactical and operational level observations into doctrine and disseminating it as broadly as possible. As such the Afghan COIN Centre was to collaborate closely with the LXC, and accordingly both elements were collocated in the same building in Warminster.[1331] The support from the army's hierarchy for the COIN Centre was tangible

1326 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 99.

1327 Ibidem, p. 113, Interviews British staff officer 24; American Scholar 2.

1328 Alderson. Too Busy to Learn, p. 292.

1329 Stuart Griffin (2011). Iraq, Afghanistan and the future of British military doctrine: from counterinsurgency to Stabilization. *international Affairs, 87*(2), p. 319-320; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 113; Alderson. Too Busy to Learn, p. 292.

1330 Interestingly, the exact date differs in various sources.

1331 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 9; British army staff officer 24.

as Alderson had the pick of his own staff officers. Furthermore, the COIN Centre was well funded and had an extensive external network with allies, think tanks and academia.[1332] Operation Entirety and the establishment of the Afghan COIN Centre provided a new impetus for a new Army Field Manual. With a larger cadre of staff officers and with empirical insight of the application of counterinsurgency principles in Iraq, Alderson could start from where he left off with the abortive effort from 2007. Equally important was the change of leadership at DCDC. Under then major-general Paul Newton, who would go on to command the FDT, the relationship with the army's doctrine writers became more productive. Moreover, DCDC proceeded to write a new doctrine on stabilization operations that was to serve as a capstone for the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine. The DCDC doctrine was published in November 2009 under the name *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (JDP 3-40). This publication removed a primary prior hindrance for the Army's field manual by ensuring compatibility between the two documents.[1333]

Beyond deployed senior commanders (theater or formation-level) and staff officers at PJHQ, JDP 3-40 was explicitly aimed towards instructors and students at the officers' career courses in Shrivenham and at the military academies. As such, it explicitly referred to the vital role of officer education in the dissemination of doctrine. Another prospective audience were civilian partners and academics. [1334] For its inspiration, JDP 3-40 explicitly referred to classical texts about counterinsurgency, among which Frank Kitson served as a main source. Fused with this older thinking were newer ideas such as those espoused by Rupert Smith, Frank Hoffman, and David Kilcullen. Although the authors aimed at a distinctively British publication, they acknowledged the impact of the American FM 3-24. Of course, the British armed forces recognized the importance of interoperability with their American ally.[1335]

Crucially, the JDP 3-40 saw the military contribution as to make the adversary irrelevant and allowing other agencies to "deliver their elements of the solution", rather than decisively defeat the enemy in battle".[1336] It considered stabilization not as a discrete type of operation but instead an activity within a conflict that must be executed concurrently with other tasks.[1337] Furthermore, the JDP 3-40 cautioned against specious concepts such as the "Revolution in Military Affairs", as adept adversaries had found ways to negate the technological advantages of Western countries. Therefore, past experiences - if studied with due regard for both the historical as the contemporary contexts - were still relevant.

1332 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 9; American Scholar 2.

1333 Interviews British army staff officer 24; American Scholar 2; British commanding officer 3.

1334 Ministry of Defence. (2009). *Joint Doctrine Publication 3/40 Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*. London, p. V

1335 Ministry of Defence. JDP 3-40, p. V-VI.

1336 Ibidem, p. xvii

1337 Ibidem, p. XVIII-XIX

For instance, the role of "influence" or "narratives" are nothing new, although the velocity of global communications has increased dramatically over the last years, making the ability to shape perceptions even more pertinent. To provide a frame of reference for the military commander tasked with stabilization, the JDP enumerated nine principles for security (see table 5.5 below).[1338] In essence, most of these were inspired by, if not copied from classical counterinsurgency maxims (see chapter 3). Moreover, the influence of FM 3-24 was evident, as well as the recent experiences from Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, it drew critique for being too focused on current conflicts and obfuscating the distinction between stabilization and counterinsurgency.[1339] JDP 3-40 nevertheless provided a joint doctrine under which the Afghan COIN Centre could produce its more applied documents.

Nine principles for security JDP 3-40	**Ten principles of counterinsurgency AFM 1:10**
Primacy of Political Purpose	Primacy of Political Purpose
Understand the Context	Understand the Human Terrain
Focus on the Population	Secure the population
Foster Host Nation Governance Authority and Indigenous Capacity	Operate in Accordance With the Law
Unity of Effort	Unity of Effort
Isolate and Neutralize Irregular Actors	Neutralize the Insurgent
Exploit Credibility to Gain Support	Gain and Maintain Support
Prepare for the Long Term (Perseverance and Sustainability)	Prepare for the Long Term
Anticipate, Learn and Adapt	Learn and Adapt
-	Integrate Intelligence

Table 5.5: The principles listed in JDP 3-40 and AFM 1:10. Note that the principles from the Field Manual are reordered to match its equivalent from the Joint Doctrine Publication.

With the support of the higher echelons of the Ministry of Defence, an expanded staff and a capstone joint doctrine, the Afghan COIN Centre could publish a new Army Field Manual 1-10: Countering Insurgency (AFM 1-10) in January 2010. This was essentially an updated version from the abortive 2007 draft. With its list of ten counterinsurgency principles (see table 5.5),

1338 Ibidem, p. XX-XXI

1339 Griffin. British military doctrine, p. 332-333.

the influence of FM 3-24 is apparent.[1340] Securing the population from violence is portrayed as the military's primary task and "a pre-requisite for improving both governance and the population's prospects."[1341] In order to attain a sustainable security situation, the military's contribution must contain several elements, such as: presence among the population, continuity of approach, intelligence, influence activities and developing the host nation's security forces through embedded training. A further crucial element is education of service members to ensure that they can adapt the doctrine when circumstances demand it.[1342]

While the AFM 1-10 was considered a necessary update for British counterinsurgency doctrine, the writers emphasized that the broad strokes of the concepts had remained the same since the Second World War. The list of principles could largely be traced back to various formal and informal publications.[1343] Still, the new version identified several omissions, such as the institutional failure to adequately capture the lessons from Northern-Ireland and the lack of analytical tools to examine the nature of insurrections.[1344]

In the chapter on insurgency, five types of insurgencies are categorized: popular insurgents (from the "Maoist prototype"), militias, clan or tribal rivalries, feral gangs, and global insurgents. For the latter category, Al Qaeda served as the prime example. Interestingly, no comments are made in the chapter about the Taliban or the nature of the insurgency in Afghanistan.[1345]

For the conduct of counterinsurgency operations, AFM 1-10 used the conceptual framework of "shape-secure-develop". The elements of this framework were considered to be interdependent and not necessarily sequential. Of the three themes, "secure" was where most of the kinetic activities would be executed. For instance, the framework of "clear-hold-build" fell into this theme. As such, the AFM adhered to classical and contemporary concepts.[1346] In a broad sense, "shape" can be equated with non-kinetic influence activities, while "develop" resembles aspects of host nation capacity building. These aspects were elaborated upon in the field manual's chapters six and ten, respectively.

Throughout the field manual historical case studies and vignettes are used to illustrate the various concepts. Most of these examples refer to British experiences with counterinsurgency operations, like Malaya, Aden, Dhofar and Northern-Ireland. These campaigns are subjected

1340 British Army. (2010). *Army Field Manual 1-10: Countering Insurgency.* Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, p. 1-1.

1341 British Army. *AFM 1-10: Countering Insurgency*, p. 1-1.

1342 Ibidem, p. 1-3.

1343 Ibidem, p. CS2-2

1344 Ibidem, CS1-4.

1345 Ibidem, chapter 2.

1346 Ibidem, p. 4-6.

to historical scrutiny and unsuccessful operations are analyzed with candor.[1347] With the combination of a historical foundation and integrating contemporary elements, the Afghan COIN Centre succeeded in its objective to publish a relevant British counterinsurgency doctrine. Furthermore, the large format with colored charts, maps, and photographs, it was intended to be easy to read.[1348] Still, its reception was not universally positive with the British Army. The main critique was that it was too high-brow and of little practical value for operations in Afghanistan.[1349] However, the Afghan COIN Centre also published lower-level doctrine that addressed specific areas of interests such as: "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan - The Essentials", "Operational Insights - Company Level Tactics in Afghanistan" and doctrine notes on for instance the Afghan Local Police and the use of Female Engagement Teams. Throughout the campaign the Afghan COIN Centre, in collaboration with LXC, kept itself abreast of operational developments in the field and strove to write accessible publications to address these topics.[1350]

The publication of AFM 1:10 was a milestone in the early existence of the Afghan COIN Centre, especially following the previous frustrating experience. Still, the staff recognized that the mere publication of a new doctrine was insufficient for its inculcation. To ensure consistent distribution of field manual's content, the COIN Centre staff were prolific in their propagation throughout the British Army and beyond. Accordingly, over 22,000 hard copies of the AFM 1:10 were distributed among service members and associated civilians.[1351] Chief among these dissemination mechanisms was the "Herrick study period". Before the establishment of the COIN Centre, each brigade that formed a Helmand-rotation was responsible for understanding the Afghan context by itself. As a result, the substance and quality of these periods varied.[1352]

At the end of 2009, the Afghan COIN Centre became responsible for the study period in the mission-specific training for the rotations headed for Afghanistan. This led to a consistent and consolidated conceptual preparation. The study period started with one introduction day on which study materials were distributed for further reading by officers and senior NCOs. Besides doctrinal publications, relevant books and a "bespoke mission study pack" were distributed. Whereas academic literature was used to gain a broader perspective, the study packs were internal publications that represented the recent developments in Afghanistan. Two weeks after the introduction day, a study week was held with the assigned homework serving as background knowledge. During this week, diverse perspectives were

1347 Interview American Scholar 2

1348 See Tom Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p 115.

1349 Interview British army staff officer 3; Catignani. Coping with knowledge. p. 519-521; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 187

1350 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-8_4.

1351 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p, 5-8_2; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 117-118.

1352 Interviews British commanding officer 2; British commanding officer 4; British army staff officer 13.

offered to highlight the Afghan context with a focus on the situation in Helmand. For instance, the latest intelligence updates on Helmand and the wider mission were provided by the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre - Afghanistan (LIFC-A, see section 5.3.4.2). Furthermore, individuals from the Afghan diaspora, academia, NGOs, allies, and media were invited to offer their perspectives.[1353] Although the structure and content of the study period improved, some observers are skeptical on whether this was sufficient to get the counterinsurgency principles across and make up for the overly kinetic outlook of predeployment training and education.[1354]

Ultimately, the impetus for a British counterinsurgency doctrine was in large part an informal process, spearheaded by colonel Alderson and several likeminded officers at the Land Warfare Centre (see table 5.6). Yet, this effort only bore fruit by 2009 when the dynamics of Operation Entirety and a change of leadership at DCDC aligned to overcome bureaucratic hurdles. With the establishment of the Afghan COIN Centre, the British Army acquired an organization that could produce doctrinal publications incorporating the latest insights from the field. How doctrine affected operations in Helmand and the predeployment training will be explored further in section 5.4.2.2.

Doctrine (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Doctrine	Tortuous publication process of AFM 1:10	Formal adaptation	Organizational politics, leadership
Conceptual thinking on counterinsurgency	Establishment of Afghanistan COIN Centre	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation (personnel)
Dissemination of doctrine	Study week in mission specific training	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation (time)

Table 5.6: Adaptations with regard to doctrine

5.3.2.3: Predeployment training

One of the most dramatic and concrete manifestations of change during operation Herrick was the predeployment training for TFH units. For the first two rotations (Herrick 4 and 5) that deployed in 2006, the preparations had in large part been slanted towards stabilization and facilitating reconstruction.[1355] Of course, the situation in Helmand was far less benign than anticipated and the training had to be adjusted accordingly. Another impediment for

1353 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-8-A_2

1354 See Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*, p. 204-209; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 118.

1355 Butler. Setting Ourselves Up, p. 51; interview British commanding officer 4.

the predeployment phase was that in the first years of Operation Herrick (2006-2008) the training establishment also had to prepare the troops that were allocated to Iraq. For the training audience, the distinction between these theaters were not always clear. Instead, there was a generic training package for both missions.[1356]

In total, the preparation time for TFH units was 18 months. Of this period, the first 12 months were spent in Hybrid Foundation Training.[1357] As the name indicates, this training phase seeks to inculcate the foundational skills for individual soldiers and units. Before 2009, this period was primarily focused on conventional war fighting capabilities. Consequently, this period resembled training cycles of the Cold War and had limited connection to the requirements of the Afghan theater.[1358] Underpinning this philosophy was the idea that the units would be trained to a level of proficiency that could be exploited in any type of mission. To be sure, a sizable portion of this training still emphasized conventional combat capabilities.[1359] Furthermore, the Foundation Training would serve as a starting point of the 6-month Mission Specific Training in which the units would be oriented towards the deployment and receive more specialized instructions.

With the onset of Operation Entirety in 2009, the Foundation Training was adapted to be more aligned to operational realities in Afghanistan. For instance, exercises started to include a mix of conventional and irregular training adversaries.[1360] Additionally, training events included aspects of key leader engagement.[1361] Furthermore, the Army increased its number battle group exercises at the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK) as the terrain there better resembled conditions in Afghanistan than jungle training in Belize.[1362] At a more fundamental level, the live firing exercises (LFX) were altered to enhance their realism. Previously, marksmanship training was centered on hitting static targets at 100 to 300 meters. This was deemed as insufficiently reflecting the realties on the ground in Helmand where combat occurred at either shorter or longer ranges with fleeting targets.[1363] By infusing LFXs with more dynamic and realistic scenarios, the training establishment sought to improve operational marksmanship.[1364] Furthermore, different weapon systems were integrated into

1356 Richard Iron (2017). Case studies of adaptation in the British Army: Northern Ireland and Southern Iraq. *The Skill of Adaptability: the learning curve in combat* (pp. 234-250). Canberra: Army History Unit, p. 240-241.

1357 This was called Adaptive Foundation Training until 2009, see Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 523.

1358 See for instance Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p23-30.

1359 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 118-119; Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 523.

1360 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 177.

1361 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 116.

1362 Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 118.

1363 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_13.

1364 Interviews British commanding officer 3; British army staff officer 18.

a LFX to train fire and manoeuvre and refinement of fire control at platoon or even company level.[1365]

While the improvements in the Hybrid Foundation Training were important for the predeployment training, the adjustments in mission-specific training inherently had a larger effect on operations in Helmand. To an extent, improvements here preceded Operation Entirety. For instance, the aforementioned OPTAG, by no means solely responsible for predeployment training, started to focus on the Afghan theatre by the end of 2007. The new commander, with experience in Afghanistan himself, recruited NCOs with recent operational deployments in Afghanistan to share their knowledge. Crucially, the prestige of instructing new rotations was raised within the army and OPTAG secured support from the personnel center.[1366] Furthermore, funding was procured for new realistic training areas, including a simulated Afghan village in Thetford.[1367] Beyond building a typical Afghan village with *qualas*, scenarios were drawn up based on real vignettes in Helmand. Gurkha troops were seconded to roleplay as Afghan troops and Afghan expats posed as the local villagers. This allowed for dynamic training in which military instructors and cultural advisers could evaluate the scenarios and provide feedback.[1368] Fed with information from the operational theater, intelligence reporting and the Lessons Exploitation Centre, OPTAG kept abreast of developments in Helmand and adjusted their trainings accordingly.[1369] After initiation of Operation Entirety, funding, and attention for predeployment training increased further.[1370]

Over time, an intense training program was established, optimized for the Helmand campaign. With the various exercises of the "Pashtun-series" various aspects of the mission were trained and evaluated, culminating in two exercises: "Pashtun Dawn" and "Pashtun Horizon". Pashtun Dawn was a battle group-level field training exercise in which all elements, including augmentees were integrated and trained. As the TFH rotations were comprised of multiple battle groups, this exercise was almost a continuous occurrence at Salisbury Plains. Pashtun Horizon was a Command Post Exercise in which the TFH-staff could hone their procedures with realistic scenarios.[1371] Participation by Afghan National Security Forces, interdepartmental partners and PJHQ helped prepare the task force staff with familiarization of the environment and the reporting lines. Mentors from preceding rotations could coach new staff members with their experiences.[1372]

1365 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1-A_1.

1366 Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 373; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_5.

1367 Interview British army staff officer 18; British civil servant 8.

1368 Interviews British army staff officer 14; British civil servant 8.

1369 Interviews British army staff officer 18; British army staff officer 14.

1370 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_5.

1371 Ibidem, p. 5-1-A_1

1372 Ibidem, p. 5-1_12; Interview British civil servant 8.

A final element from the predeployment training was the so-called "Reception, Staging and Onward Integration" (RSOI) at Camp Bastion, Helmand. Here the incoming rotations were in-processed into theater, received the latest information on developments in the area of operations and final instruction.[1373] To this end, units were welcomed by their assigned instructors from OPTAG that had trained them during Mission Specific Training. In this way, the units saw familiar faces that helped their final preparations for operations. Moreover, this way the instructors were kept informed of the latest developments.[1374] As an evaluation tool, the deployed units were asked to complete a post-training survey after three months in Helmand to rate the training they had received. This provided information that the instructors could use to adjust their curricula.[1375] These forward deployed members OPTAG saw some duplication of effort in information gathering with those required from the LXC.[1376] Still, their role in RSOI, helped the final preparations of the deployed units.

The sequential progressive predeployment training up unto the RSOI-phase was built into a conveyor belt of mission preparation, where individuals and units were fed through the various training stages. By and large, commanders at various levels regarded their predeployment training as the best they had encountered during their careers.[1377] To be sure, challenges remained for predeployment training. According to various observers, it was still too focused on kinetic activities. The conceptual training on counterinsurgency such as the Herrick Study Week (see sub section 5.3.2.2) was deemed insufficient to inculcate units with the required mindset.[1378] Furthermore, the adaptations in predeployment training were geared towards combat and combat support units. Preparation for more specialist capabilities such as information operations and civilian-military cooperation meant that these individuals were not available for collective training, thereby hampering the integration with their units.[1379] Finally, equipment that was present in theatre was not always available in training so that troops had to familiarize themselves during the RSOI-phase to address such deficiencies.[1380] This was only resolved under Operation Entirety with the establishment of the "land training fleet".[1381] While reaching an impressive state of incorporating learning by

1373 Ibidem, p. 5-1_11.

1374 Interviews British army staff officer 18; British commanding officer 3.

1375 D. Johnson, J. Moroney, R. Cliff, M. Markel, L. Smallman and M. Spirtas (2009). *Preparing and Training for the Full Spectrum of Military Challenges: Insights from the Experiences of China, France, the United Kingdom, India, and Israel.* Santa Monica: RAND, p. 168-169.

1376 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 46-47.

1377 Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 5 British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 13; British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 12; British commanding officer 14; British staff officer 3.

1378 Catignani. Getting COIN, p. 29; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 119. Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 116-117. Interview British commanding officer 7

1379 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-1_10.

1380 Ibidem, p. 5-1_8.

1381 Ibidem, p. xliii

2011-2012 (see table 5.7), the predeployment training had had to evolve from an inauspicious start in 2005-2006, thereby having an adverse effect on operations well into the campaign.

Training (themes)	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Incorporation of experience from the field	Incorporated in training scenarios and RSOI	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation
Reinvigoration of OPTAG	Training support increasingly geared toward Afghanistan	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation

Table 5.7: Developments in predeployment training

5.3.4: Vignettes

Mirroring the structure of the previous chapter, the following sub sections will provide an in-depth examination of the learning processes in four vignettes. As such the Helmand PRT will serve as a vignette of interagency cooperation; subsequently, the learning processes with regard to intelligence, non-kinetic activities and counter-IED efforts are analyzed. By applying the theoretical framework from chapter 2, the dynamics of these processes can be assessed.

5.3.4.1: *The Helmand PRT*

The Helmand PRT forms an interesting case in the constellation of various PRT models that operated in Afghanistan. Initially, the Helmand PRT was commanded by the deputy commander of TFH and overseen by the PCRU. In the Joint UK Plan for Helmand, the PRT was to be responsible for fostering governance and development, while TFH was to provide security. Concurrently with the initial plan, the civilian component of the British mission had been resourced to work around Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, with less than ten civil servants from FCO and DfID. The rest of the positions were filled by the military.[1382] As such, the PRT was dependent on the resources provided by the military such as transport and force protection. With this configuration, the PRT was to be a conduit for the integrated approach.[1383] However, as the plan was subsequently discarded in the spring of 2006, the civilian contribution was naturally affected.[1384]

1382 Rodwell. *Theory and the reality*, p. 24.

1383 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 4.

1384 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

As a result, the PRTs operations were marred from the outset, as the civilian members were not allowed, due to security considerations, to venture beyond Lashkar Gah. This drew some ire from the military as this undermined an integrated approach to operations. At the same time, the heavy fighting in the early rotations precluded constructive work on development and governance. Consequently, the PRT had limited contact with the population.[1385] An additional impediment to integrated working was the cultural differences between the military and civil servants from the FCO and DfID. This divide manifested itself in the planning processes: where the military plans for relatively short periods of time with concrete objectives, their civilian counterparts tend to take a more longitudinal view with an iterative approach. Given the predominance of military personnel in Helmand, their planning procedures prevailed.[1386] Moreover, in the early Herrick-rotations, the incoming TFH-commanders generally brought their own six-month plans that were not coordinated with the PRT.[1387]

This is not to say that the civilians in the PRT were themselves always of the same mind. By design, the civil servants from DfID and FCO reported back to their own departments instead of PRT-leadership. Of course, all these organizational barriers hindered unity of effort within the PRT. As the mission progressed, the coordination between the various elements in the PRT improved. However, PRT-member found to their frustration that their resolved arguments were often rehashed at the UK Embassy in Kabul and in Whitehall.[1388] Finally, the PRT had insufficient understanding of Helmand and its dynamics. As there was no transfer of knowledge between the American and the British PRTs, the latter were at a significant disadvantage at the start of operations in 2006.[1389] Despite the touting of a comprehensive approach for Helmand, the mission was dominated by military operations that tried to enhance the security situation.[1390]

The deficiencies in the civilian contribution were recognized both within Helmand and in the UK. Over the course of 2007, the civilian staff of the PRT was expanded to 30 individuals, yet tensions between the PRT and TFH persisted.[1391] At the end of that year, Whitehall resolved to further increase the civilian contribution. Moreover, the British activities in Helmand would be brought under civilian leadership in the form of a senior civil servant as head of the PRT. As the civilian equivalent of a major-general, this individual would be of higher rank than TFH's commanding brigadier. In June 2008, Hugh Powell, assumed this mantle as

1385 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3

1386 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6.

1387 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 15.

1388 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 13-14; Interviews British civil servant 3; British civil servant 6.

1389 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 6.

1390 James Pritchard and M.L.R. Smith (2010). Thompson in Helmand: Comparing Theory to Practice in British Counter-insurgency Operations in Afghanistan. *Civil Wars Journal*, *12*(1-2), p. 78-79.

1391 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 204.

head of the "civil-military mission Helmand" (CMMH). In this way there was a nominal unity of command of all British activities in Helmand.[1392] The TFH commander at that time, Mark Carlton-Smith (Herrick 8) even moved his brigade planning cell to the PRT in an effort to improve the planning cycles.[1393] Additionally, the strength of the PRT was increased to more than 200 individuals, of which around 80 were civilians.[1394]

From the military's perspective, its role in stabilization activities was also reconsidered. In 2008, the MoD added "Military Assistance to Stabilisation and Development" to its formal tasks. Stabilization operations were exemplified by complexity, collaboration with various actors and varying levels of volatility. This new task further enshrined in the Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40: *Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*, discussed earlier. The JDP 3-40 emphasized the need for collaborative planning for stabilization operations between Mod, FCO and DfiD. [1395]

A further adaptation at the institutional level regarding the comprehensive approach was made in 2007 when the PCRU was succeeded by the Stabilisation Unit (SU). In essence, the SU was established as an executive agency for stabilization of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.[1396] It was better resourced than the PCRU had been and was jointly owned by FCO, DfID and the MoD.[1397] Its role was to develop deployable civilian capacity, facilitate cross-governmental planning and to identify and learn lessons from experience.[1398] By 2009, this new agency numbered over a 1000 individuals who worked on stabilization, of which 70 were deployed overseas.[1399] Although the establishment of the Stabilisation Unit should have removed interdepartmental barriers, seconded personnel still reported to their respective parent departments, despite being funded independently from the departments.[1400] For the armed forces, the Stabilisation Unit provided an improved interface with the FCO and DfID for operations. While members of the Stabilisation Unit were deployed to other conflict-affected areas, Afghanistan was its main focus.[1401]

1392 Robert Egnell (2011). Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan: what now for British counterinsurgency? *International Affairs, 87*(2), p. 305

1393 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 232.

1394 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_3.

1395 Jennifer Baechler (2016). *Operationalizing "Whole-of-Government" as an approach to state fragility and instability: case studies from Ottowa, Canada and London, United Kingdom.* Halifax: Dalhousie University (Doctoral Dissertation), p. 324-325.

1396 J. Connolly and R. Pyper (2020). Developing capacity within the British civil service: the case of the Stabilisation Unit. *Public Money & Management*,), p. 1.

1397 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 5; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 96.

1398 House of commons. Comprehensive Approach, p. 30.

1399 Ibidem, p. 38-39.

1400 Connolly and Pyper. Developing capacity, p. 4-5.

1401 Interviews British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6; British staff officer 21.

In practical terms, the Stabilisation Unit provided additional personnel for the PRT in Lashkar Gah, thereby enlarging the civilian contribution. A further important change was the employment of "Stabilisation Advisers" in 2008 to some of the outlying districts by the SU. A key driver to this development was the recognition that the conflict could not be resolved from the provincial capitals, instead the local dynamics and grievances had to be addressed at the district level.[1402] Stabilisation Advisers deployed to districts such as Sangin and Musa Qalah where they served as an adviser to the incumbent battle group commander on governance and development. A key benefit of the Stabilisation Advisers was that they generally stayed in theater for prolonged periods of time, thereby becoming an important source of local knowledge for incoming rotations. Furthermore, these advisers liaised with the local district authorities and mentored them.[1403] While the Stabilisation Advisers were a marked improvement for civil-military cooperation at the battle group/district level, their ability to affect governance and development was naturally limited, as the PRT did not bequeath sufficient additional personnel to the districts.[1404] Nevertheless, some civilian specialists, for instance on agriculture or education and political advisers were deployed to the districts.[1405]

In theater, the military sought to remedy the lack of PRT personnel at the district level by setting up the "Military Stabilisation Support Teams" (MSSTs) in 2008. To be sure, military CIMIC-personnel had been deployed to Helmand from the outset to interact with civilian agencies - during the initial rotations, CIMIC-personnel were attached to TFH-units and started projects and paid compensation to locals caused by firefights.[1406] Since 2005, the CIMIC-personnel had been organized in the Joint CIMIC-group and included reservists with relevant experience in aspects as agriculture, development, and infrastructure. With the establishment of the MSSTs, the PRT acquired military personnel that could support the district Stabilisation Adviser on the ground and foster civil-military cooperation.[1407] The MSSTs consisted of four to eight soldiers from all services, including reservists with the functional specialists. Besides the British MSSTs, American and Danish teams were operating in districts like Garmsir and Gereshk.[1408]

To enhance the capacity and preparation of the MSSTs, the Joint CIMIC Group was reorganized in 2009 into the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG). The MSSG was commanded by a colonel and grew to a strength of 400 personnel. It recruited and trained personnel for CIMIC-roles, prepared the MSSTs for their missions and deployed staff-officers to the PRT

1402 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3; Stabilisation Unit. *Lessons Identified*, p. 8.

1403 Stabilisation Unit. (2008). *The UK Approach to Stabilisation*. London), p. 7; House of Commons. Comprehensive Approach, ev, 90

1404 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3

1405 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 16; Campaign Study, p. 5-4_4.

1406 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p 5-4_5.

1407 House of Commons. Comprehensive Approach, ev 162; Baechler. "*Whole-of-Government*, p. 325.

1408 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_5.

in Lashkar Gah. Although its main effort was in Helmand, the MSSG deployed personnel to various other countries such as Kosovo, Libya, and Sierra Leone.[1409]

While the deployment of Stabilisation Advisers and the MSSTs improved the ability to mount reconstruction projects and improve local governance, there was a lack of coherence between the activities in the districts.[1410] During Operation Herrick 13 (2011), a "Stabilisation Cell" was established in the TFH staff to coordinate the stabilization efforts across the districts.[1411] This is indicative of the lack of control that the headquarters of the PRT had over its sub-units, as by this move TFH mirrored the mandate of the PRT.

Throughout its operations in Helmand (and beyond), the personnel of the MSSG acquired much experience in stabilization operations. Yet, the teams did not always see eye-to-eye with battle group commanders. Whereas the former were trying to build Afghan capacity, the latter generally had a shorter time-horizon that focused on security. This resulted in tension between the two viewpoints, where the military perspective normally prevailed due its predominance. [1412] Compounding this issue was that the members of the MSSTs, despite their specialist skills and knowledge, sometimes lacked military credibility with their collocated battle groups. As such, they were not always valued. Furthermore, like the rest of the military, their tours were capped at six months which curtailed their local understanding and the continuity of it in general.[1413]

A further fundamental change within the operations of the PRT was the shift in focus from reconstruction towards political aspects of the mission. Within TFH, there was a tendency to start projects such as the building of schools and healthcare centers, partly based on experiences from the Balkan and Iraq, which had been more developed areas. Moreover, military commanders preferred such projects as they were tangible and indicated a form of progress. However, it gradually dawned on them that Helmand lacked the institutional capability to maintain such infrastructure. Instead, the British efforts should concentrate on building the institutional capacity of Afghanistan, starting with empowering local authorities.[1414]

A prime example of this was the Afghan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP), which was set up in collaboration with the Afghan central government in 2009. Under this Afghan-British initiative, the Helmand PRT sought to link the Afghan authorities with local communities

1409 Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Structure of the MSSG*. London

1410 Interview British civil servant 2

1411 British Army. *Herrick Campaign study*, p 5-4_5.

1412 Ibidem.

1413 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1414 Stabilisation Unit. *Lessons Identified*), p. 6, British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_5

via the districts. The ASOP created *shuras* (councils) between community leaders and district and provincial authorities to help resolve local problems and disputes. Furthermore, the PRT provided funding and assistance for additional staff at the district level.[1415] With dedicated funds, local authorities could improve their service delivery that was tailored to the needs of the communities. As security around district centers improved, linkages between communities and Afghan governmental agencies were strengthened. Although this represented a marked improvement over the initial efforts by the PRT, the ability of local governance to administer their inhabitants remained insufficient to function independently. In part, this was caused by the fact that most developmental funds were initiated outside of the purview of the provincial governance and the PRT. As a result, such projects were not coordinated and had the negative effect of increased corruption. In turn, this adversely affected how local authorities were perceived by their constituents.[1416] An additional fundamental problem was the scarcity of competent administrators on the local (or provincial) level who could bridge difference between the various tribal communities.[1417] This of course was a challenge that would require decades rather than a few years to overcome.

Naturally, the deployment in force of more than 20,000 US Marines in 2009 also affected the work of the Helmand PRT. Indeed, because of the increased troop presence, the security situation in population centers was improved.[1418] Although the American presence eclipsed the British contingent by 2010, the newly-established Regional Command South-West deferred largely to the British PRT for governance and development at the provincial level. By virtue of their presence since 2006, the British had gained a modicum of experience with working with the communities and local authorities.[1419] However, this British prominence was far from absolute. For instance, the Americans brought far more resources to bear on the province and therefore decided how to spend the development funds. Given that the American Surge was under a time pressure to produce results, their development projects were geared towards quick impact and highlighting of progress.[1420] This was at odds with the (belated) recognition in the PRT that resolving political issues among local communities and capacity building at the district-level was paramount. Unsurprisingly, Afghans were perceptive enough to recognize the changed dynamics in the province and leverage the difference between the British and Americans.[1421]

1415 House of Commons. Comprehensive Approach, ev 90.

1416 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 24-25.

1417 Interviews British civil servant 3; British civil servant 2.

1418 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 9.

1419 Jeffrey Dressler (2009). *Securing Helmand: Understanding and Responding to the Enemy.* Washington DC: Institute for the Study of War p. 35.

1420 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 16.

1421 See Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 225-231.

To be sure, the American mission in Helmand initiated a broad range of initiatives for reconstruction and development such as alternative livelihood programs to curtail poppy production, a cash-for-work to stem recruitment for the insurgency and large infrastructural projects. By and large, these efforts had little lasting effect on the development of Helmand; indeed, the influx of funds without competent Afghan political oversight fueled corruption. Furthermore, it was highly doubtful whether the Afghans could maintain these efforts[1422] A further element that undermined the long-term political stability of Helmand was the British and American inability and unwillingness to sponsor reconciliation insurgents with local authorities. In Sangin, the British Stabilisation Adviser had helped broker an agreement with tribal leaders who had hitherto backed the insurgency in 2009. However, when the FCO demurred and the formalization of the agreement was stalled, the leaders who had subscribed to this truce were assassinated. A last-ditch effort to salvage the agreement when the US Marines took over Sangin came to naught as the Americans were equally disinclined to a deal with insurgents.[1423]

In retrospect, producing viable political and economic solutions for Helmand's manifold woes was beyond the competence of the Helmand PRT (see table 5.8). Despite the various adaptations of the British civilian-military efforts, the interplay between security, governance and development was never adequately resolved. As acknowledged by some of its members, the Helmand PRT had lost valuable time in the early years of the campaign in which its activities had not been aligned with TFH and had been marred by a lack of understanding of its environment.[1424] Even with better coordination and understanding, the PRT had to cope with both Afghan and alliance dynamics that it could not influence. In a bleak recognition of the inability of the Afghan authorities to sustain many of the initiated programs after the end of the ISAF-mission, the PRT concentrated its efforts towards managed decline after 2012.[1425]

1422 Dressler. *Securing Helmand*, p. 37.

1423 See Fairweather, *The Good War*, 394-396.; Interview British civil servant 3.

1424 FCO. *Capturing the lessons*, p. 10.

1425 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 6.

Provincial Reconstruction Team	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Civilian contribution	Increase in civilians attached to PRT and civilian command of the PRT (2008)	Formal adaptation	Learning mechanisms, civil-military relations
Cooperation PRT – TFH-elements	District Stabilisation Advisers	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, organizational culture
Military support	Military stabilisation support teams/group	Formal adaptation	Civil-military relations, organizational culture, resource allocation

Table 5.8: Learning processes in the PRT during the Helmand campaign

5.3.4.2: Intelligence and understanding

The initial inability to understand the local dynamics of Helmand by the British Task Force has been well documented. In the analysis of the inadequacies of the intelligence process, several causes were identified. Primarily, the British troops generally lacked interaction with the local population as they were spread too thinly and were predominantly conducting clearance operations.[1426] A second deficiency was that the focus of the intelligence process was on the adversary instead of the operational environment as a whole. As a result, the intelligence process in the initial years was insufficient in providing a thorough understanding of the dynamics in Helmand. Thirdly, the intelligence process was not organized for a counterinsurgency campaign. Initially intelligence was structured top-down instead of bottom up. This meant that the headquarters of TFH had access to highly classified intelligence from sensitive sources that originated at higher echelons. Consequently, intelligence personnel were preoccupied with analyzing this stream of information, to the detriment of intelligence derived from patrols and other open sources. Essentially, the deficiencies in the intelligence process in Afghanistan were a continuation of those experienced in Iraq. Best practices picked up in Northern Ireland, such as decentralized intelligence processes, the importance of interaction with the local population and the study of open sources, had seemingly been forgotten. [1427]

In comparison to the Dutch Army, the British Army had a separate intelligence corps at the time of the ISAF-campaign. The Intelligence Corps thus could serve as a natural anchor point for knowledge acquired in Helmand. As such, intelligence personnel received consistent

1426 See for this notion: Martin. *An Intimate War*; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*; Emile Simpson (2012). *War from the ground up: Twenty-first-century comabat as politics*. London: Hurst.

1427 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_5.

training in their specialty. Moreover, these service members could pursue an established career path in this branch and build experience. However, these specialists were initially concentrated at the TFH/brigade level.[1428] In contrast, in the battle groups, the intelligence section (S2) were staffed by officers and NCOs from the own regiments (thus mainly infantry and cavalry). In theory, these personnel were trained for their intelligence roles prior to deployment. Unfortunately, this was not always the case due to last minute shifts in personnel. Moreover, intelligence positions in battle groups were not necessarily coveted by the organic battalion personnel, as command or operations (S3) billets were perceived to hold more allure. At the company level, the problems with intelligence position were even more pronounced as the small number of positions had to be filled by relatively junior personnel.[1429] As such, the preparation and quality of the intelligence personnel at the battle group level and below were inconsistent. This factor impeded the processing and analysis of the information that was acquired by the units in the field and thus affected the intelligence position of TFH as a whole.

The lack of understanding of Helmand was widely recognized in the early rotations. For instance, battle group commanders requested to embed personnel from the intelligence corps in their units. This became practice after 2009 as part of Operation Entirety. The battle groups were reinforced with intelligence support detachments (BGISD). This was replicated at replicated at the company level with intelligence support teams (COIST).[1430] These small detachments consisted of officers and enlisted personnel from the Intelligence Corps and were meant to augment the organic intelligence sections.[1431] In practice, many battalion intelligence officers were repurposed to fill other billets or replace casualties. The establishment of BGISDs and COISTs resulted in mixed teams of Intelligence Corps personnel and organic battalion personnel.[1432]

In essence, the BGISD and COISTs meant a qualitative improvement of the intelligence process at the tactical level. Quantitatively speaking, their contribution was modest with just one or two individuals per unit.[1433] As TFH increasingly concentrated in central Helmand, the interaction with local population increased and patrols generated more data. With the eventual augmentation of specialized personnel, processing and analysis of this enlarged data flow improved.[1434] Still, the addition of Intelligence Corps personnel to manoeuvre units meant that they had to be integrated during their predeployment phase. Consequently, personnel had to receive specific training while at the same time help to prepare their new

1428 Interviews British army staff officer 13; British army staff officer 11.

1429 Interviews British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 13; British army staff officer 11.

1430 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_7.

1431 Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practices*, p. 10-3.

1432 Interviews British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 13; British army staff officer 11.

1433 Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practices*, p. 10-3.

1434 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_5.

units with understanding their area of operations. Within the Intelligence Corps it was acknowledged that attachment to an infantry company or battalion required different competencies from its personnel than a position as an analyst at higher headquarters. Therefore, personnel for the BGISDs and COISTs were specifically selected for their ability to connect with tactical commanders and work in austere conditions.[1435] Additionally, BGISDs and COISTs were attached to Afghan National Army units to enhance their intelligence processes.

As the campaign progressed in time, the training of intelligence personnel was slowly adapted. However, this lagged behind the developments in-theater. For instance, the training of battalion S2s in 2008 was overwhelmingly geared at finding and fighting insurgents; it had little to offer on local dynamics and identifying IED networks. Consequently, these officers found that they were ill-prepared for their role in Helmand.[1436] Curiously, the secondary training of new Intelligence Corps officers was even more hidebound. During this training, the focus was on the role of intelligence in conventional war. The junior officers had to study the Military Intelligence Field Manual (colloquially known as the "pink pillow" due to its size and hue of the pages) that was essentially a relic of the Cold War, focused on the organization and doctrine of Soviet Army formations.[1437] This did little to prepare the young officers for deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan. By 2010-2011 a shift became visible in these training efforts towards more contextual understanding of the wider human terrain.[1438] Gradually, the population and the social dynamics became the subject of intelligence training, driven by demand from the field and by instructors who had served in Afghanistan and Iraq.[1439] In 2011, the centrality of comprehensive understanding of the human terrain was incorporated into various doctrinal documents.[1440]

The increased attention for the human terrain and cultural knowledge for understanding of the operational environment in Helmand is further illustrated by the establishment of the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit (DCSU) in 2010. This new unit was the result of a combination of formal and informal processes within the armed forces.[1441] Recognizing the value of linguistic skills in-theatre, service members could volunteer to attend courses in Dari or Pashtu. There was a basic course of ten weeks and a proficiency course of 18 months. Although this initiative was commendable it was initially impeded by a lack of cultural awareness. This

1435 British Army. (2012). *The Company Intelligence Support Handbook*. Warminster: Land Warfare Centre; Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practices*, p. 10-2.

1436 John Bethell (2010). Accidental counterinsurgents: Nad E Ali, Hybrid War and the Future of the British Army. *British Army Review, 149*(Summer), p. 1-2.

1437 Interviews British Army staff officer 11; British Army staff officer 13.

1438 Interview British Army staff officer 15: Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice*, p, 2-13.

1439 Interviews British Army staff officer 15; British Army staff officer 11; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*. p. 3-1_5.

1440 See Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations* . London, p. 4-18; Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice*, p. 3-13.

1441 Interview British army staff officer 14; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 120

"resulted in some individuals involved in mentoring arriving in theatre having learnt the wrong language as it was discovered that within the ANSF, Dari was spoken at Lieutenant Colonel rank and above with Pashtu spoken at the lower levels."[1442] Moreover, the language training was in itself no silver bullet; understanding the local dynamics required immersion in the field. Language skills were no substitute, but rather an indispensable tool to acquire this insight.[1443]

Recognizing the limits of the linguistic training, one of the officers enrolled in this program, captain Mike Martin, took the initiative to establish a unit with a broader remit. As such, the DCSU was not an intelligence asset by design, but it was indicative for a shift towards a more comprehensive understanding of the environment. Martin envisioned a corps of 'political officers' akin those of the colonial era. The idea was that with linguistic skills and cultural acumen, cultural specialists could advise tactical commanders and form their interface with local leaders. A further consideration was that such cultural specialists needed to have a military credibility in order to have traction with their commanders. Thus, the cultural specialists were to be recruited from military personnel with additional linguistic and cultural training, rather than militarized anthropologists.[1444] The idea was embraced within the British Army and supported by the Afghan COIN Centre (Martin was nominally provided with a billet there) and more senior officers.[1445]

In 2010, this led to the establishment of the DCSU. Not only would the cultural specialists advise commanders in-theater, but they would also play a pivotal role in the cultural training of their rotations.[1446] The cultural advisers (CULADs) were attached to the headquarters of TFH and the battle groups.[1447] As such, the contribution of the CULADs was highly valued by commanders as they helped enhance their understanding of the environment and gave them more options to influence it.[1448]

Still, the CULADs and the DCSU were limited by a few constraints. One aspect was that the number of eligible officers capable (and willing) to perform this role adequately was inherently limited.[1449] A related characteristic was that as the CULADs were a scarce commodity, they had to spread themselves thinly in theater. Given that most interactions with local civilians

1442 Op Herrick Campaign study, p. 5-3_13

1443 Interviews British army staff officer 14; British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 19.

1444 This was in marked contrast to the American Human Terrain Teams that employed anthropologists to the Afghan and Iraqi theaters. Interviews British army staff officer 14; British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 19.

1445 Interviews British commanding officer 3; British Army staff officer 24; British army staff officer 14.

1446 Ministry of Defence. (2010, February 24). Military develops its cultural understanding of Afghanistan. *Defence Policy and Business*

1447 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 6-9_1.

1448 Ibidem, p. 5-3_10.

1449 Interviews British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 19.

occurred at the lower tactical levels, cultural expertise was in high demand at the multitude of patrol bases.[1450] Furthermore, the training of the CULADs was still focused on linguistic skills in Dari or Pashtu, while cultural training was truncated to 5 weeks.[1451] Consequently, the actual cultural knowledge for some of the CULADs was limited. Finally, CULADs felt the inherent tension of understanding the local population, the requirements of the intelligence process (of which they were no formal part) and influencing the environment through their knowledge.[1452]

A further formal adaptation was the establishment of the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre Afghanistan (LIFC(A)) in early 2010. Again, this was the result of requests by tactical commanders for better intelligence support in their Post-Operation Reports from both Iraq and the early Helmand rotations. It had to provide improved tactical intelligence, both for predeployment training as use in-theater. [1453] The LIFC(A) was based in the UK and thus a reach-back facility. This had the benefit that the analysts were somewhat removed from operational pressures in Afghanistan and could provide continuity, write in-depth assessments, and identify long term trends.[1454] Of course, the LIFC(A) still had to be responsive to requests from Afghanistan. Its structure reflected the various districts of Helmand where TFH operated. Small teams provided a narrative for their districts through fusing intelligence from all sources, ranging from patrol reports to sensitive intelligence from the UK's intelligence and security services. Additionally, there were several teams that were organized thematically such as for narcotics and the insurgency. [1455] Furthermore, LIFC(A) forged links to both OPTAG and the LXC. It provided current input to predeployment training and debriefed returning intelligence personnel. Publications from the LIFC(A) on insurgent tactics and other topics were widely disseminated throughout the Army.[1456]

For all the adaptations in intelligence that were either initiated or supported by the British armed forces, several aspects diminished the effects of these changes (see table 5.9). First, the introduction of a flurry of new acronyms reflects that the BGISDs, COISTs, the LIFC(A), the DCSU and the wider shift in emphasis to understanding the environment took approximately four years to manifest and even longer to pay off. Secondly, the general lack of campaign continuity meant that successive TFH rotations struggled to understand the local dynamics of the conflict. Critics contend that this lack of understanding was never resolved despite the

1450 Catignani, Getting COIN, p. 526.

1451 Interview British army staff officer 19; House of Commons. (2014, October 27). Written Questions and Answers: Defence Cultural Specialist Unit. London

1452 Interviews British army staff officer 14; British army staff officer 15.

1453 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-1_6.

1454 Interview British army staff officer 13.

1455 Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice* p. 1-15; Interviews British civil servant 6; British army staff officer 13.

1456 British Army. *COIS Handbook*, p. 8-7; Intelligence Brigade. *Intel Best Practice*, p. 1-15.

ameliorating efforts.[1457] A third element was that significant intelligence efforts pertained to making advancements in precision targeting of insurgents at the TFH and battle group levels.[1458] While the precise application of force adheres to counterinsurgency doctrine (as opposed to indiscriminate force), the continuous targeting of rank-and-file insurgents did little to stabilize Helmand.[1459] Leveraging intelligence for non-kinetic operations proved to be more difficult.[1460]

Intelligence	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Cultural understanding	Defence Cultural Specialist Unit and increased attention for comprehensive intelligence	Formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms; resource allocation
Enhancing intelligence support for battle groups and companies	Detachments from the intelligence corps: BGISD's and COIST's	Formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation; Anchor point in Intelligence Corps
Knowledge retention and sharing on Helmand	Establishment of Land Intelligence Fusion Centre - Afghanistan	Formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation; Anchor point in Intelligence Corps

Table 5.9: Learning processes on intelligence during the Helmand campaign

5.3.4.3: Non-kinetic effects

From the outset of the Helmand campaign, TFH and the PRT were expected to deliver non-kinetic effects. Indeed, the Joint UK Helmand Plan envisioned a stabilization mission in which combat operations were secondary to attaining the objectives on security, governance, development, and counter-narcotics. Of course, reality on the ground proved far more volatile. Still, there was a nascent capability embedded in the first rotation, one which increased in size in the subsequent rotation. However, as they were faced with intense violence, TFH's focus was understandably on kinetic activities in those first rotations. The difficulty of delivering non-kinetic effects was compounded by the precarious intelligence

1457 See Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 240-245; Christian Tripodi (2021). *The Unknown Enemy: Counterinsurgency and the illusion of control.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 165-167.

1458 See British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, section 3-3; Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 11; British commanding officer 13; British army staff officer 3.

1459 Farrell, *Unwinnable*, p. 328-332; Martin. *An Intimate War*, p. 200-202.

1460 Interviews British commanding officer 15; British army staff officer 12; Catignani. Getting COIN, p. 526.

position and the scarcity of specialized personnel. Moreover, the inability of the PRT to accompany the troops on the ground further impeded influencing the population through non-kinetic means.[1461]

The rotation by 52 Brigade sought to make non-kinetic influence activities central to their operational design. Influence activities were integrated to the general staff-processes. To deliver influence activities at the battle group-level, Development, and Influence Teams (DITs) were established. The teams consisted of four individuals and encompassed a CIMIC and psyops-specialists, an engineer and an interpreter.[1462] However, such personnel were scarce and so to fill this gap, Non-Kinetic Effects Teams (NKET's) were established. The NKETs were two-man teams, repurposed from their organic tasks within the battle group or company.[1463] As a result, junior personnel found themselves conducting information operations and "CIMIC-lite".[1464] Given that these soldiers were not specifically trained for these roles, their effectiveness often varied.[1465] These non-kinetic activities were to be guided by the analysis from TCAF.

Whereas TCAF was quickly discarded, the NKETs and other associated adaptations endured. Company commanders were "encouraged" to establish NKETs, but the practical employment of the NKETs differed in each unit. Not only was implementation contingent on the aptitude of the soldiers executing these additional tasks, but also on the importance that the commanders awarded to the non-kinetic activities.[1466]

There was some further capability within TFH to conduct non-kinetic activities. Members from the Media Operations Group (MOG) and 15 Psychological Operations Group (POG) were embedded in the task force. Officers from the MOG were essentially facilitating journalists. Their remit was to coordinate messaging on the British activities through formal media but to have inherently no direct influence on the content itself.[1467] A particular example of this is the initiative to bring in Arab media for Operation Mar Karadad in an attempt to convey how the British forces were operating in Afghanistan and thus influence the wider Muslim audience's perception.[1468]

1461 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_2.

1462 DSTL. (2010). *Delivering Strategic Communications and Influence in Afghanistan: A UK Perspective.* London; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_2

1463 Commander British Forces Op HERRICK 7. (2008). *Counterinsurgency in Helmand Task Force Operational Design.* Lashkar Gah, p. A-1.

1464 Land Warfare Centre. (2008, July 3). Post Operations Interview: Commander Operation Herrick 7. Edinburgh, p. 4.

1465 Interviews British commanding officer 2; British army staff officer 7.

1466 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_5.

1467 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_15.

1468 Steve Tatham (2009). Tactical Strategic Communication!Placing Informational Effect at the Centre of Command. *Small Wars Journal*, p. 8.

In contrast, the "Information Activities & Outreach" (IA&O) process was more proactive as it sought to influence the perception of the Helmand population. Through target audience analysis, bespoke messaging should be created to influence attitudes and behavior.[1469] The resulting messages were mostly disseminated through leaflets and radio broadcasts; ISAF set up Radio Tamadoon in Helmand, this station featuring music, news, and education in Pashtu. Radio Tamadoon was considered an effective medium as it reached an audience of 1.5 million listeners. Still, the British Army recognized that the insurgents were more effective in sharing their messages by using mobile phones and social media.[1470]

A further adaptation was the establishment of Female Engagement Teams (FETs) in 2010. This move was not based on a perceived capability deficiency by the British forces but had been the result of diktat from ISAF headquarters that every task force should deploy a FET.[1471] The twin ideas underpinning this development were that female soldiers could interact with the Afghan population in a different fashion than their male counterparts and that FETs would give (better) access to Afghan women and children. Through the FETs ISAF would be better positioned to understand local dynamics and subsequently influence the local population.[1472]

The British Army adopted the FET-concept and endeavored to deploy four teams on each rotation. Initially, the FETs were prepared by the MSSG. In-theater, the FETs were to establish contacts with local communities, which could then be followed up by an MSST.[1473] However, it proved hard to recruit female soldiers who could conduct foot patrols in Helmand in sufficient numbers.[1474] Instead, commanders scrounged for female troops who were regularly beyond the wire for other tasks. As such, these soldiers were performing a secondary task without sufficient preparation.[1475]

In practice therefore, the initial FETs proved to be less effective than envisioned. An important deficiency that was identified was that the FETs required a female interpreter. To ameliorate this, FET members should enroll in a ten-week Pashtu course. Furthermore, they had to be proficient in basic close combat skills and receive cultural training. A further consideration was that the battle group commanders to which they were attached had to get used to this new capability.[1476] Given the specific training requirements for the FETs, there was limited

1469 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_2.

1470 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_17.

1471 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London, p. 6.

1472 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London, p. 2

1473 Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Joint Doctrine Note 11/08 Female Engagement Team.* London, p. 4.

1474 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_4.

1475 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London

1476 Brigitte Rohwerder (2015). *Lessons from Female Engagement Teams.* Birmingham: GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services, p. 4-5.

time to integrate with the battle group during the pre-deployment training. By 2012, DCSU had become responsible for the training of new FET-members, which made sense due to the linguistic and cultural training requirements.[1477] Although in the end the FETs were largely unable to engage with women in rural Helmand, the British Army considered this capability successful in engaging with children. As such, the Herrick Campaign Study recommended to assess the requirement for FETs for new operations.[1478]

In 2012, during Herrick 12, non-kinetic effects were integrated with kinetic targeting in the Joint Effects Cell in the TFH-staff. This cell was commanded by an artillery officer who by definition would be more well versed in kinetic effects. Within this cell, a lieutenant-colonel oversaw information operations. This section encompassed information operations, the CULADs and a PSYOPs element.[1479] This integration was an improvement, as now non-kinetic effects were to be considered throughout the targeting process.[1480] However, there was an inherent tension between the temporal dimensions of immediate kinetic strikes and more ambiguous 'soft effects'. Moreover, there was a lack of understanding among commanders and staff officers on how to integrate IA&O in planning and operations.[1481]

Despite the increased attention for "Information Activities and Outreach" as the Helmand campaign progressed, its effectiveness was curtailed by three fundamental deficiencies (see table 5.10). A first issue was of course the limited understanding of the environment through which influence activities could be directed. Secondly, the personnel involved in these 'non-kinetic' roles were largely "enthusiastic amateurs". As there was no real career path in the British Army for specialists in information or psychological operations, there was no incentive for soldiers to invest in these skills.[1482] Furthermore, staff officers responsible for integrating IA&O with kinetic effects were naturally better acquainted with the latter.[1483] Finally, ISAF struggled with the vectors through which to apply non-kinetic activities and messaging; essentially, this was limited to leaflets, radio broadcasts and formal (Western) media.[1484] Officers involved in IA&O stated that Helmand's information environment was underdeveloped in the sense that formal media outlets were scarce. At the same time, they recognized that British capabilities were immature, as they for instance lacked the ability to leverage social media.[1485] The combination of these factors meant that non-kinetic IA&O was

1477 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Female Engagement Teams in the Army.* London, p. 6.

1478 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_4.

1479 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_5

1480 Interviews British army staff officer 12; British commanding officer 10.

1481 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-3_6.

1482 Ibidem, p. 5-3_8.

1483 Interview British army staff officer 12; British Army staff officer 25

1484 Andrew Mackay and Steve Tatham (2012). *The Effectiveness of US Military Information Operations in Afghanistan 2001-2010: Why RAND missed the point.* Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom., p.2.

1485 British army staff officer 12; British army staff officer 19; British commanding officer 13

limited in its effectiveness throughout Operation Herrick. Although these deficiencies were identified, they could not be resolved during the campaign.

Non-kinetic effects	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Integrating non-kinetic effects	Increased attention, lack of capacity and capability	Recognized deficiency, limited formal adaptation	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture
Specialized personnel for non-kinetic effects	At best associated task for personnel, reservist units	Recognized deficiency	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics; no real anchor point
Employing non-kinetic activities at tactical level	Non-kinetic Effects Teams	Limited formal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture; no anchor point in organization

Table 5.10: Learning processes on non-kinetic activities during the Helmand campaign

5.3.4.4: Counter-IED efforts

The British Army had prior experience with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Northern Ireland and Iraq. The longevity of operations in Northern Ireland had led to a highly qualified cadre of Ammunition Technical Officers (ATOs) and Explosive Ordinance Disposal Teams. Here, the threat was technologically sophisticated IED that generally were targeted at security forces or specific individuals. [1486]

Although there was significant institutional knowledge on IEDs, this was concentrated in the British Army with the EOD and ATOs. Moreover, the British Counter-IED capability was focused on domestic aid to "civil power," a legacy of operations in Northern Ireland. As such, the British Army faced difficulties when it had to deploy counter-IED capabilities concurrently to both Iraq and Afghanistan when this threat proliferated. By 2006, just two Counter-IED teams were available in Helmand, with four being deployed in Iraq. With the expanding of TFH and the wide area of operations, these teams were hard pressed. [1487]

1486 See Cochrane. *British Approach to IEDD*.

1487 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_1.

Yet the threat posed by IEDs was not manifested from the outset of the campaign. Initially, the main emphasis was on repelling insurgent attacks on platoon houses and foiling ambushes. Taliban tactics adapted after the violent summer of 2006 and more extensive use was made of IEDs.[1488] The first British fatality due to an IED strike occurred in October 2006. ISAF data reveals that the number of IEDs (both discovered and exploded) were relatively few in number in 2006 and 2007 but then showed a steady increase. In July 2008, the number of incidents reached over a hundred per month, after which the increase accelerated to multiple hundreds per month. [1489]

A marked difference with the IED threat in Northern Ireland and Iraq was that in Afghanistan the devices were of a lesser level of technological sophistication. In Helmand, most devices were crude contraptions with either unexploded ordinance or home-made explosives (HME). However, this lack of sophistication did not diminish their lethality nor insurgent proficiency in utilizing IEDs to significant effect. If anything, the relative simplicity of the IED s fostered their proliferation.[1490] Furthermore, most IEDs in Helmand were victim-operated by pressure plates, which meant that jamming equipment was ineffective.[1491] There was thus a mismatch between the small number of highly trained ATOs and EOD operators and the increasing numbers of crude yet lethal IEDs in Helmand.

To make up for this deficiency of trained personnel, ATOs and EOD operators trained engineers to destroy discovered IEDs instead of the more intricate process of neutralizing the devices. The trade-off of this expedient was that this destroyed potential forensic evidence that could be used to target the networks responsible for these devices.[1492] Furthermore, the British troops adapted TTPs to search for IEDs and thus mitigate the threat. These drills, colloquially known as "Operation Barma" included sweeping roads with "Vallon" metal detectors and probing probable IED-locations. The natural effect of this was that the British troops were restricted in their mobility and lines of communication.[1493] Additionally, insurgents successfully fixed troops at their patrol bases by emplacing IEDs at the approaches to these locations.[1494] Not only did the IED threat thus pose risks to the troops, but it also hindered their ability to engage with the local population.[1495] To make matters worse, the insurgents became more adept in their use of IEDs by removing metal contents, which made

1488 Thomas Johnson (2013). Taliban Adaptations and Innovations. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 24(1), p. 5-6.

1489 See ISAF data IEDs in Helmand in *Herrick Campaign Study*, p.3-6-E_1.

1490 Interviews British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 24.

1491 In 2010-2011, around 80 percent was victim-operated, see Campaign Study, p. 3-6_F-1.

1492 Interview British army warrant officer 1

1493 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 342.

1494 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_3

1495 British army warrant officer 1; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_4.

them even harder to discover by metal detectors. British troops struggled to adapt to this development.[1496]

The sheer volume of IEDs in Helmand is exemplified by the official numbers of related incidents involving UK personnel: 5,313 from 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014. When including the number of incidents that involved civilians, Afghan security forces and other coalition members, this number would be significantly higher.[1497] Furthermore, explosions (mostly IED-related) accounted for over half of battle injuries that were admitted to the field hospital at Camp Bastion throughout the Helmand Campaign.[1498] By January 2008, close to 80 percent of the deaths in action of British service members were caused by IEDs.[1499]

In Helmand, the Army had initially deployed WMIK's and Snatch jeeps under the assumption that it would be a stabilization mission and that the limited road network would not support heavier vehicles.[1500] Due to the heavy fighting and emergent IED threat, the MoD recognized that armored vehicles were needed for the Afghan theater and ordered additional Mastiffs and other variants in the summer of 2006.[1501] Although this deficiency was swiftly identified and acted upon, the concurrent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan complicated the delivery of the vehicles in quantity.[1502] Moreover, spare parts were scarce and by the end of 2007, less than half Mastiff's in Helmand were serviceable.[1503] In October 2008, the secretary for Defence announced a further investment of over 500 million pounds for new vehicles.[1504] Multiple variants of armored vehicles, with a V-shaped hull that protected against IED-blasts from below, were bought off the shelf. Ranging from the nimble "Jackal" for reconnaissance tasks to the highly protected "Wolfhound" for transport, the UK acquired a suite of vehicles colloquially known as the "Dogs of War" due to their names.[1505] Over time, thousands of these vehicles were deployed to Helmand. Given their high level of protection, the "Dogs of War" undoubtedly saved many lives. As such, the second order effects of lagging conceptual embedding, instruction before deployment and maintenance issues can be perceived as

1496 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_4; Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army warrant officer 1.

1497 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Background Quality Report: Improvised Explosive Device (IED) events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014*. London, p. 1.

1498 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Types of Injuries Sustained by UK Service Personnel on Op HERRICK in Afghanistan, April 2006 to 30 November 2014*. London, p. 6.

1499 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6-A_1.

1500 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 201-202.

1501 House of Commons. (2007, October 23). Defence - Minutes of Evidence. London, Q90.

1502 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-2_3.

1503 See LWC. *Post Operation Interview Herrick 7.*

1504 House of Commons. (2008, Octobner 29). Written Ministerial Statements: Defence National Recognition Study Report - Government Response. London.

1505 Akam. *Changing of the Guard*, p. 360-365.

minor hindrances. Still, such ramifications increased additional pressure on the over-stretched Army.[1506]

Naturally, the proliferating threat, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, propelled the need to address IEDs into the spotlight. The mounting casualties garnered political attention as well and centered largely on the requirement of protective measures.[1507] Indeed, the parliamentary opposition used deficiencies in force protection to highlight government incompetence. As a result, force protection became a political topic in itself, and a focal point for the Helmand campaign in the domestic political debate.[1508] Given the urgency awarded to protecting the force, the bills of associated costs (mainly through Urgent Operational Requirements, UORs) were swiftly footed.[1509]

Within the Ministry of Defence itself, the mounting casualties led to an extensive review, mandated by PJHQ. The resulting Burley Review indicated that the IED threat had to be tackled in a comprehensive manner. American counter-IED task forces in Iraq ("Troy") and Afghanistan ("Paladin") were seen as examples.[1510] While the acquisition of new vehicles with enhanced protection and the development of new TTPs were helping to save lives, these measures were only reactive in character. Moreover, given the increased use of IEDs and the evolution of enemy tactics, the review team assessed that the protective assets and TTPs would be overwhelmed by 2009 and would cause unsustainable casualties. Instead, a shift was needed towards a more offensive posture to neutralize the insurgent networks that produced the IEDs. [1511]

The Burley Review thus advocated an overhaul and reinforcement of the Army's counter-IED capability. This became an integral part of Operation Entirety. At an institutional level, the Counter-IED effort was overseen by a major-general at the Army Headquarters, with a direct line to the Vice-Chief of Defence Staff. Throughout the Army the various capabilities were coordinated to support the deployed forces in Helmand.[1512] One of the most fundamental changes envisioned by the Burley Review was that Counter-IED was no longer a 'specialist' task but an 'all-arms' activity. As such, the international counter-IED doctrine was embraced. This consisted of three primary pillars: "prepare the force; attack the network; defeat the device".

1506 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-2_2

1507 See House of Commons Defence Committee. (2007, May 11). The Army's requirement for armoured vehicles: the FRES programme: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2006–07 HC 511. London; House of Commons Defence Committee. (2009, July 16). Helicopter Capability Eleventh Report of Session 2008–09 HC 434. London.

1508 Mark Clegg (2016). Protecting British Soldiers in Afghanistan. *RUSI Journal*, *157*(3), p. 25-28.

1509 See for example: House of Commons. (2009, February 23). Afghanistan (Troop Deployment) Volume 488: debated on Monday 23 February 2009. London; National Audit Office. (2009). *Support to High Intensity Operations*. London, p. 8-9.

1510 Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 343.

1511 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6-A_1.

1512 Ibidem, p. 3-6_J-2

These pillars were to be supported by a foundation of "understanding and intelligence".[1513] Furthermore, two new regimental headquarters were established to generate EOD capability for deployment, and additional personnel were trained for intelligence exploitation. [1514]

To meet these requirements in-theater, a counter-IED Task Force was assembled throughout 2009 and formally established in November that year. This new element integrated various capabilities in the fight against IEDs. With this new task force, every battle group gained specialized EOD teams and advanced search teams.[1515] Other capabilities included the establishment of military working dogs' regiment under operation Entirety for search purposes and the introduction of new controlled vehicles. [1516] Furthermore, TFH had scientific advisers from DSTL who could experiment in the field with potential solutions. Although their remit was broader than just IEDs, this was largely their focus. In 2009, a testing facility for counter-IED solutions was opened at Camp Bastion.[1517]

Beyond these efforts, the Afghan security forces that were mentored by the British troops received additional training in Counter-IED drills. With the continuing ISAF retrenchment, the Afghan forces were increasingly at the forefront of operations and vulnerable against IEDs. Yet, the training of the Afghan forces on this subject lagged woefully behind, however, as the Afghans lacked technologically sophisticated assets. The focus therefore gradually shifted to training on low-tech solutions that could be sustained after ISAF had left. [1518] Finally, the latest experiences concerning IEDs were disseminated to the UK, to be incorporated into the predeployment training. Still, the adherence to the trained TTPs remained a weak point well into the campaign.[1519]

The most important shift in counter-IED efforts was the focus on intelligence exploitation. Forensic evidence gleaned from debris or discovered IEDs was used to identify individuals who had fabricated and placed them. This information was then fused with intelligence from other sources to understand and map the networks responsible for the IEDs. In turn, the intelligence was used to drive targeting operations to dismantle these networks.[1520] This modus operandi aligned with TFH-wide shift to "front-footed precision" and was supported by the increased intelligence efforts.[1521]

1513 Ibidem, p. 3-6_2.

1514 Ibidem, p. 3-6-B_1.

1515 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6-A_2.

1516 Ibidem, p. 3-6_15.

1517 Interview British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

1518 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_19.

1519 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_16.

1520 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_13/14; Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 343-344.

1521 Interviews British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23; British army staff officer 11.

Undoubtedly, the improvements regarding Counter-IED efforts were profound and saved many lives over the years (see table 5.11).[1522] Still, the IED remained the weapon of choice for the insurgent as it was successful in constraining the activities by coalition forces. The number of IED incidents peaked in July 2011 with more than 900 incidents in Helmand alone. Although the numbers decreased after this, the numbers remained consistently high (oscillating between 700 and 200) and never returned to the lower volumes of 2006-2008.[1523] While a significant decrease is visible in 2013 for incidents involving British personnel, this can be attributed to their drawdown and reducing of patrols.[1524] By and large, these numbers are thus indicative of both the efficacy of the IEDs itself as well as the continued potency of the insurgency in Helmand.

Counter-IED	Manifestation	Stage of learning	Influencing factors
Developing and sharing new TTPs	Immediate adaptation by troops in the field and quick dissemination by training establishment	Informal and formal adaptation	Organizational culture, resource allocation, learning and dissemination mechanisms
Materiel acquisition	"Dogs of War"- vehicles	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, domestic politics,
Comprehensive countermeasures and knowledge sharing	Establishment of C-IED task force	Formal adaptation	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 5.11: Learning processes on counter-IED during the Helmand campaign

5.3.5: Sub conclusion

The British effort in Helmand was marred from the outset by a lack of understanding and an under-resourced yet over-ambitious campaign plan. Moreover, the initial campaign plan was immediately discarded by the first rotation in Helmand as a result of the pressures posed by the local dynamics. The jettisoning of the initial campaign plan was not redressed, as each incoming brigade brought a distinct plan for its own rotation which precluded any continuity beyond six months. In part this haphazard approach was driven by the regimental cultures, which entailed nuanced distinctions. PJHQ was initially unable to impose a new, feasible campaign on the early TFH rotations. In part, this can be explained by the violent character of the operation in which the British forces struggled to control their enlarged area of operations. A first adaptation thus was the gradual yet consistent increase in troop

1522 See Farrell. *Unwinnable*, p. 344.

1523 See ISAF data IEDs in Helmand in British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p.3-6-E_1.

1524 Ministry of Defence. *IED events*, p. 4.

numbers, from 3,000 in 2006 up to 10,000 in 2009. This was made possible by the concurrent withdrawal from Iraq. Yet, this growth in troop levels was unable to hold cleared areas, let alone develop them. Moreover, as the British were unable to withdraw from peripheral districts, TFH had to repeatedly conduct new clearance operations. Beyond the futility of this approach, such operations had an adverse effect on escalating the violence in Helmand and impaired the perception of the international effort by its population. More resources were needed, but due to the growing unpopularity of the Afghanistan campaign, the cabinet was unwilling send further reinforcements, despite public requests for further reinforcements by generals and the Americans.

A further fundamental flaw in the campaign was the lack of a working assessment process that informed commanders of the effect of their activities and could guide their plans. The Army did not adopt the informal initiative of the Tactical Conflict Analysis Framework; moreover, the later Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme was predominantly used by the PRT and had little effect on the military operations. As such, this deficiency in understanding the effect of operations was not addressed.

As the campaign made little lasting progress from 2006 to 2009, various adaptations were initiated to address deficiencies. These areas included training, doctrine, intelligence, non-kinetic activities, and interagency cooperation. Although some of these adaptations were successful, they were often impeded by a lack of central guidance. The primary exception to this situation was measures pertaining to force protection such as counter-IED efforts and the acquisition of protective vehicles. Protecting troops from harm was not only a prime consideration within the MoD, but also garnered significant political attention. Through bottom-up development of new TTPs and the procurement of vehicles and other equipment via the Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) process, these problems were gradually addressed.

The most dramatic adaptation by the British Army leadership was of course Operation Entirety. This focused the army on Helmand, recognizing that the campaign was not properly resourced. As such, Operation Entirety took the calculated risk that by focusing singularly on Helmand, diminishing the Army's ability to prepare for other contingencies. "Entirety" affected the mission preparation of the units earmarked for deployment and instigated a learning process that more fully exploited the experiences from theater. Moreover, through the establishment of the Force Development and Training Command, the army now had a conduit to implement formal and informal adaptations. For instance, the writing of a new counterinsurgency doctrine was reinvigorated and an initiative to recruit and train cultural advisers was formally adopted. Other adaptations were the establishment of the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre Afghanistan and the Military Stabilisation Support Group.

The initiation of Operation Entirety was both necessary and impressive, as it overcame substantial organizational barriers. That it was implemented at all was a testament to the forceful advocacy of senior individuals. Still, even this program did not fully address deficiencies as the lack of campaign continuity. Despite the recognition that the campaign would benefit from longer command and staff rotations, the schedule of brigade deployments was retained.

Finally, Operation Entirety had profound effects on how the army prepared for the mission and learned from it. The formal adaptations further improved the performance of the British troops in Helmand. Yet, the extent that these adaptations had genuinely affected the mission itself is doubtful. The deployment of a large contingent of US Marines in 2009 had a more profound effect on Helmand and the campaign. This enabled the British forces to concentrate on central Helmand and engage in further capacity building and development. Furthermore, the implementation of a new Helmand Plan that was supported in Whitehall and aligned with a reinvigorated ISAF was now made feasible. Despite, or perhaps due to, the saturation of the province by security forces, Helmand remained one of the most violent areas of Afghanistan. As a direct result, the British forces continued to engage the insurgents until the end of the mission to allow for the transition to Afghan authorities and security forces. Although more emphasis was placed on non-kinetic activities in TFH, these capabilities were remained relatively underdeveloped compared to kinetic operations.

5.4: Institutionalization

5.4.1: Evaluation and Army 2020

5.4.1.1: The OP Herrick Campaign Study

As the British Army withdrew from Helmand after more than ten years of operations in Afghanistan, it took stock of its experiences. To this end, a campaign study was mandated by the commander of Force Development and Training in July 2013. The aim for the Herrick Campaign Study was to consolidate and prioritize the multitudes of tactical lessons from the Afghanistan mission. In addition to this aim, the study set out to capture lessons of enduring relevance for future conflict and force development.[1525] Underpinning these objectives were the ideas that the army will conduct counterinsurgency operations in the future and that experiences from Afghanistan had led to conceptual developments that would be useful for future conflict. At the same time, the campaign study's foreword acknowledged that all experiences from Operation Herrick would be relevant for retention.[1526]

1525 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. v.

1526 Ibidem, p. iii.

A writing team was assembled from the Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC). As the LXC had organized the Mission Exploitation Symposia, oversaw the DLIMS-database, and had conducted the Post-Operation Interviews with commanders, it was understood to be the repository of experiences from the campaign in the British Army. In addition to these sources, scores of further interviews were conducted.[1527] The writing team started its work in September 2013. Thus, the review of the tactical lessons commenced while the mission was still ongoing. The rationale behind this timing was that the experiences were collected while still fresh.[1528]

The vast amount of data was divided into functional areas and capabilities. The lessons identified and best practices were 'peer reviewed' by more than 30 "military judgment panels" to ensure coherence and forward them into the MoD's learning process for action. Besides input from within the British Army, the Royal Marines and the Royal Air Force contributed to the lessons. In all, over 700 lessons identified were captured and processed.[1529] A selection of these lessons were included in the campaign study. The upper echelons of the army and the MoD then vetted the drafts of this document, and additional comments were sought from the commanders of TFH.[1530]

The Operation Herrick Campaign Study was published in March 2015 by the Land Warfare Centre as an internal document.[1531] The resulting document is a vast tome of lessons identified, learned and best practices for a military audience. As a campaign post-mortem, the study was a continuation of the evaluations that had been written by the army after operations in Northern Ireland and Iraq. The contents of the campaign study reflect the division of lessons into the categories of functional capabilities, notably chapters on Command; Combat; Combat Support and Combat Service Support. In addition to these chapters, more specific themes in relation to the campaign are addressed: pre-deployment training; equipment; lessons learned processes; doctrine, counter-IED and stabilization operations. Further attention was awarded to Operation Entirety and its effects.[1532]

Throughout the study, best practices are highlighted that emerged from both informal and formal adaptations. Examples of these adaptations were the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre, the Defence Cultural Specialist Unit, and the Battle Group Intelligence Support Detachments.[1533] At the same time enduring organizational deficiencies were acknowledged.

1527 Interviews British army staff officer 6; British army staff officer 9.

1528 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. V.

1529 Ibidem, p. V; Interview British army staff officer 6.

1530 Interview British army staff officer 6.

1531 Since then, a redacted declassified version has been made available to the public through the Freedom of Information Act.

1532 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxv-xlv.

1533 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study* see, p. 3-1_6; 6-9_1.

For instance, counter-IED capabilities and Information Activities & Outreach and capacity building were identified as areas that had developed over the course of the mission. However, as the Helmand campaign had been concluded, the army now had to ensure that these capabilities were further professionalized and integrated in the organizational structure.[1534]

To be sure, the Campaign Study (and by extension the British Army) recognized that not all experiences or lessons from Operation Herrick were relevant for retention or useful in future operations. Indeed, the study explicitly states that the army needs to recalibrate after the prolonged Afghanistan campaign to be ready for other types of operations. The most prominent aspect of the mission that was perceived as specific to Afghanistan was the limited tactical capabilities of the insurgency. This is not to say that the British Army did not have a professional respect for the fighting abilities of the Taliban. However, the Afghan insurgents lacked air-support and had a "rudimentary indirect fire" capability. Such differences in capabilities meant that the British forces could maintain large headquarters and other static positions, whereas a potential future adversary might well enjoy a parity or even an advantage in technological assets.[1535] As British troops had operated in an environment where they had an overwhelming advantage in firepower and protective measures for over a decade, the army was aware that it had to reacquire the knowledge and skills to work under more austere conditions.[1536] Moreover, the campaign study asserted that the emphasis on force protection in Helmand, in particular due to IEDs, had driven a change in TTPs that minimized risks to the troops and fostered a defensive mindset. This risk aversion in both the public and military spheres threatened the readiness of the army for future conflicts. Therefore, the army should engage in a public debate to address this risk-threshold and thereby regain a more offensive outlook. [1537]

Of course, the campaign study has its inherent limitations as an evaluation. First of all, it was published as an internal document by the British Army and assesses the experiences of the organization in order to retain the relevant lessons for the army's future use. In combination with its comprehensive scope on how the Afghanistan mission had affected the army, it makes for an unwieldy and esoteric document.[1538] Secondly, and more fundamentally, it did not seek to draw up a verdict of the Helmand Campaign and was by design limited to tactical lessons.[1539] Still, on occasion, the study criticizes the prosecution of the mission by the army as an institution. Particular points of critique were the absence of clear campaign objectives,

1534 Ibidem, see sections: 3-6; 5-3; and 2-4.

1535 Ibidem, p. 2-1_1.

1536 Ibidem, p. xxix.

1537 Ibidem, p. 2-1_2.

1538 Interview British army staff officer 9; British commanding officer 7; including annexes, the document numbers over 600 pages.

1539 Interview British army staff officer 4; British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. p. 1-1_2.

convoluted British (and Allied) command relationships and the inability to impose campaign continuity between the rotations.[1540]

Still, a higher-level evaluation on the prosecution of the campaign, its plans and the performance of the army (or the MoD) in resourcing the mission was warranted. According to some external and internal observers, the inability to publish a critical post-mortem of the campaign reflected the unwillingness of the armed forces to address structural issues in its organization.[1541] Of course, on the political level, the initiation of the Helmand mission had been questioned by the Chilcot inquiry, but this latter study was primarily in the context of the Iraq war. Unfortunately, an official historical reconstruction of the Helmand Campaign has been deferred to an undisclosed future date.[1542]

Ultimately, the Operation Herrick Campaign Study is a candid and comprehensive evaluation for the British Army's activities at the tactical level. It recognized the tension between the need of knowledge retention of lessons from counterinsurgency operations in Helmand while recalibrating the British Army for new challenges such as conventional combat.[1543] New plans and policy for the army after Helmand would indicate the extent to which this tension would be addressed.

5.4.1.2: Strategic Defence and Security Review and Army 2020

The foundations of the British Army after the Helmand mission were laid in 2010 with the publication of a National Security Strategy (NSS) and a new Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Where the NSS-document detailed the strategic environment end the UK's interests at the time, the SDSR should provide its strategic ways and means.[1544] The strategic analysis in 2010 was one of the first outputs of the National Security Council that had been installed by the new coalition government of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. This new forum for sought to enhance cross-government decision making for national security and thus address the strategic deficiencies that had manifested in the political preludes towards Iraq and Afghanistan under the previous Labour-governments.[1545] The NSS itself recognized four main threats to the UK's interests: international terrorism;

1540 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_1 - 1-1_5.

1541 See Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 158-159; Ledwidge. *Losing Small Wars*. p. 159-160; interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1542 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2014, March 26). Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2013–14 HC 1175. London, p. 10-11; interview British civil servant 1.

1543 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 2-1_1.

1544 Paul Cornish (2010). *Evaluating the 2010 Strategy Review*. Chatham House: London, p. 3.

1545 See HM Government. (2010). *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy* . London p. 5; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 164.

cyber-attack; international crises and major accidents or natural hazards.[1546] According to the NSS, the ongoing operations in Afghanistan were still primarily conducted to counter the threat of international terrorism.[1547] However, the main challenge for the UK as outlined in the NSS was to bring the "nation's finances to a sustainable footing." Therefore, considerations of national security had to be aligned to the financial constraints.[1548] To make matters worse, acquisition projects and spending on operations had left the Ministry of Defence with a budget deficit of 38 billion pounds.[1549]
Where the NSS sketched the strategic context and the UK's interests, the SDSR should present how the UK opted to respond to this. According to the coalition government, a new SDSR had been long overdue as the last had been issued in 1998.[1550] Beyond the shift in strategic context in the intervening twelve years, the British government had to grapple with the fall-out of the financial crisis as emphasized in the NSS. Within these parameters, the SDSR delineated how the Ministry of Defence should be structured to meet contemporary challenges. Yet, the SDSR held disparate views on the roles of the three services in the strategic environment. The army would continue to focus on Operation Herrick, while the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were poised to procure and integrate new equipment from long term acquisition processes. Respectively, the costly acquisition of two new aircraft carriers and the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35) meant that these two services had to scrap other capabilities such as the Fleet Air Arm, amphibious ships, air mobility and ISR-assets. Consequently, the RN and RAF mortgaged their ability to support stabilization mission and more narrowly focused on force projection and potential interstate conflict.[1551]

Although the SDSR stated that the government would continue to resource operations in Afghanistan until the end of the mission in 2014, the Army had to look beyond Helmand for its future structure. It had to retain to function as a deterrent and if necessary, fight conventional wars. Still, foreign interventions and stabilization missions were the primary task for the army according to the SDSR. To sustain a continuous brigade-level commitment, the army would be structured around five multi-role brigades that could operate across the spectrum of conflict. Areas of investment included counter-IED capability and the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG). Capabilities that were to be reduced included main battle tanks and artillery.[1552] Given these propositions, the experiences from Afghanistan seemed to be incorporated into the strategic vision for the army by the British government and Ministry of Defence. A more incidental side effect of the operations in Afghanistan was that equipment that had been acquired for the mission, in particular the array of protective

1546 HM Government. *A Strong Britain*, p. 11.

1547 Ibidem, p, 13.

1548 Ibidem, p. 14.

1549 Malcolm Chalmers (2011). Keeping our powder dry? UK Defence policy beyond Afghanistan. *RUSI Journal*, 156(1), p. 21

1550 HM Government. (2010). *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review.* London, p. 9.

1551 Cornish. *Evaluating the Security Review*, p. 7-8; Chalmers. Keeping our powder dry? p. 20-21.

1552 HM Government. *SDSR 2010*, p. 24-25.

vehicles, had to be integrated into the army; moreover, the army now had to sustain this fleet from its own resources. Despite the vow that operations in Afghanistan would not be affected by the need to balance the budget, reports emerged in early 2011 that the army would lose some 20 per cent of its personnel strength. Its numbers would decrease from around 100,000 to 82,000.[1553]

The British Army itself conducted a review into its future structure with these considerations in mind under the name Army 2020 "to meet the security challenges of the 2020s and beyond". General Nick Carter led this effort. Initially published in July 2012, it confirmed that regular troop strength would be reduced to 82,000. While this meant that thousands of soldiers would be declared redundant, this would not lead to the disbanding of traditional regiments (or cap badges). Still, the army would be reduced by 23 regular units.[1554] As the army acknowledged that with this personnel numbers, it would not be able to perform all its tasks, the army opted to fully integrate its reserve component. To compensate for the decrease in regular forces, the reserves had to be increased from 14,000 to 30,000 by 2018. In this way the force levels Reservist could augment the army as individuals or in formed-up units.[1555] Beyond merely filling in gaps left by regular troops, the idea was that reserve could be recruited for such specialist roles as cyber operation, stabilization, and capacity building. In this way, the army could acquire necessary expertise without having to replicate the training processes.[1556] In Helmand, such specialists had already been deployed in a psyops, stabilization or other capacities.

The conceptual groundwork for the restructuring of Army 2020 was laid in the "Future Land Operating Concept", published in May 2012 by the DCDC. At the core of the document was the uncompromising requirement for land forces to excel at warfighting." Accordingly, the Army must be able to function as a deterrent and if that fails "be ready to apply lethal force to set the conditions for political progress". [1557] It recognized that potential adversaries would use hybrid threats to confront the UK. Therefore, understanding of conflicts and the operational environment was a primary underpinning idea of the concept. Furthermore, the Army must be able to generate influence and contribute to the UK's soft power in coordination with the other government departments.[1558] Perhaps the most striking aspect of this document was that it recognized that large scale interventions would not be palatable to the British public or politicians after the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan. Although the army must still

1553 Sean Rayment (2011, February 19). Army facing huge cuts after withdrawal from Afghanistan. *The Telegraph*

1554 British Army. (2012). *Transforming the British Army, July 2012: Modernising to face an unpredictable* . London, p. 7.

1555 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 2-8. Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Future Reserves 2020: The Independent Commission to Review the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces*. London, p. 12.

1556 Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Future Reserves 2020: The Independent Commission to Review the United Kingdom's Reserve Forces*. London, p. 25-26.

1557 Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Concept Note 2/12: Future Land Operating Concept*. London), p.vi.

1558 Ibidem, p. vii.

be able to conduct interventions of scale, the FLOC proposed to invest in capacity building for stabilization purposes. Through this long term "Defence Engagement", the British Army could develop enduring relations, acquire a better understanding of the environment, help prevent conflicts and promote the UK's values abroad.[1559] Overall, the British Army needed to integrate other capabilities like cyber and other non-kinetic effects, collaborate with other government agencies and provide security for stabilization and counterinsurgency operations.[1560]

In Army 2020, like the SDSR and the Future Land Operating Concept, stabilization missions were still presented as the most foreseeable task. If tensions in a region would conflagrate into a conflict, the British Army could then intervene through its high readiness reaction force. This would be a stabilization operation with a force configuration not too dissimilar from Helmand. Yet, through "persistent engagement" the British Army sought to contribute to international stability before an open conflict. Of course, this was preferable over a costly intervention, and this aligned with the emphasis on "Defence Engagement" in the FLOC. With "upstream capacity building," relatively small numbers of troops could assist in conflict prevention through, for instance, security sector reform. To be effective, the army proposed to invest in language and cultural training and align units (brigades) with specific regions in the world. In this way, units would acquire a better understanding of the environment.[1561]

To enable this operating concept of persistent engagement, changes to the force structure were made based on the lessons from Afghanistan. For instance, the army aimed to institutionalize "the integration of 'soft effect' into manoeuvre." Furthermore, it had to organize for inter-agency integration.[1562] To this end, a Security Assistance Group was established (see section 5.4.3.3) This brigade level formation would encompass inter-agency cooperation, capacity-building and non-kinetic effect delivery.[1563] Elements from this new formation could augment the staffs of regular units to integrate their capabilities with manoeuvre. Another area that warranted additional consideration was intelligence and understanding. Drawing on the experiences of Afghanistan, an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Brigade was established. This formation integrated military intelligence battalions, the LIFC and further ISR-capabilities. These and other specialist and combat support formations were to be organized into a Force Troops Command (equivalent to a division).[1564] To be sure, these changes were relatively modest within the restructuring of the British Army in response to the SDSR of 2010. Yet, they also form an indication that

1559 Ibidem, 4-16/4-17.

1560 Ibidem, 4-20/22

1561 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 2.

1562 Ibidem, p. 2.

1563 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 11.

1564 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades*. Andover, p. 4-7.

interagency cooperation, non-kinetic effects, and intelligence were areas that had been identified as being underdeveloped in Afghanistan and now required increased attention and small investment in a period of large reductions.

A final salient aspect of the Army 2020 reorganization was the importance awarded to the divisional level. Despite the envisaged reductions, the army wanted to retain the ability to deploy a division of three brigades and enablers for a short operation.[1565] With the establishment of additional specialist and combat support formations, divisional headquarters could serve as a core capability into which the more specialist elements could be integrated.[1566] Furthermore, the division headquarters was seen as the level of command that had the capacity and training to orchestrate the multitude of effects.[1567] To an extent this was a correction on the situation experienced with TFH where the brigade headquarters had to contend with an expansive span of control and multiple command relations.[1568] At the same time, it reversed the trend from Helmand in which responsibilities and capabilities were deferred to the brigade level and below. [1569]

In sum, the 2010 SDSR and the Army 2020 review yielded mixed results in institutionalizing the lessons from Afghanistan. Stabilization operations remained the primary task for the army. Indeed, this role was expanded with "Persistent Engagement" which saw the army deployed before and after a conflict for capacity building. Furthermore, specific capabilities were added to the army based on the experiences from Helmand such as the Security Assistance Group and the ISR-brigade. At the same time, the capacity of the army was dramatically reduced by 20.000 troops. This degraded the ability to engage in future protracted stabilization campaigns with the intensity of Helmand.

5.4.1.3: The 2015 SDSR and Army 2020 Refined

While the British Army was withdrawing from Afghanistan and in the process of restructuring along the lines of Army 2020, the strategic context shifted with the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the proxy war in Ukraine. Furthermore, the surprising battlefield successes of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria indicated that the turmoil in the Middle East was far from over. In this sense, it was fortuitous that the Conservative government was working on a new national security strategy and accompanying SDSR for 2015. Not surprisingly, the

1565 British Army. *Transforming the British Army*, p. 1.

1566 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2014, March 6). Future Army 2020 Ninth Report of Session 2013–14 HC 576. London, ev. 39.

1567 Royal United Services Institute. (2016, June 28). *Speech by General Nick Carter RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2016*. Retrieved from RUSI.org: https://rusi.org/events/conferences/rusi-land-warfare-conference-2016.

1568 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 1-1_8.

1569 Interviews British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 10; British commanding officer 13.

events of 2014 affected the outlook of the new NSS. It identified four main challenges to the UK's security: "the increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability; the resurgence of state-based threats and intensifying wider state competition; the impact of technology, especially cyber threats; and wider technological developments and the erosion of the rules-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats."[1570] After the discrete interventions of the early 21st century the West - and thus the UK - had to newly contend with interstate rivalry. For the British armed forces, this meant a further emphasis on deterrence.[1571] Consequently, the budget would increase as the government vowed to meet the NATO agreement to spend 2 percent of the GDP on its armed forces.[1572]

With the strategic context sketched in the NSS, the 2015 SDSR went into more detail on how the UK would respond to this. For the armed forces, the government envisaged large investments in equipment with 178 billion pounds over the next decade. The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force would grow modestly with 700 personnel, while the army would not be reduced below the 82,000 cap from the previous SDSR.[1573] In order to confront a wider range of potential adversaries, thus including state actors, the SDSR stated the intention to develop a standing "Joint Force" for 2025. This Joint Force was to be comprised of 50,000 troops from across the three services. It consisted of a maritime task group centered around a new aircraft carrier, an air group of combat and support aircraft, a special forces task group and a division from the army.[1574]

For the British Army, the SDSR 2015 meant a further shift in focus. Where the previous SDSR and Army 2020 was geared towards reduction and to an extent institutionalizing the lessons from Helmand for future stabilization missions, the army now had to prepare to deploy a "war-fighting division". To field a division, it would acquire two new "strike brigades" based around new Ajax armored vehicles under development, along the existing two mechanized brigades.[1575] As the army would not grow, these "strike brigades" would be formed from existing units. The idea underpinning the new strike brigades was that the army needed a medium capability that was easier to deploy with lower logistical footprint and achieve decisive effects over long distances. It proposed to mix tracked Ajax-vehicles with wheeled Boxers and attached indirect fire support.[1576] However, what this entailed for

1570 HM Government. (2015). *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*. London, p. 17-22.

1571 HM Government *NSS and SDSR 2015*, p. 24.

1572 Ibidem, p. 27.

1573 Ibidem, p. 27.

1574 Ibidem, p. 29.

1575 Ibidem, p. 31.

1576 Nicholas Drummond 2020, April 8). *The Anatomy of Strike*. Retrieved March 3, 2022, from UK Land Power: https://uklandpower.com/2020/04/08/the-anatomy-of-strike/

the way the British Army would operate was not fully developed at the time. In essence it was an idea to fight a potential conventional foe without heavy vehicles as the inventory of Challenger-2 main battle tanks was further reduced.[1577] To develop this concept further, a Strike Experimentation Group was established at Warminster, consisting of an infantry battalion and a reconnaissance battalion.[1578]
The focus for the army now was explicitly on high intensity combat operations instead of stabilization missions. Yet, the SDSR 2015 fitted in with the earlier developments in which the Army needed to recalibrate from over a decade of large-scale counterinsurgency operations.[1579] What had changed with the NSS and SDSR was that the UK was conscious that interstate conflict was again a real possibility, for which the army had to prepare. The experience from Afghanistan were not always relevant in this new context.[1580] With the reduced capacity of the British Army and the dubious strategic effects of Iraq and Afghanistan, the UK in common with most of its allies opted for interventions with smaller footprints by deploying air power and special forces.[1581]

These new developments required some adjustments for the Army 2020 plans. Beyond the development of the strike brigades, the army felt that the most significant shift required relative to the SDSR 2015 was producing the ability to commit a division to a combat scenario. Of course, Army 2020 had already emphasized the divisional level of operations and smaller missions before and after conflict through "Persistent Engagement". General Nick Carter, by then Chief of the General Staff, stated that for the latter type of activities, the army needed bespoke units. [1582] For this, the army established the "Specialised Infantry Group". This new unit was built from four infantry battalions and were specifically geared towards capacity building training and advising partner forces. As these battalions consisted of mainly officers and NCOs, they were relatively small.[1583] Somewhat fortuitously, the establishment of the Security Assistance Group, now renamed 77 Brigade (see section 5.4.3.3), was further vindicated as the Ministry of Defence and parliament recognized the value of non-kinetic effect in inter-state competition.[1584] In the SDSR, 77 Brigade was even designated as the unit

1577 Peter Antill and Jeremy Smith (2017). The British Army in Transition:. *RUSI Journal*, *162*(3), p 53-54.

1578 House of Commons. (2016, December 15). Strategic Defence and Security Review - Army: Statement made on 15 December 2016 by Michael Fallon. London.

1579 Jeremy Mooney and John Crackett (2018). A Certain Reserve: Strategic Thinking and Britain's Army Reserve. *RUSI Journal*, *163*(4), p. 89.

1580 Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research. (2016). Being ready for warfighting at scale – lessons learned and today's challenges. *Ares & Athena*, *6*, p. 19.

1581 Malcolm Chalmers (2016). The 2015 SDSR in Context: From Boom to Bust – and Back Again? *RUSI Journal*, *161*(1), p. 8-9.

1582 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2016, June 14). Oral evidence: SDSR 2015 and the Army, HC 108. London, Q 3.

1583 House of Commons. (2016, December 15). Strategic Defence and Security Review - Army: Statement made on 15 December 2016 by Michael Fallon. London.

1584 House of Commons Defence Committee. (2016, June 14). Oral evidence: SDSR 2015 and the Army, HC 108. London, Q 91

for "counter hybrid warfare".[1585] Thus, as the strategic context shifted in 2014, the UK moved away from large scale interventions and counterinsurgency operations.

5.4.2: The legacy of Operation Entirety: Learning processes, doctrine, training

Operation Entirety had represented an overhaul of Army processes to support the Helmand Campaign. Although its effects were geared towards a specific mission and meant to be reversible, the British Army expected that through this experience, a dramatic intervention like Entirety would not be necessary in future campaigns.[1586] This section will explore the extent to which Operation Entirety and the Helmand campaign endure in processes of lessons exploitation, doctrine development and training.

5.4.2.1: Lessons exploitation and learning processes

Exploiting experiences from operations in Afghanistan was one of the primary drivers of Operation Entirety. The establishment of Force Development and Training Command (FDT) with its mandate and leadership by a lieutenant-general had been instrumental in overcoming internal stovepipes in the army to incorporate lessons across the organization. The tactical lessons from Helmand had then been consolidated in the Herrick Campaign Study and a selection of those were subject to further institutionalization through Army reorganizations. However, when the British Army returned from Afghanistan a key concern was to retain or even improve the learning processes introduced with Operation Entirety in peacetime.[1587] The LXC itself was broadening its scope before the end of operations in Helmand. For instance, it gathered information on French operations in Mali and assisted civil authorities with lessons processes on flood relief efforts and the London Olympics of 2012.[1588]

At the joint level, the gauntlet was taken up to enhance the Ministry of Defence learning capabilities. This was initiated with the establishment of the Joint Force Command (JFC) in 2011, itself a result of the 2010 SDSR. Beyond coordinating joint capabilities provided by the three services, it also sought to improve the joint lessons learned processes. To this end, personnel from PJHQ's J7 (lessons learned) were moved to the JFC's "Lessons and Learning Team".[1589] Tom Dyson notes that this joint lessons team had three tasks: to track

1585 HM Government. *NSS and SDSR 2015*, p. 28.

1586 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. xxxix

1587 See Newton. Adapt or Fail, p. 310.

1588 Interview British army staff officer 9.

1589 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p 147.

the operational lessons from PJHQ; designing a lessons learned process for the JFC; and "developing a learning and lessons strategy" for the Ministry of Defence.[1590]

This latter task led to the "Defence Organisational Learning Strategy" (DOLS) in 2014. In answer to parliamentary questions, the MoD stated that it had "identified the need for a more effective overall approach to learning, so that at the operational and strategic levels we critically learn from history, training, education, operations and strategic events, and routinely apply what has been learnt to future activity." DOLS was to instill "a culture of learning across Defence."[1591] In 2017, the intention for an enhanced organizational learning capability for the ministry of Defence was reinforced by the publication of the Defence Knowledge Strategy. It sought to capture knowledge in order to promote challenges and encourage individual and organizational learning across the Ministry of Defence.[1592] This knowledge strategy was one of the products from the MoD's team that tried to implement recommendations from the Chilcot Report. In the same vein as the DOLS it aimed to foster an organizational culture that seeks and values knowledge and enables organizational learning. Furthermore, it encouraged experimentation and challenging of assumptions.[1593] With these two strategies, organizational learning for the Ministry of Defence featured on the political agenda.

In practice, the pan-Defence learning process was hampered through some institutional constraints. The JFC's "Learning and Lessons Team" was under-resourced from the outset as, apart from for the operations in Helmand, the Ministry of Defence faced severe budget cuts. After 2015, the team attempted to reinvigorate the DOLS by devising a formal joint learning process and aligning the processes from the services. Yet the services resisted efforts to harmonize their lessons processes as they felt that these were geared towards their specific requirements.[1594] Likewise, the team struggled to implement a joint learning process due to a lack of resources. As the team was developing the DOLS-policy, which had garnered political attention, it was unable to support the operational lessons process. Somewhat ironically, the JFC team was dependent on the services to provide them with lessons identified; however, the focuses of the services were inherently more parochial. Furthermore, JFC does not have the mandate to enforce measures based on identified lessons. As PJHQ remains the operational level and runs the deployments it is still the primary conduit for information from operational theaters. However, PJHQ is often unable to follow-up on identified lessons.

1590 Ibidem, p. 147-148.

1591 | House of Commons Defence Committee. (2014, January 14). Intervention: Why, When and How? Government Respons. London, point 22.

1592 Ministry of Defence. (2018). *Defence Knowledge Strategy*. London, p. 4.

1593 Ministry of Defence. (2018). *Defence Knowledge Strategy*. London, p. 3.

1594 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 148. Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 2.

Additionally, many of the identified issues are within the remit of the individual services[1595]. As a result, the lessons process at the operational and joint level remains sub-optimized.

As for the army's learning process, the Helmand campaign had shown that on the tactical level the service had become responsive to signals from the field after the establishment of the Lessons Exploitation Centre and the FDT. However, the FDT was abolished in late 2015. Although the functioning of the FDT had generally been lauded within the British Army, the end of the Afghanistan campaign had reduced the operational pressure for lessons exploitation and force generation.[1596] Furthermore, the disbandment of the FDT meant that the army could scrap a three-star general position, for which was considerable political pressure.[1597]

Yet, after a hiatus, part of the FDT's legacy was assumed by the Land Warfare Centre in 2018 when, following a reorganization, the LWC became responsible for the (Field) Army's "agile adaptation." Under the auspices of a major-general, the LWC coordinated the various trade schools, collective training, lessons exploitation and doctrine and concept development.[1598] This, and other organizational learning initiatives, have been mandated by the army leadership (general Carter) who subscribed to the idea of enhancing the army's learning capabilities.[1599] The "lessons team" is responsible for lessons exploitation and is the successor of the LXC. It has been reduced in terms of staff billets in comparison to the Afghanistan campaign, meaning that therefore the lessons team is unable to deploy staff members to operations, as the LXC had done in Helmand. Instead, the officers regularly visit the various theaters and have periodic video conferences with deployed units. Of course, the current deployments are of a smaller scale and of a lower intensity than Herrick. Consequently, both the volume of lessons identified and the operational pressure to resolve them have currently decreased. Similarly, the Mission Exploitation Symposia have been largely shelved after Helmand. While these are regarded as a useful tool to capture lessons and initiative enhancements across the MoD and beyond, the LWC has not felt that the missions after Afghanistan have warranted the organization demanded for these labor-intensive events. In the case of a future larger mission, the symposia will probably be reinstated.[1600]

Lessons or identified deficiencies are still captured from Post Operational Reports, which are subsequently subjected to the Military Judgment Panels headed by PJHQ. In essence, these panels are a truncated version of the exploitation symposia. The consolidated lessons are

1595 Interviews British army staff officer 1: British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 3: British army staff officer 5; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 149-150.

1596 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 4; British commanding officer 3

1597 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 153.

1598 Tim Hyams (2018). The New Land Warfare Centre. *British Army Review, 173*(Autumn), p. 5.

1599 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 151.

1600 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

processed into the DLIMS-database, and from here, actions to address lessons are taken by Operational Lessons Integration Groups (OLIGs). These OLIGs are thematically organized to address lessons concerning a specific topic and include members of the lessons team. With the reorganization of 2018, the LWC has the various training establishments of the arms and branches, for example infantry, artillery, and logistics under its wings. This makes coordination for the lessons team easier, although the team itself holds no authority over these training schools. Information on lessons identified and lessons learned is shared through the Army Knowledge Exchange. Although there are still issues with the search function, and variable quality of observations, the AKX is frequently used by army personnel. To make the content more accessible, the LWC is posting videos (vlogs) and podcasts.[1601]

While the Army's ability to capture tactical lessons from operations is somewhat truncated, the process is largely intact and potentially scalable. However, personnel shortages have led the lessons team to solely focus on operations. Lessons from training and exercises have been assigned to the LWC's training branch. As a result, there is no coordinating authority that has a comprehensive view of the identified lessons in training and on operations (see table 5.12). A further deficiency is the lack of a formalized learning policy for the operational level within the army. This is ascribed to reluctance on the part of senior army officers who "fear the establishment of [...] lessons processes which might shed light on problems in their areas of competence".[1602] At this level, crucial aspects of how a counterinsurgency or stabilization campaign is designed, led, and assessed could be addressed, for instance based on the army's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, the British ability to exploit lessons is uneven. Despite political attention and support by senior military leadership, the Ministry of Defence have not yet established a practical joint learning process. Furthermore, financial austerity, internal resistance and lack of operational pressure have diminished the Army's learning capability. Still, in large part, the learning processes from Operation Entirety continue to capture tactical lessons.

Learning processes	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Central position of learning process in British Army	No, discontinuation of FDT	Resource allocation, organizational culture
Learning and dissemination mechanisms	Yes, at Land Warfare Centre, albeit slimmed down in capacity	Resource allocation, anchor point in LWC

Table 5.12: Institutionalization of lessons learned processes

1601 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4.

1602 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 151-152.

5.4.2.2: Doctrinal developments

After the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Afghanistan COIN Centre was reorganized into the Stabilisation and COIN Team at the LWC.[1603] Without the operational demands for doctrine publications on counterinsurgency and the recalibration towards conventional conflicts, the team grew progressively smaller over the years, shrinking by 2019 to a team of just a handful of officers and NCOs.[1604] However, doctrine development on counterinsurgency and stabilization operations continued after 2014. This section describes how experiences from Helmand have been processed into doctrine.

At the joint-level, the JDP 3-40: *Security and Stabilisation* was succeeded by the JDP 05: *Shaping a Stable World: The Military Contribution*. Published in 2016 by DCDC, the JDP 05 was written to align with the interdepartmental The UKs Approach to Stabilisation of 2014.[1605] It retained the stabilization principles as listed in JDP 3-40.[1606] Interestingly, the nascent 77 Brigade is already singled out in the document as a key contributor to the UK's stability efforts.[1607] Further on, the role of the military in understanding and influencing the environment through non-kinetic activities is emphasized. Military activities such as capacity building and security sector reform are also elaborated upon, but unevenly. [1608]The use of force, for instance in a counterinsurgency context, is given relatively short shrift.[1609] As such, the JDP 05 defers the more practical elements of stabilization operations to subsidiary doctrine. As counterinsurgency features only in passing, the JDP 05 is a marked departure from its predecessor.

A further document pertaining to land forces by DCDC (2017) was the JDP 0-20: *Land Power*. This is a generic doctrine on the role of land forces in conflict. Although it does not refer to the operations in Afghanistan, aspects from the Helmand campaign are discernable. The main concept introduced in the JDP 0-20 is "Integrated Action", which is described as "a unifying doctrine that requires commanders first to identify the desired outcome, to consider all the audiences relevant to attaining the outcome, to analyse the effects required on the relevant audience and then to determine the best mix of capabilities, from soft through to hard power, to achieve the outcome."[1610] It applies to all activities of the British

1603 Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 141.

1604 Interviews British army staff officer 1; British army staff officer 3.

1605 Ministry of Defence. (2016). *Joint Doctrine Publication 05 Shaping a Stable World: the Military Contribution*. Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre), p. iii

1606 Ministry of Defence. *JDP 05*, p. 27-28.

1607 Ibidem, p. 74-75.

1608 Ibidem, p. 86-121.

1609 Ibidem, p 91.

1610 Ministry of Defence. (2017). *Joint Doctrine Publication 0-20: UK Land Power*. Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, p. iii-iv.

land forces, ranging from war fighting and stabilization operations to disaster relief.[1611] While it recognizes fighting as the core function of land forces, it underpins the other functions of secure, support and engage.[1612] To be successful in land operations, the JDP posits that land forces must collaborate with government agencies and other partners. However, the command-levels who were tasked with the coordination between partners are the corps and division.[1613] Again, this is in contrast to the experiences in Helmand where such capabilities were delegated to brigade-level and below.

Thus, understanding of the environment, non-kinetic influence and interagency cooperation were integrated into joint doctrine. For the army itself, with its pivot to conventional combat and small-scale "upstream defence engagement", the retention of counterinsurgency in doctrine was still considered as a crucial task.[1614] In its capstone doctrine, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP): *Land Operations* (2017), the concept of Integrated Action is naturally further expanded upon.[1615] Furthermore, in its foreword, it posits that "[s]uccess is more likely to be achieved through non-military or non-lethal means [...]". However, the concepts of Mission Command and the Manoeuvrist Approach are still considered to be of enduring relevance. [1616] Crucially, it distinguishes between four operations themes (adhering to NATO-doctrine): war fighting; stability; peace support; engagement. While these themes are not stagnant within any given conflict, they are meant to provide an intellectual framework for the dynamics of that conflict. Counterinsurgency is consequently a type of operation within the Stability theme under the designation "Counter-irregular Activity.[1617] As for the experiences in Afghanistan, the ADP only refers to it in passing, besides a small vignette about Operation Hamkari (2010) on integrated civil-military actions and synchronizing non-kinetic effects

The theme "Stability" is elaborated in the Army Field Manual: Tactics for Stability Operations (2017). A salient aspect of this doctrine is that is closely aligned to the interdepartmental doctrine on stabilization and the integrated approach. Thereby, the various agencies at least have a common frame of reference. Perhaps the most interesting element in this volume is the recognition that well-intended military actions and interventions might well have negative effects on the operation. Therefore, it calls for "conflict sensitivity" in commanders so that they are aware of potential outcomes.[1618] This AFM forms an overarching doctrine for specific types of operations such as "Counter-irregular Activity" (2019) and "The Military

1611 Ministry of Defence. *JDP 0-20*, p. 23.

1612 Ibidem, p. 44-45.

1613 Ibidem, p. 39.

1614 Presentation Warfare Branch (2016).

1615 British Army. (2017). *Army doctrine Publication Land Operations*. Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, chapter 4.

1616 British Army. ADP Land Operations, p. i

1617 Ibidem, p. 7-8.

1618 British Army. (2017). *Army Field Manual: Tactics for Stability Operations*. Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre; Interviews British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

Contribution to Stabilisation" (not to be confused with JDP 3-40). Although "Counter-irregular Activity" has a broader outlook, its focus is on counter-insurgency. As such, it is designated as the successor of AFM 1:10, and it has retained the principles of AFM 1:10. The Army's experiences in Helmand are extensively used in small vignettes and a critical case study on Afghanistan is included at the end of the document.[1619]

Thus, the UK Armed Forces and the British Army have developed an array of doctrine publications on stability operations and counter-irregular activity after the end of operations in Helmand. Crucially, these documents show coherence with each other, but also with documents from other departments. However, whether the various tomes are read and comprehensively applied during operations remains to be seen.

5.4.2.3: Training and exercises

As the end of the Helmand Campaign approached, the Army started to recalibrate its training towards contingencies other than counterinsurgency missions. This has drawn critique by scholars who saw that, as early as 2011, training by the army was starting to revert to its emphasis on conventional war fighting.[1620] To an extent, this criticism is warranted as this recalibration risks the army to discard hard-won lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, experiences and capabilities from counterinsurgency operations were likely to be relevant for future missions. Yet, the return to for conventional combat skills has been welcomed within the British Army.[1621] At a fundamental level, such reactions to the recalibration towards training for conventional combat operations is indicative of the tension between mission-specific preparation for Helmand and 'foundational-skills' needed for other operations. Indeed, the institutional reluctance of the British Army to adequately resource its operations in Helmand had been the primary reason for launching Operation Entirety. At the same time, the army recognized that the effects of Operation Entirety should be reversible to prepare itself for new missions.[1622]

Of course, the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq had been formative experiences for the British Army. For over a decade, British service members had fought in two distinct counterinsurgency campaigns. With Operation Entirety, the institution had been adapted to meet the challenges of Helmand. Although Helmand was the most exacting mission for the British Army in decades, it was also fought under conditions that were specific to the Afghan

1619 British Army. (2019). *Army Field Manual Counter-irregular Activity.* Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre; Interviews British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1620 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 50-51; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 157-158.

1621 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 51; Dyson. *Organisational Learning*, p. 157-158.

1622 See British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p xxxix; Interviews British commanding officer 17; British commanding officer 3.

theater. First, in a tactical sense, the adversaries had not been able to defeat the British troops in combat. To an extent, this can be ascribed to British training and tactical prowess. Yet it could be more to do with the British troops having overwhelming advantages in firepower and air support. Moreover, during operations, force protection was a prime consideration .[1623] Secondly, TFH had rather largely uncontested logistical support and could operate from large, static forward operating bases. Furthermore, the quality of medical support was high and, in most cases, wounded service members received adequate treatment.[1624]

As the British Army looked to potential future conflicts, it acknowledged that conditions might well be more austere and adversaries more capable. However, the environment in Helmand had been the norm for years and permeated training exercises that were not geared to deployment in Afghanistan.[1625] Even at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, instructors emphasized their experiences in Helmand in the basic training for officer-cadets. Consequently, the Helmand experience skewed the training at a generic level and thus affected the preparation for other missions. Therefore, a reset in force preparation was warranted. An important aspect of this recalibration was that hybrid foundation training no longer included Afghanistan-specific elements and instead focused more on combat operations.[1626] Beyond the participation in combat exercises, army officers seek to address the underpinning assumptions in training. They feel that the British Army has become risk-averse due to the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan where force protection had been the norm. Instead, training, TTPs and equipment should be geared towards winning in close combat situations and survivability rather than protection.[1627] A further element in this reset from Helmand was that units had to reacquire the knowledge of how to design training. During Operation Entirety, units preparing for deployment were taken through the motions of training and just had to report at the time and location as ordered. With the end of the mission, the "conveyor belt" of training was discontinued. Now commanders must design and organize training and exercises for their units in order to attain the required level of readiness.[1628]

In accordance with the 2010 SDSR and Army 2020, the British Army established a rapid reaction force for expeditionary combat missions. For this role, the army had to provide a brigade with armored and mechanized units. This required extensive training on combined arms tactics at the brigade level. This included the strategic movement of heavy materiel to

1623 Interviews British commanding officer 14; British commanding officer 6; British army staff officer 3; British commanding officer 3.

1624 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 2-1_28.

1625 British staff officer 8; British army staff officer 3; British commanding officer 6

1626 Catignani. Coping with knowledge, p. 49-51.

1627 Neil Unsworth (2020). Fight Light: The appetite for risk in dismounted close combat. *Carre*(3), p. 1-8Interviews British staff officer 3; British commanding officer 6.

1628 Interviews British staff officer 9; British commanding officer 6; British commanding officer 13.

theater and fighting conventional adversaries with sophisticated capabilities. In a rotating schedule, Army brigades and battle groups were thus prepared for high intensity combat operations.[1629] Conventional combat is further trained in exercises as the American-led annual Joint Warfighting Assessment. Here a British army brigade, under the command of an American division, is evaluated in its ability to conduct combat operations.[1630] Furthermore, the British 3rd Division, earmarked for high-intensity operations, has participated in Warfighting exercises with American formations in recent years. Again, the training scenarios are geared towards conventional combat.[1631]

Likewise, the UK is the lead nation for a NATO battle group in Estonia for the alliance's Enhanced Forward Presence. Under Operation Carbrit, the army has provided 800 troops on a rotational basis for this battle group since 2017, augmented by contingents from Denmark and Iceland. Additionally, the UK has deployed a company-sized detachment to Poland under American command. During their rotations, the British troops train for combat operations up to battle group-level.[1632] Annually, the British battle group participates in the Estonian-led exercise "Spring Storm". This exercise brings over 10,000 allied troops to Estonia to train defensive operations against a fictionalized conventional adversary.[1633]

With regard to mission-specific preparation, the withdrawal from Afghanistan precipitated adjustments. With the various smaller deployments such as the mission in Iraq against the Islamic State (Operation Shader) and MINUSMA in Mali (Operation Newcombe), the mission-specific training phase naturally lost its singular focus of the later stages of the Helmand campaign. Thus, the army's training establishment had to service various requirements as counterterrorism operations (Shader) and stabilization missions (Newcombe). However, the mission preparation is in large part adapted from Operation Herrick. For instance, the preparation phase focuses on working in a multinational environment with interagency partners. When possible, service members are joined by personnel from NGOs and other departments during predeployment exercises. Additionally, cultural understanding is an integral part of mission preparation. These activities are supported by the DCSU and the LIFC. A main difference in the training is that the current emphasis is on enabling partner forces to conduct operations British forces taking on a mentoring role. This change poses some difficulties as it is harder to assess whether individuals or units are adequately trained

1629 Tim Ripley (2015, June 24). Ready to go: UK rapid reaction forces return to contingency. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, p 27-28.

1630 British Army. (2018, May 8). *Joint Warfighting*. Retrieved June 6, 2021, from British Army: https://www.army.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2018/05/joint-warfighting/

1631 John Mead (2019). Winning the Firefight on the 'Road to Warfighter'. *British Army Review*, 175, p. 64-73.

1632 Ministry of Defence. (2020, December 21). Operation CABRIT explained: Deterring Aggression in Estonia and Poland. London

1633 *Spring Storm: 1,000 British Personnel On Exercise In Estonia*. (2019, May 10). Retrieved july 12, 2021, from Forces.net: https://www.forces.net/news/exercises/exercise-spring-storm-battle-groups-operating-civilian-populated-towns-estoniexercise-in-estonia/

for such a role. Instead of normal combat skills, mentoring is more about cultural sensitivity and personal rapport.[1634]

To be sure, the trend of recalibration of training towards conventional combat does not mean that the British Army is reverting to a Cold War-footing. Since 2011, the army organizes the exercise "Agile Warrior". Initiated by the FDT, the objective of the exercise was to instill experimentation and concept development in the Army. Furthermore, it seeks to provide an "evidence-based analysis of future land-force requirements."[1635] Therefore, Agile Warrior strives to include international, academic, and interagency partners to provide additional insight that helps the army explore future capabilities and operating concepts. [1636] Areas of interest are the use of cyber capabilities and influence activities. Furthermore, the Army has increased training in urban environments with new capabilities in the related exercise "Urban Warrior."[1637]

Although "Agile Warrior" explicitly looked beyond operations in Afghanistan, the program identified enduring lessons from this mission that were relevant in future conflicts. For instance, the army must retain the ability to decentralize capabilities to brigades or even battalions and companies. Another aspect that warranted further development is intelligence and understanding of the environment through open sources and other agencies (such as NGOs). Related to this was the enduring necessity to work in an integrated manner with various partners rather than in isolation.[1638] A final aspect that was to be retained from Helmand and that Agile Warrior sought to promote was the ability to exploit lessons by the army.[1639] Although the FDT no longer exists, the Agile Warrior exercise has been retained and it has spawned new experiments and concepts such as the use of autonomous vehicles in operations. [1640] Moreover, outcomes from Agile Warrior have been used as foundation for the Future Land Operating Concept and other doctrinal publications.[1641] Thus, "Agile Warrior" sought to look beyond Iraq and Afghanistan by experimentation and cooperation. At the same time, enduring lessons from these missions were taken into account and the program attempted to retain the intellectual outlook of Operation Entirety.

1634 Interviews British army staff officer 2; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 5; British army staff officer 8.

1635 Think Defence. (2012, March 10). *Agile Warrior and the Future of the British Army.* Retrieved May 10, 2021, from Think Defence: https://www.thinkdefence.co.uk/2012/03/agile-warrior-and-the-future-of-the-british-army, p 2-3.

1636 Mark Philips (2011). *Exercise Agile Warrior and the Future Development of UK Land Forces.* London: RUSI Occasional paper, p. 5-6.

1637 Think Defence. *Agile Warrior and the Future of the British Army*, p 4-5.

1638 Mark Philips (2011). *Exercise Agile Warrior and the Future Development of UK Land Forces.* London: RUSI Occasional paper, p. 7-10.

1639 Interviews British army staff officer 9; British commanding officer 3.

1640 Chris Tickell (2019). Keeping the Competitive Advantage. *British Army Review, 175*, p. 6-9.

1641 Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Concept Note 2/12: Future Land Operating Concept.* London, p. V; British Army. (2017). *Army doctrine Publication Land Operations.* Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, p. 1-6.

5.4.3: Vignettes

As seen during operation in Helmand, the British forces developed capabilities to better cope with the challenges posed by the operational environment. Aspects like intelligence, non-kinetic influencing, counter-IED measures, stabilization activities and interagency cooperation were changed due to experiences in Helmand. This following section studies how these capabilities were institutionalized and further developed after the ISAF mission. In this way, we can assess whether these crucial aspects in counterinsurgency endure beyond Helmand and are potentially developed further. Moreover, this will shed light on the distinct dynamics of institutionalization from wartime adaptation as proffered in chapter 2.

5.4.3.1: Interagency cooperation and the Stabilisation Unit

One of the core principles in counterinsurgency theory is the coordination between government agencies, subject to an overall plan. As described in section 5.3, the Helmand PRT was the main manifestation of the British interdepartmental efforts in theater. Although the government agencies, Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for International Development and the Stabilisation Unit ostensibly subscribed to the iterations of the campaign plans, cooperation at the coalface in Afghanistan proved problematic. This section examines the extent to which lessons from the Helmand PRT have been identified and addressed. It will focus on the subsequent developments concerning the Integrated Approach in the British Army and the Stabilisation Unit.

Like the British Army, the Stabilisation Unit evaluated the mission in Helmand to draw lessons from it. During a three-day conference in December 2014, it examined the experiences of the Helmand PRT. The conference focused on the PRTs effects on civil-military relationships; the lessons from the PRTs role in promoting reconstruction, development and governance; and whether the PRT could serve as a model for future integrated missions. [1642] Attendees of the conference, which included British civil servants, and American, Danish and Estonian participants, were generally in agreement that after an inauspicious start, the Helmand PRT had improved its performance.[1643]

Yet, the conference highlighted various fundamental flaws within the Helmand PRT. First of all, there was no clearly formulated strategic end-state for what the PRT was to achieve. Instead, there was a list of policy objectives based on departmental preferences that were often incompatible. For instance, the vacillating emphases between population-centric counterinsurgency and more kinetic counterterrorism activities were not successful in

1642 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 1-2

1643 Interviews British civil servant 5; Interviews British army staff officer 6.

garnering local support for ISAF or the Afghan authorities. Moreover, in Helmand this had been exacerbated by the counter-narcotics effort, which was found to be mutually exclusive to bringing stability to the province. However, the delicate coordination between the various departments and their interests had been deferred to the PRT. As a result, the PRT was more a reflection of interdepartmental rivalry than a solution for this problem.[1644] Secondly, the PRT had initially emphasized reconstruction and development projects while awarding insufficient attention to the political dynamics of Helmand. In large part, this was caused by the lack of understanding of the political economy of Helmand. Only as this understanding improved over time, the PRT became more adept in negotiating the local dynamics and supporting local governance. While this brought more cohesion to the PRTs efforts, there was considerable doubt about the sustainability of the modest progress that had made after the end of the mission in 2014.[1645]

Furthermore, while after 2008 the British mission in Helmand came under nominal civilian command, in reality the military commander of TFH ordered the deployment of his forces. Even after the introduction of the Helmand Roadmap, the collaboration between the PRT and TFH was marred by successive brigades trying to impose their plans on the mission.[1646] This was mirrored at the district-level where battle groups worked with the Stabilisation Advisers; the effectiveness of this ground-level cooperation hinged on the personal relationship between the adviser and the battle group staff.[1647] With regard to the American Surge, the evaluation was mixed in its opinion. The American troop contribution was seen as crucial in bringing security to population centers, allowing the PRT to assist local authorities and work on development. Concurrently however, it struggled to influence the American efforts as the PRT lacked credibility due to its performance in earlier years.[1648]

Ultimately, the Helmand PRT itself was not seen as a model for future missions. Fundamental issues like interdepartmental coordination, stating clear and obtainable objectives, acquiring sufficient understanding of the environment and the ability of collaborating with local authorities had to be addressed before embarking on a new ambitious intervention. Although the construct itself was not to be emulated, the positive note of the PRT-evaluation was that the Helmand mission had produced an experience cadre of personnel across the departments who had worked together under austere conditions.[1649]

1644 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 11

1645 Ibidem, p. 24-25; Interview British civil servant 5.

1646 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 15.

1647 Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1648 FCO. *Capturing the Lessons*, p. 6

1649 Interviews British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6; British civil servant 3; British staff officer 21.

While the Wilton Park evaluation essentially produced a consolidated list of observations by individuals who had worked in or with the PRT, various identified issues were included into "UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation". This document produced by the Stabilisation Unit and its parent departments in 2014, listed four key characteristics for British stabilization efforts: the primacy of an overtly political objective for addressing the instability; an integrated, civilian-led approach; activities that are flexible and targeted at the local level but within the larger political context; and, the awareness that British involvement is transitory, thereby planning for sustainable development and capacity-building.[1650] When contrasted to the mission in Helmand, these characteristics were aspects that had been sorely missing in the British efforts there. Moreover, the document underscores that political imperatives must make precedence over expediency from a security or military perspective. As such security must be seen as "an enabling factor" rather than an end in itself. Too much focus on the latter can impede political accommodation.[1651] Although the "Approach to Stabilisation" has a broader application than large-scale interventions like Afghanistan, the experiences in Helmand seem to provide its frame of reference, as it is ambitious in its outlook of fostering stability at local and national levels.

While the government agencies were evaluating their Helmand experiences, new, smaller missions were initiated that required interdepartmental collaboration. In September 2014, the UK deployed a task force to Sierra Leone to assist its struggle with an outbreak of Ebolavirus. The operation (Gritrock) was placed under civilian command and closely coordinated with NGOs. In this arrangement, the military contributed with naval transport, medical units, engineers for building treatment centers and infantry to provide security. This civilian-led mission was successful as Sierra Leone was declared "Ebola-free" in November 2015.[1652] Conversely, the UK contribution to the fight against the Islamic State, operation Shader, was military-led. However, beyond the delivery of humanitarian aid, mentoring Iraqi forces and air support, the FCO and DfID participated in the mission in an effort to address the root causes of the conflict. For instance, DfID provided stabilization assistance in liberated areas for the Iraqi government and economic reconstruction.[1653] Still, the military considerations were paramount in this operation.[1654] Of course, operations Gritrock and Shader were distinct for the Helmand mission in terms of objectives and scale. Yet the integrated command of the newer missions has been heralded by informed observers as representing marked progress from Afghanistan.[1655]

1650 Stabilisation Unit. (2014). *The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation (2014).* London, p 5-6.

1651 Stabilisation Unit, *The UK's Approach to Stabilisation*, p. 7.

1652 Interviews British civil servant 6; British staff officer 21

1653 Department for International Development. (2010). *Working Effectively in Conflict-affected and Fragile Situations: Links between Politics, Security and Development* . London, p. 5-6.

1654 Interview British commanding officer 10.

1655 Interviews British civil servant 6; British staff officer 21; British civil servant 3; British commanding officer 10.

From a military perspective, the need for interagency cooperation was well recognized. Indeed, the military had criticized the other departments for their lackluster contributions in Basra and the initial years in Helmand. Through subsequent doctrine publications, the army has reiterated the need for integrated operations, in particular for stabilization and peace support missions (see 5.4.2.2.).[1656] Furthermore, the army has established a specialist formation for interagency cooperation in the form of 77 Brigade. Still, the integration of civilian agencies into military planning processes and exercises have been regarded as underdeveloped.[1657] A further point of critique regarding contemporary military operations and the comprehensive approach is that there is no link between tactical activities and the objective to provide stability to an area. As the UK and its military are pivoting towards "upstream engagement", military personnel are providing security force assistance to indigenous security forces. Nevertheless, beyond enhancing the partner forces' tactical capabilities, it is often unclear in how this improves the local stability as these activities are apt to reinforce existing political tensions rather than resolve them.[1658]

The emphasis on promoting stability through engaging (local) political problems was reiterated in the 2019 version of the "UK's Approach to Stabilisation". A striking aspect of this version is that it denounces the military-led efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan as being unable to address the political situation.[1659] Instead of trying to defeat an adversary, such as an insurgency, the UK should help the parties of a conflict in reaching a political accommodation. Through facilitating such an agreement, violence could be reduced and thus provide a foundation for enduring stability.[1660] This idea was based on independent research on behalf of the Stabilisation Unit, "Elite Bargains and Political Deals", research finding that, since the end of the Cold War, conflicts had mostly been ended by a settlement rather than a decisive military victory.[1661] However, this diplomatic avenue had not been taken in Helmand where the Sangin-accord reached with local elders in 2011 received no political backing from the UK and the US. Consequently, violence resumed in the district.[1662] As such, this new 'approach' to stabilization operation spelled a departure, in theory at least, from the large-scale interventions in which military considerations of security were paramount. Instead, the military contribution was to be more subdued as it should focus on enabling local security forces and if necessary, reduce the threat against civilians.[1663] Finally, the Stabilisation Unit explicated the distinction between counterinsurgency and stabilization

1656 See for instance JDP 05, *Military Contribution*, p. 121.

1657 Interviews British staff officer 21; British army staff officer 12.

1658 See Abigail Watson and Megan Karlshøj-Pedersen(2019). *Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps: Lessons learned from remote warfare in Africa*. London: Oxford Research Group, p. 22-23; Interview British army staff officer 21.

1659 Stabilisation Unit. (2014). *The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation (2014)*. London, p. 7-8.

1660 Ibidem, p. 9-10.

1661 Stabilisation. (2018). *Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict*. London, p. 11.

1662 Ibidem, p 27; Interviews British civil servant 2; British civil servant 3.

1663 Stabilisation Unit. *UKs Approach to Stabilisation*, p. 9.

operations. In the former, the intervening forces are assisting the local government, while the latter is more neutral.[1664] One problem with engaging in a counterinsurgency campaign is that the (nominal) authorities may well be a source of instability.[1665]

Regarding the Helmand PRT, the enduring lesson in the UK is seemingly that the experience from Afghanistan should not be emulated (see table 5.13). Far from a solution to interdepartmental wrangling, the PRT was seen as a manifestation of the unresolved tensions. Furthermore, future stabilization efforts should be genuinely civilian-led and more focused on political accommodation instead of defeating drivers of instability.

Comprehensive approach and PRT	**Institutionalization**	**Influencing factors**
Doctrine	Yes, incorporated in doctrine and policy papers	Political salience, dissemination mechanisms
Organizational structure	Yes, in Stabilisation Unit and successors; in British army through 77 Brigade. However, PRT is no blueprint for future interagency cooperation	learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation
Training	Limited, mostly in 77 Brigade.	Organizational culture: differences in training objectives

Table 5.13: Institutionalization of interagency lessons

5.4.3.2: *Intelligence*

Intelligence, and the more general term understanding of the operational environment, has been identified as an enduring area of attention within the British Army.[1666] As one of the principal units of the Army 2020 reorganizations, 1 ISR Brigade, was formally established in September 2014. It encompassed several units from the Royal Artillery with capabilities in surveillance and target acquisition. Beyond these units, the brigade consisted of the various regular and reservist Military Intelligence battalions and companies, the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre (LIFC) and the Defense Cultural and Specialist Unit (DCSU).[1667] These latter two units were thus being retained after being established to support operations in Helmand. However, the DCSU was to be transferred to 77 Brigade in December 2019 (see section 5.4.3.3.).

1664 Ibidem, p11

1665 This is a central point in Mike Martin's *An Intimate War.*

1666 See British Army. (2012). *Transforming the British Army, July 2012: Modernising to face an unpredictable* . London p. 2.; Ministry of Defence. (2012). *Joint Concept Note 2/12: Future Land Operating Concept.* London p. 3-6.

1667 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades.* Andover, p. 11.

Hence, the LIFC was institutionalized as a reach-back facility for tactical intelligence. Towards the end of the Helmand campaign, the scope of the LIFC was widened to include more regions such as Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. In this way, the LIFC both supports deployed units and fuses the intelligence that is generated by these missions. Moreover, the LIFC aims to provide a baseline of situational awareness for potential areas of deployment in order to inform units that form an entry-force.[1668] Although this input will be no substitute for the more granular understanding of an environment, the idea is that in this way initial rotations can build their intelligence position from this foundation. In this role, the LIFC is an important partner of 77 Brigade.

Another adaptation from Helmand that has since been retained is the concept of Battle Group Intelligence Support Sections (BGISS). Since Army 2020, several Military Intelligence Battalions have dedicated companies to train for this role. If necessary, intelligence personnel can also form Company Intelligence Support Teams (COISTS). As in Helmand, the primary role of these Intelligence Corps detachments is to provide analytical support for the organic intelligence sections of manoeuvre units.[1669]

During operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the initial focus of the intelligence process had been on the adversary. One of the key observations by British service members was that a more comprehensive analysis of the environment and local dynamics was needed.[1670] To enhance the ability of the army to collect intelligence on the "human terrain", the concept of "human terrain reconnaissance" was developed. This entailed patrols conducted by intelligence personnel to acquire an understanding of the environment and its cultural, social, and political characteristics. Although such patrols have value throughout a mission, human terrain reconnaissance had the express purpose to obtain a better intelligence position at the preparatory and initial stages of a deployment.[1671] In other words, the purpose of these patrol was to prevent a reprisal of the Helmand campaign where understanding of the environment had been insufficient. However, for such patrols to be effective in an uncertain environment with limited military presence required specifically trained personnel. To this end, specific "Human Environment, Reconnaissance and Analysis" units have been established from reservist members of the Special Air Service. [1672]

The centrality of a comprehensive understanding of the environment and its actors is underlined in doctrinal publications (see table 5.14).[1673] As such the scope of the intelligence

1668 Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army staff officer 15.

1669 Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army staff officer 15.

1670 Interviews British army staff officer 14, British army staff officer 11; British commanding officer 2.

1671 Interviews British army staff officer 11; British army staff officer 15.

1672 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades*. Andover

1673 See Ministry of Defence. (2011). *Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00: Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations* . London, p. 4-11 - 4-14; *British Army. ADP Land Operations*, p 4-2 - 4-3.

process is broader than threats and physical terrain. However, in Helmand these requirements led to a significant expansion of intelligence staffs and, more generally headquarters, at the brigade and battle group levels. It is doubtful whether these static staff elements are sustainable in conflicts of a higher intensity. Yet a decreasing capacity in intelligence personnel will affect a unit's analytical capability to understand it's human environment.[1674] As the British Army has been recalibrating towards conventional conflict, it remains an open question how regular formations and units will cope with such constraints, whether in training or on deployments.

Intelligence	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Land Intelligence Fusion Centre	Yes, with expanded view	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation
Tactical intelligence support	Yes, BGISDs and COISTs are retained	Resource allocation, organizational culture, organizational politics
Cultural understanding	Yes, DCSU retained with expanded view	Resource allocation

Table 5.14: Institutionalization of intelligence lessons

5.4.3.3: Institutionalizing unorthodoxy: the establishment of 77 Brigade for non-kinetic effects

One of the most salient attempts to institutionalize lessons from the Helmand Campaign is the establishment of 77 Brigade. This new formation was part of the Army 2020 restructuring and initially called the Security Assistance Group (SAG). Its remit was to bring unity of command to - and enhance coherence between - specialist capabilities such as information operations and stabilization support. In essence it was to provide non-kinetic effects for the Army. Additionally, the SAG was to serve as the main military partner for the Stabilisation Unit at the tactical level.[1675]

Set up in September 2014, the SAG incorporated several disparate units. It comprised the Military Stabilisation Support Group, the Media Operations Group and 15 Psychological Operations Group. Furthermore, a Security Capacity Building Team was to be established. Finally, the new formation included a liaison team from the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre. It was initially subordinated to Force Troop Command, a divisional level formation that housed various brigades for combat support and combat service support. In 2019,

1674 Jack Watling (2021). Preparing Military Intelligence for Great Power Competition: Retooling the 2-Shop. *RUSI Journal*, p. 13.

1675 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 5-4_6; British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades*. Andover, p. 27.

this formation was reformed as 6th (UK) Division. Although the SAG was a brigade-level formation, its personnel strength was in the range of a small battalion with roughly 400 regulars and reservists.[1676]
From its inception, the SAG was an amalgamation of existing units and nascent capabilities. From the Army's perspective the unit had to balance the need for novel and unconventional competencies yet still be sufficiently familiar for other formations to be utilized. Therefore, regular positions were staffed with personnel from across the various arms and regiments. The more specific skills were drawn from reservists that were recruited.[1677]

Another initiative was the branding of the formation, both to attract personnel and enhance its status. Recognizing that the SAG image was somewhat bland, the first commander endeavored to rebrand it by adopting the traditions of the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade that was part of the "Chindits". Commanded by the eccentric Orde Wingate, the "Chindits" were known for their unconventional operations behind enemy lines in Southeast Asia during the Second World War. Its first commander felt that these disparate elements had to be mixed to break down the internal stove pipes.[1678] Revisiting its pedigree, 77 Brigade was reorganized into different "columns" including: planning support; reach-back capacity for deployed units; deployable specialists; media operations and civil affairs; capacity building. [1679] However, some observers felt that by breaking up the original units, valuable knowledge from operations in Helmand was discarded.[1680]

This structure was upended in 2018 when 77 Brigade was now organized in various groups. Information operations and influence activities are conducted by the Digital Operations Group, which includes a production team for various information products and a team for "web operations" that monitors sentiment and can engage with audiences to influence perceptions. This latter activity is conducted within the bounds of British policy.[1681] As such, the Digital Operations Group is the 'modernized' successor of 15 PsyOps Group. Media outreach is conducted by the Operational Media and Communications Group. Beyond its operational activities, 77 Brigade is also active in concept development for integrating non-kinetic effects within the British Army.[1682] Furthermore, 77 Brigade has seconded a liaison officer to the Stabilisation Unit to enable information sharing and keeping the Brigade abreast of cross-departmental developments.[1683]

1676 British Army. (2014). *Force Troops Command: Forces Troop Command overview and brigades.* Andover, p. 27.

1677 Interview British commanding officer 15.

1678 Nick Reynolds (2015). The 'soft' touch: Delivering non-kinetic effects to influence the battlespace. *Jane's Defence Weekly*; British commanding officer 15

1679 British Army. (2016, May). 77 Brigade (unclassified presentation)

1680 Interview British civil servant 5; British civil servant 6.

1681 James Chandler (2020). An Introduction to 77 Brigade. *British Army Review*, 177, p. 17-18

1682 Chandler. 77 Brigade, p. 15-16.

1683 Interview British staff officer 21.

In December 2019, 77 Brigade was further augmented by the DCSU which was transferred from 1 ISR Brigade. In this way, the DCSU can provide Target Audience Analysis for the brigade's information activities and in general contribute to understanding the operational environment.[1684] In parallel to the LIFC, the scope of the DCSU was expanded to other regions of the world. Naturally, this has the side-effect that the depth of training is diminished, in contrast to the Afghanistan mission. Therefore, the role of the officers is shifting from cultural 'experts' towards more generic advisers for commanders on cultural understanding and influencing activities. This is reflected in the training of the officers which is currently more generic and based on outreach and information activities. After this foundation, the officers specialize in a region and receive linguistic training. On deployment, cultural advisers are generally attached to battle groups or higher echelons.[1685]

The DCSU continues to enroll active-duty personnel in the rank of captain, yet by and large, prospective candidates are provided by the Army's personnel services rather than actively recruited and selected. A fundamental issue for the DCSU is that there is no specific career-path for its personnel. Consequently, both the army and the service member have to invest much time and effort in the training for relatively modest gains in terms of operational output. Moreover, a tour at the DCSU has been described in interviews as detrimental to an officer's career.[1686] As a result, while the DCSU is institutionalized within the army, it is not fully embraced in the absence of a large mission like Helmand.

Furthermore, the legacy of the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG) and its constituent teams (MSSTs) is respectively continued by the Outreach Group and the Task Group. For its part, the Outreach Group has three main roles. The first is advising commanders on human security as espoused by the United Nations and to support policy development on this theme within the Ministry of Defence. Secondly, the group is tasked with fostering civil-military cooperation at an institutional level. In this role it helps planning for cooperation for missions and acts as an interface between the Ministry of Defence and civilian agencies. The third role is that of capacity building at the institutional level. This is not exclusive to armed forces, but also to other security agencies of partner nations. As such, its activities in capacity building are complementary to the more tactical focus of the Specialised Infantry Group. As the Outreach Group consists of approximately 40 personnel, both regular service members and reservists, it cannot execute its tasks to the full extent by itself. Instead, it functions as a hub in a network of experts that can be called upon when necessary. Its reservists largely maintain these relationships and are more generalists than specialists.[1687]

1684 Interview British army staff officer 19.

1685 Interviews British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 16.

1686 Interviews British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 15; British army staff officer 14; Ucko and Egnell. *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 120

1687 Interviews British army staff officer 16; British army staff officer 20.

Additionally, 77 Brigade's Task Group can be described as a conceptual descendant of the MSSTs. It is comprised of several Information Activities and Outreach (IA&O) teams that can be attached to formation headquarters and tactical units. As such, these comprise the deployable capacity of 77 Brigade. The IA&O teams are tasked with CIMIC, key-leader engagement, PsyOps and contribute to understanding the operational environment.[1688] Finally, a training element is under development that aims to train personnel from regular army units to conduct some of the information activities.[1689] In essence, although there is no direct organizational link, these teams can be seen as a continuation of the Non-Kinetic Effects Teams that were introduced in Helmand.

Still, challenges remain for the brigade and the integration of non-kinetic effects. First, it is hard to simulate the information domain and the potential effects it seeks to achieve in a training scenario, in particular within a training exercise by regular formations and units. For brigade and battalion commanders and their staffs, these challenges impede their familiarization with the non-kinetic effects and the ability to integrate them in operational plans.[1690] A second challenge is that for regular service members, for instance from the infantry, artillery or engineers, a position within the 77 Brigade is often less well understood by the personnel branches. This increases the threshold for talented officers and NCOs to join 77 Brigade lest they diminish their career prospects in their own regiments.[1691]

Within its short existence, 77 Brigade has deployed various detachments to missions. For example, elements of the brigade have contributed to Operation Shader (Iraq), Operation Cabrit (Estonia and Poland) and Operation Newcombe (Mali) [1692] Thus, 77 Brigade has evolved from an identified deficiency in the Army's ability to conduct "Information Activities and Outreach" in Iraq and Afghanistan into an institutional response to address the capability gap (see table 5.15). From here, it has taken a vital role in developing non-kinetic effects, both conceptually and on deployments. Senior Army officers have lauded the establishment of 77 Brigade as a crucial new capability to achieve influence effects.[1693] Of course, such statements are to be expected, yet the establishment of 77 Brigade in times of financial constraints is itself indicative that Army leadership has been willing to invest in such capabilities. However, while the capabilities of the brigade are evolving and deployed on missions, its potential is

1688 Interviews British army staff officer 16; British army staff officer 20.

1689 See 77 Brigade Groups https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/formations-divisions-brigades/6th-united-kingdom-division/77-brigade/groups/.

1690 Interviews British army staff officer 20; British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 3; British army staff officer 4; British army staff officer 5.

1691 Interview British army staff officer 20; British army staff officer 19; British army staff officer 16; This had been identified earlier by Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, p. 120.

1692 Chandler, 77 Brigade, BAR, p. 17.

1693 See comments by General Nick Carter and Lieutenant-General Paul Newton in House of Commons Defence Committee. (2017, April 29). SDSR 2015 and the Army: Eighth Report of Session 2016–17 HC 108. London, p. 20-21.

hampered by difficulties in providing integrated training with manoeuvre formations and the lack of viable career-paths for regular officers and NCOs.

Non-kinetic activities	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Integration of non-kinetic activities	Limited, increased attention for these activities. Yet, hard to integrate them in training exercises	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, organizational culture
Professionalization of information operations personnel	Yes, establishment of 77 Brigade important boost. However, no career path for specialized personnel	Resource allocation, organizational culture

Table 5.15: Institutionalization of lessons on non-kinetic activities

5.4.3.4: Counter-IED

Where IEDs were the hallmark threat during the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, following these missions novel threat vectors such as armed UAVs and conventional capabilities as indirect fire have become more prominent. Despite this, within the British Armed Forces IEDs were acknowledged as an enduring threat in all potential theaters.[1694] Therefore, the British Armed Forces decided to institutionalize the counter-IED knowledge "to ensure hard won gains were not lost in the same way many had been on the conclusion of Operation BANNER". In particular, the understanding of C-IED capabilities and TTPs across the army should be retained.[1695]

To strengthen counter-IED training beyond the Afghanistan mission, the MoD established a new training site in December 2012. Additionally, a joint Defence EOD Munitions and Search (DEMS) Training Regiment was established. This brought together the various disciplines in of explosive ordnance handling. Specifically, one training wing trains for Search capabilities that supports service members from the various arms, services, and other security agencies. Another training branch is focused on the neutralization (dismantling) of IEDs.[1696] Furthermore, the army has retained two regular (and one reservist) regiments under the Royal Logistics Corps and Royal Engineers tasked with handling IEDs.[1697]

1694 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 6-1_2; Interviews British army warrant officer 1; British army staff officer 22.

1695 British Army. *Herrick Campaign Study*, p. 3-6_17.

1696 Interviews British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

1697 Interviews British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

The skills in detecting and dismantling IEDs continues to be relevant on missions such as Mali.[1698] To keep abreast of developments, the DEMS Training Regiment closely follows information on IEDs in various conflicts. This is further enabled by its international students who enroll annually in the DEMS courses. In this way, the DEMS can use their experience to adjust its training and TTPs (see table 5.16).[1699] Beyond this more specialized training, C-IED are still used in the more generic training schedules for members of the army.[1700] Although the operational pressures from Operation Herrick have subsided, the British Armed Forces have retained an institutional foundation of Counter-IED knowledge.

Counter-IED	Institutionalization	Influencing factors
Training and knowledge retention	Yes, establishment of DEMS training regiment	Learning and dissemination mechanisms, resource allocation

Table 5.16: Institutionalization of lessons on counter-IED

5.4.4: Sub conclusion

Even before the conclusion of the Helmand campaign, the British Army started to recalibrate towards other potential missions. Training and exercises were used to prepare for other contingencies than Helmand. After Operation Entirety, this pivot was warranted as the army had been singularly focused on preparing for Afghanistan. Within the army, it was felt that this focus on a campaign with specific conditions had diminished its ability to fight in more austere conditions against more capable adversaries. Furthermore, this reset was precipitated by the reorganizations following the 2010 Security and Defence Review. Budgetary constraints necessitated a decrease in the Army's capacity by 20,000 regular troops as proposed in the Army 2020 review. In this review, the army sought to reinvigorate the divisional level and be ready for high-intensity combat operations if called upon.

Besides this reset from Afghanistan and the pivot to conventional combat the army retained stabilization operations as a core task. However, the UK now emphasized "upstream defence engagement". This meant that the British army conducted capacity building in order to prevent conflagrations of potential conflict areas. Although this did not necessarily preclude interventions in conflict, the capacity of the British Army to engage in large scale operations

1698 Michael Shurkin, (2020, March 12). *The UK in Mali*. Retrieved May 6, 2021, from The Wavell Room: https://wavellroom.com/2020/03/12/the-uk-in-mali

1699 Interview British army warrant officer 1

1700 Interviews British army staff officer 22; British army staff officer 23.

like Helmand was severely diminished by this reorganization. At the same time, Army 2020 envisaged to institutionalize lessons and address deficiencies from Afghanistan such as interagency cooperation, non-kinetic influencing and enhancing the intelligence process. To this end 77 Brigade and 1 ISR Brigade were established.
These deficiencies had of course been identified by the Lessons Exploitation Centre (LXC). Before the end of the mission, the LXC was tasked to evaluate the Helmand Campaign. This resulted in the comprehensive Operation Herrick Campaign Study. Although the study offered a candid examination of observations, best practices and deficiencies, its scope was restricted to the tactical level. A higher-level post-mortem or an official historical reconstruction have not been commissioned. Therefore, as the campaign has not been publicly evaluated at the operational and strategic levels, it is unclear what the enduring lessons are from the perspective of the army and the MoD. Moreover, lacking such an internal appraisal, it is hard to discern whether issues at the higher echelons have been resolved for future missions.

In theory, the interdepartmental and military doctrine publications point to a measured approach for stabilization operations. Through integrated action, normally under civilian leadership, the UK seeks to assist in foreign conflict resolution. In this sense, the main observation from the Helmand experience seems to be to not engage in such a campaign again. The Helmand PRT equally was not considered to be template for future missions by its participants. However, the experience of the cooperation on the ground was valued by both civil-servants and service members.

Thus, aspects of the Helmand campaign have been consciously institutionalized as a result of a deliberate learning and evaluation process. Interagency cooperation, intelligence and non-kinetic activities have been implemented in doctrine, integrated into new units, and received more attention and resources within the army. Furthermore, to its credit, the British Army does not regard Helmand as its golden standard but recognizes that some lessons have enduring relevance in different contexts. As such, the establishment and further development of 77 Brigade and 1 ISR Brigade are an indication that the army has enhanced its capabilities that are crucial for counterinsurgency and stabilization operations. Yet, the specialization within such units runs the risk of being disconnected from regular manoeuvre units and formations as they are training for high-intensity combat operations. Integrating these specialized capabilities into generic training exercises remains complicated. Consequently, the lack of common training hampers the familiarization with these capabilities by commanders and their staffs in peace time. This is further compounded by limited career prospects for regular service members in a specialized formation such as 77 Brigade. Often, a billet here is seen as detrimental to a career. These relatively mundane considerations hamper the integration of these more 'exotic' capabilities.

5.5: Conclusion

Generally, observers from within the British Army posit that the institution has changed profoundly from its experience in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The Helmand campaign was of course the focal point of these wars due to its intensity and longevity from 2006 to 2014. As large parts of the army have been deployed to Helmand, this experience will have a lasting effect on the institution and its members. However, the ability to harness this experience for deliberate organizational change proved to be harder.

As has been extensively described above, the Helmand campaign was off to an inauspicious start. When the under-resourced TFH deployed, it was confronted with escalating violence and a besieged governor. This situation was the result of an inherently flawed campaign design. The initial campaign plan had been imposed by political and military leaders in order to initiate a politically preferable mission in Helmand. This would allow the UK to maintain its standing as key ally of the United States, while cementing its international stature by engaging in benevolent interventions. While the British forces in Helmand acquitted themselves admirably against fierce resistance, their tactical achievements of repelling these attacks did little to dampen the violence. Indeed, over the first rotations the level of violence increased even further. The lack of a workable campaign plan meant that the successive rotations often reversed course from their predecessor and repeatedly had to engage in new clearance operations. Meanwhile, the Helmand PRT was hamstrung in its ability to promote governance and economic development.

To be sure, various informal and formal initiatives were started to address deficiencies, which were often identified during the concurrent operations in Iraq. However, these adaptations were generally not adopted uniformly throughout the army because of bureaucratic hurdles and the absence of a lessons learned process. This changed with Operation Entirety in 2009. As the British Army was put on a campaign footing, more attention and resources were given to a new lessons' exploitation process and force preparation. Consequently, initiatives were now adopted and incorporated within TFH and the supporting elements in the UK. Meaningful adaptations included the enhanced pre-deployment training, a new counterinsurgency doctrine by the Afghan COIN Centre, the Lessons Exploitation Centre, the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre, the various counter-IED measures and the Military Stabilisation Support Group.

However, the effects of these formally supported adaptations on the mission itself can be questioned. The arrival of more American troops in Helmand and the improved capability of Afghan security forces allowed the British to concentrate on Helmand's central population centers within a relatively improved security situation. As such, Operation Entirety had a more lasting effect on the inner workings of the British Army than on the mission itself.

This is not to criticize the expended efforts by British service members to improve their performance. Operation Entirety was necessary for the army to cope with the operational demands of the mission. Furthermore, TFH enhanced several crucial capabilities. Yet, the local dynamics and conflicts of Helmand proved to remain largely beyond the competency of the British Army to resolve.

At the end of the mission, the British Army endeavored to institutionalize enduring lessons from Helmand. It did so within the context of a changing strategic outlook where great power competition and conventional warfare had become more prominent. Furthermore, the army was faced with considerable financial constraints, leading to a 20% decrease in service members. Despite these strategic and budgetary aspects, the army institutionalized elements based on the evaluation of the Helmand campaign. It established a specialized formation for interagency cooperation and non-kinetic influence in the guise of 77 Brigade. Furthermore, increased attention was given to understanding the environment through intelligence that looks beyond threats. All these elements are now incorporated into a coherent body of doctrine, even at the interdepartmental level. A further important aspect that has been retained, albeit in a slimmed-down version, is the lessons learned process. Potentially, this can be scaled in case of a larger operation with similar characteristics.

However, these institutionalization efforts are marred by two fundamental issues. First, the conduct of the campaign at the operational and strategic levels has not been analyzed publicly by the army. This means that profound issues with campaign continuity and providing operational guidance from PJHQ have not been addressed. As a result, despite positive developments new campaigns can suffer from similar profound defects. Secondly, although the British army is still engaged in small-scale stabilization missions, the bulk of the force is preparing for high-intensity conflict. While this is understandable in itself, given the specific condition of the Helmand campaign and post-2014 priorities, it is hard to integrate elements such as interagency cooperation and non-kinetic effect in the prevailing training scenarios. This limits the familiarity of commanders with these capabilities necessary for operations. Moreover, combined with limited career prospects, this can lead to a lack of stature of such specialized units, which diminishes their capability.

Finally, the British Army has shown that it had the willingness to address institutional deficiencies at the tactical level, as evidenced through starting Operation Entirety. The effects of this were both profound and necessary. Entirety enabled a responsive learning process that changed the way TFH prepared, operated, and exploited its lessons. Still, the deficiencies at the strategic and operational level have been alluded to, but there is no indication that they have been remedied after Helmand. Perhaps the most enduring lesson from the Helmand campaign at the strategic level is that the British Army and its interagency partners do not consider the conduct of this mission as a template for future deployments.