

Between vigilance and reconstruction: Dutch military operations in Afghanistan

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Introduction

Dutch armed forces personnel are carrying out a difficult and complex task in tough circumstances in Afghanistan. In doing so, they have to find a balance between security for the population, on the one hand, and the development of governance and economy of the country, on the other; in other words, between vigilance and reconstruction.²

When these armed forces are deployed, they must be guaranteed effective, and therefore it is necessary that they are extremely well trained, well led, equipped with modern materiel and sufficiently financed. Although this seems obvious, it is not always the case, certainly not in a bureaucratic organisation such as the armed forces.

Therefore, the important question presents itself whether the Dutch units that have been deployed in Afghanistan are effective and efficient. In order to answer this question the reader should first have an insight into the manner in which the Netherlands carries out its military operations in Uruzgan. In this respect I will study the factors of influence, with special attention for doctrinal aspects, command and control, means, personnel and organisation.

The present chapter analyses and considers the Dutch operations in Uruzgan in order to assess their effectiveness and any possible consequences for the allocation of the resources. To do this, the following topics will be addressed: first of all, the current doctrine, secondly, the planning with the factors of influence,³ thirdly, the execution, illustrated by the battle for Chora, with specific attention to command and control and leadership in a high-threat environment. Then, some observations and reflections will be made on these aspects. Finally, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations made for the organisation of the armed forces. In this contribution the deployment of the land forces will be discussed primarily, but, wherever expedient, there will also be attention for the cooperation with the air forces.

Doctrine

Doctrine is the formal expression of military thought. The Royal Netherlands Army (KL) has issued a number of doctrine publications, such as the Army Doctrine Publication (LDP) IIC, which deals with combat operations against an irregular opponent and which consequently also gives guidance to the Dutch Land operation in Afghanistan, within the framework of providing stability and reconstruction.⁴

In a conceptual model the LDP IIC distinguishes five groups of actions in the principles of the operations against warring factions.⁵ The first group is directed against the warring factions themselves: 'find, fix and strike'. The second group provides the physical protection of the population against the influence of the factions. The third group focuses on preventing, restricting or cutting off external help to the factions; the fourth group focuses on the mental state of the population: the famed hearts and minds operations, directed at increasing the legitimacy, creating support for the own operation, and undermining the support for the factions. The fifth group, finally, focuses on providing security for own personnel, in order to maintain or establish freedom of action. Needless to say, these groups of actions will always be inter-related and will sometimes even converge.⁶

Compared to regular combat operations, the factors time and space are relatively less important in the operational framework for combat operations against factions than the means. *What* has to be achieved is more important than *where* and *when*. As for means, they are different to the strictly military ones, while, on the other hand, the military resources are also committed in a different way during the operations. With regard to the factor time, deep operations are mainly directed at creating the conditions for the long term (diplomatic and information operations; finding and fixing), while close and rear operations mainly take place in the present (strike, humanitarian ((emergency)) aid and maintaining freedom of action: protection, gaining and retaining political and public support).

From an analytical perspective four phases can be distinguished: securing an operating base; securing forward operating bases; securing the adjacent areas and, finally, consolidating the secured area.⁷

Once the operating base has been established, it must be determined with the help of the operational decision making process how the forward operating bases can be secured. In principle, the LDP IIC distinguishes two so-called forms of manoeuvre: the eccentric and the concentric method. In the former a relatively small area is captured in

the centre which expands from there to the outer edge of the area. This form of manoeuvre comes closest to what is often called in popular parlance 'ink stain strategy'.⁸ In the concentric method, however, first an outer ring is laid around the area to be secured, after which a central point is approached sector by sector by means of so-called blocking and reconnaissance operations. In both forms of manoeuvre the outer ring is established as a defence perimeter. In the concentric method this is done by establishing inward as well as outward facing strong points; in the eccentric method the defence is organised from less deep blocking positions. The choice between the two forms of manoeuvre depends on the factors of influence, but is mainly determined by the available means in relation to the area to be occupied. The (logistic) vulnerability, which is often the bane of the eccentric method, is a second criterion. Needless to say, also a combination of the two is imaginable. Subsequently, from the forward operating bases the adjacent areas are secured through offensive actions against the factions. Although there is a great need for reconnaissance and intelligence capacity throughout the entire operation, for these offensive actions, in particular, reconnaissance capacity next to infantry (whether or not reinforced with armour) is essential.⁹

When an area is secured, authority is transferred as soon as possible to the civilian authorities in the consolidation phase, with support from the armed forces present in the area. Subsequently, the operation is continued on the tactical level as an area security. In doing so, there is specific attention for stability enhancing aspects, such as route and object security by means of observation posts and patrols, maintaining a ready reserve, fighting factions, curbing crime, maintaining law and order, reconstructing and supporting public governance, giving humanitarian (emergency) help, restoring essential infrastructure, et cetera. The impression of this kind of operation is that of area security. In this situation the commander should not only be warned of various threats, so that he can adjust his plan accordingly, but the threats will actually have to be dealt with and removed. This requires flexible and ready units with sufficient protection and escalation dominance.

Planning and decision making

The objective and the desired end state of the operation in Afghanistan are determined at the political-strategic level. On this basis the higher commander draws up an integrated (combined-joint) operations plan, emphatically taking into account the local population in the area and representatives of other national and international authorities and organisations. When the *Afghan Transitional Authority* was installed in Kabul in late 2001 and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandated NATO to support

the Afghan government through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a deliberate choice was made for a small-scale operation around the relatively secure capital, involving some 4,500 troops. This was inspired mainly by concerns in Washington and the UN not to make the same mistakes the Soviet Union had made.¹⁰ In the meantime, this international force has grown to almost 50,000 troops, deployed all over Afghanistan, in an ISAF framework under command of NATO.¹¹

As was said above, in a counter-insurgency (COIN) campaign it is not only about the use of violence. The military capability should be part and parcel of a more comprehensive approach, which also encompasses political/managerial, diplomatic, economic and sociological factors. As the area of operations is rather unsafe, the number of persons that possess the necessary know-how on the non-military components is limited. However, the commander of Task Force Uruzgan (C-TFU) is expected to make a plan which incorporates all these factors of influence. This normally leads to a plan in which at least three lines of operations can be distinguished: Defence (security), Diplomacy (governance) and Development (economic and social development), also known as '3D'. In accordance with good military practice, these lines of operations are made concrete in a number of Decisive Points to be attained and their effects.

Soldaat and Broks describe the consequences of working with effects for the organisation of the higher staffs, such as Regional Command South (RC-(S)).

*'A feature of, in particular, civilian oriented effects, after all, is that it takes longer to attain them. Only by intermediate assessments is it possible to determine whether the intended effects have indeed been reached and whether the entire campaign is on track. This can best be done by a special cell inside a staff, whose sole task is to plan and guard the entire operation on a higher and more durable level. At RC-(S) this has led to a so-called 'effects cell', which incorporates planners and evaluators (Operational Analysts). They identify the effects and make suggestions for concrete actions, which are then executed by an operations section, which has a small planning capacity to re-adjust the current actions (a J-35), an element that coordinates the actual execution (a J-33) and a 'targeting cell', which does the traditional kinetic target acquisition. It is highly advisable to incorporate the perspectives of various civilian disciplines into the effects planning, in particular anthropologists, CIMIC personnel (civil-military cooperation), a political adviser, a development adviser, cultural adviser, possibly a former mayor and/or chief of police. In any case, they should be people who can fathom how the local society functions. (...) On top of that, incorporating a 'red cell', preferably manned by Afghans, is recommended. They play the role of the opponent as well as the population and through a 'perception check' can give advice as to whether the intended action will be seen as positive by the local population.'*¹²

This has consequences for the decision making and for the organisation and design of command posts, which is a subject under consideration.¹³

Assignment and sub-tasks

ISAF has a clear and sufficiently robust mandate. The starting points and main objectives for policy making are directed at security, good governance, rule of law and human rights, economic and social development and, finally, fighting the narco-trade.¹⁴ ISAF's task is to support the Afghan authorities in bringing about a secure and stable environment, conducive to state building and peace building. ISAF does this by contributing to the development of a credible Afghan security structure. The military strategic end state is that after the Security Sector Reform (SSR) Afghanistan has operational and therefore effective armed units capable of controlling any remaining threats to security. The operations go along the following lines: formation, training and education of Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, disarmament and disbandment of illegal factions, counter-narcotics and juridical reforms. To achieve this (as yet foreign) combat units are necessary, on the one hand, and 'reconstruction and development capacity', called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), on the other. From Kabul these PRTs were deployed consecutively in three phases: phase 1 to the north, in phase 2 to the west and in phase 3 to the south. The Netherlands offered to become lead nation with over 1,600 troops in Uruzgan in RC-(S), working together with Great Britain (about 7,800 troops), Australia (about 1,100 troops) and Canada (about 2,500 troops). In phase 4 PRTs will also be deployed in the east of Afghanistan.

A number of objectives is primarily relevant for the provincial level, such as the disbandment of all illegal factions,¹⁵ transparent, merit-based appointments, a functioning security and juridical system in all provinces and, finally, rural development for the benefit of 38,000 villages.¹⁶ The actions of the PRTs are directed at creating a secure environment and strengthening the authority of the central government. By taking away the deeper causes for regional and local instability, circumstances can be created in which reconstruction activities may have a chance.¹⁷ A starting point and pre-condition in this is the existence of a permissive environment. On this basis and in view of its tasking, a PRT is only lightly armed and therefore needs constant protection from infantry and other units in the Battle Group (BG), which of course are more heavily armed and better protected. CIMIC officials and mission teams perform several activities in support of the TFU tasks. Besides, it has been investigated how an initiative of reservists coming from the world of business, the International Development of Entrepreneurial Activities (IDEA), can support entrepreneurs in Uruzgan with know-how and advice.

The Netherlands also makes available a number of Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) to train and monitor the Afghan armed forces.

COIN is a substantial part of stability and reconstruction operations in Afghanistan. In COIN the opinion of the population is the centre of gravity, and information plays a crucial role in it. That is why Information Operations, with which COMISAF wants to influence the population and gain more support for the operation from more interest groups, is of such importance. Among the 'target groups' that can be distinguished, the opinion makers, who determine and shape the perception of the population the most, come first. In Afghanistan they are often the clan chiefs, religious leaders, relatives, teachers and physicians. The second group is the (inter)national and local media, followed by the (inter)national visitors, such as politicians, higher commanders and staff functionaries, members of international organisations and officials. Finally, there is the group of coalition partners with their own interests and way of operating, for which there should be some measure of understanding.

Time and space

Afghanistan, 6,000 kilometres away from the Netherlands, forms the land-locked strategic triangle with routes of approach between Persia/Iran in the west, Central Asia in the north and Pakistan and India in the east. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is identical to the historic 'Durand Line', is 2,400 kilometres long and cuts right through Pashtun territory.¹⁸ Measuring 1,800 by 850 kilometres, Afghanistan is 15 times bigger than the Netherlands and has between 27 and 29 million, mostly Islamic inhabitants. It has an arid, dusty continental climate with deserts and mountains up to more than 7,000 metres. The compartmentalisation is as follows: the northern plains with rich farming land and natural gas reserves, the central plateau with its narrow gorges, high mountain ridges and scattered farming land, and, finally, the southwestern plateaus with several major rivers and salt water swamps. The rugged terrain in combination with a poor system of roads and infrastructure interfere with mechanised operations and cause movements over land to be slow and vulnerable to actions of factions, or in NATO terms, Opposing Militant Forces (OMF). Aerial movement, therefore, is recommendable, although it is sometimes hampered by a lack of 'lift' caused by the mountainous terrain and difficult orientation. For this reason, movements are more often indicated in time rather than in distance.

Groups

ISAF, and consequently the Netherlands, is conducting a COIN operation in Afghanistan. Part of the population supports the Afghan government and the international community in Afghanistan, and it is pro-ISAF. The majority of the population is neutral and reserved, and it needs to be won over to ISAF through a hearts and minds campaign. But which enemy or Opposing Militant Forces (OMF) can be distinguished?

Soldaat and Broks identify two types of enemy: “hard-core fighters” and “day-fighters”.¹⁹ The resistance of the former, among whom must be reckoned the Taliban, the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin and Al Qaïda, against the current government and its allies is seated in a deep conviction.²⁰ They are welcoming the reinforcement by foreign factions. The day fighters are coerced or persuaded, by money, revenge or whatever reason, to join the hard-core fighters for a limited period of time. They are hangers-on, facilitating the hard core, and they can still, under certain conditions, be persuaded to lay down arms and to reintegrate. Those conditions can be tangible, such as money, work, and social security, but also other benefits, such as security, justice, power, apologies, the process of democratisation and the ideological conviction that UN and NATO are doing ‘a good job’. Soldaat and Broks put it that by winning over the population, the category of day-fighters will decrease, and that this is one of the reasons why the environment in which the hard-core fighters move becomes useless to them. This will separate these factions from the population and they can be attacked in various ways, not necessarily ‘kinetically’. Over the past few months relevant actors have been talking repeatedly about negotiating with the leaders of the (moderate) factions.

The OMF will also try to win the population over to them, and where this does not work, force the people to cooperate with them in their struggle against the ‘occupying force’. In doing so, they will resort to well-known guerrilla tactics, such as ambushes on logistic convoys, attacks with improvised explosive devices (IED), missile and mortar bombardments, suicide attacks, hostage taking of local officials, et cetera. The insurgents are hoping that ISAF will be tempted into using excessive violence, reprisals with collateral damage in which also innocent third parties will be hit. This will further alienate the population, and the group of day-fighters will grow. Moreover, this will also lower the support for the operation in Afghanistan from political parties and the population in the Netherlands.

As the factions need finances, but cannot dispose of them legally, there are strong ties between the insurgents and the world of crime, in Afghanistan mostly the narcotics industry, with which the Taliban is associated. According to Soldaat and Broks, it is

clear by now that opium is being smuggled out of the country via Pakistan, northern Tajikistan and Iran.²¹ This ensures a useful support from abroad, which will have to be cut off by the international community with the help of NATO.

Own means

At the moment of writing this article the Netherlands has sent out a total of 1,946 personnel in several missions, 1,677 of whom in the ISAF framework.²² The entire NATO mission is led from the Joint Forces Command Brunssum (JFCBS), which controls ISAF Headquarters (HQ) at Kabul. This, in turn, steers the Air Task Force and a number of Regional Commands, such as RC-(S) on Kandahar Airfield, which comprises 23,000 troops from 16 nationalities.²³ RC-(S) consists of four Task Forces (TFs): the British-Danish Task Force Helmand (TFH), the Canadian Task Force Kandahar (TFK), the American-Rumanian Task Force Zabul (TFZ) and the Dutch-Australian Task Force Uruzgan (TFU). TFU encompasses a staff, a BG, a PRT and an Australian Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force (MRTF).

Staff-TFU comprises approximately 90 personnel and cooperates closely with a so-called Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT). Apart from the BG, C-TFU also commands an engineer company, a psy-ops unit of 15 persons, a PRT of 114 troops, Base Command of around 180 people and, finally, the MRTF of about 440 people. According to Davids, et al., the support of the TFs is a national responsibility, while the support of the RC-(S) is a joint responsibility of the participating countries.²⁴ The Joint Support Detachment (100 persons) and the Logistic Support Detachment (LSD) (190 persons) provide in the national support.

The BG has a small staff, a reconnaissance platoon (Fennek) reinforced with Intelligence, Surveillance, Target acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR)-personnel and a total of three companies: an air-mobile, a motorised (Bushmaster and Patria) and a mechanised infantry company (Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle (AIFV)-25mm). The BG does not have tanks; fire support is provided by three Panzer howitzers (155 mm).

In conformity with the article-100 letter²⁵ the F-16s give air support to ISAF ground troops (and in emergencies to OEF ground troops). The Apache attack helicopters and the transport helicopters have been put in a multinational brigade pool for the south.²⁶ The F-16s as well as the Apache attack helicopters, therefore, are not exclusively earmarked for deployment in Uruzgan.

The plan of operations

The Netherlands wants to carry out an intensively integrated operation: military action, reconstruction and dialogue,²⁷ with the adage ‘reconstruction where possible, military action where necessary.’²⁸ To this end, as was said above, the Netherlands operates along three lines of operation (‘the 3 Ds’): one line of operation directed at stabilisation and security (Defence), another directed at governance (Diplomacy), and finally a line focused on (re)construction (Development). A hybrid model of governance and security, with tribal as well as ‘modern’ elements, seems to be the most effective model for progress in Uruzgan for the medium term (15 years).²⁹

The Parliamentary letter of 1 September 2006 states that the ISAF commander (COMISAF), after consultation with the Afghan government has drawn up a fine-tuning of the operations concept on the basis of the security situation which is in line with the ‘oil stain approach’ (also known as the ‘ink stain approach’, or Clear, Hold and Expand³⁰) already adopted by the Netherlands. In this concept the Afghan army, supported by ISAF troops in the south, will create areas within which security and stability can be maintained on a durable basis. Inside these areas, called Afghan Development Zones (ADZ), the emphasis will come to lie on strengthening the authority of the local and national government and support activities for the benefit of the population. By concentrating the efforts geographically and gradually expanding them, too large a spreading of resources is prevented and tangible improvements in governance and living circumstances for the population can be realised. Success will have a positive influence on the remoter areas.

Initially, operations in Uruzgan will take place in and around Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawod, which, incidentally, has been the Dutch intention from the start. Outside that zone, ISAF will occasionally, if necessary, act offensively against direct threats against the security and stability in the secure areas, as it did in Chora. Taliban operations in the outer areas must be harassed. Where possible, contacts must be established with the local authorities and projects started for the benefit of the local population (‘hearts and minds’). The Parliamentary letter also mentions explicitly that the “initiative will not be handed over to the Taliban”. For the smaller projects which are to create the conditions for reconstruction in the long run (so-called Quick and Visible Projects), the Minister for Overseas Development has made funds available.

In the remoter areas ISAF and OEF can carry out reconnaissance and security operations, complementary and mutually reinforcing, against the insurgents, where possible together with the Afghan armed forces. The condition attached to this is that all OEF operations must be coordinated, deconflicted and tested against the ISAF operation and

its objectives by the regional ISAF commander in Kandahar. Support of or from OEF units in security operations against insurgents will only take place in case of an emergency. The province of Uruzgan is the area of operations of the TFU and the security of Uruzgan has the highest priority. On request of the regional commander and after having received permission from the MoD, support can be given on an incidental basis in the other southern provinces. This characterises the close cooperation between the partners in the south.³¹

Execution

COIN is all about the minimum use of violence, which does not mean that in some cases the 'soft' way of operating has lost its effect, and that – needless to say, within the constraints of the Rules of Engagement (ROE) – a transition must be made to the use of violence in order to neutralise factions or to coerce them into cooperation. The BG has to create and maintain the secure environment within which the PRT can do its reconstruction work and support the Afghan authorities. If violence is needed, it must be used in a professional manner: finding, fixing and striking the opponent within (inter)nationally accepted doctrines, rules, values and norms. The defence of the village of Chora in April 2007 can serve as an example of a case involving substantial application of force. By means of the Chora case the execution of combat operations in Uruzgan will be described, analysed and considered to see if and what lessons can be learned from it. Let us go back to the situation of 2007.

Chora is a green strip with a number of small villages in the 5-kilometre wide Baluchi valley in Uruzgan at a distance of some 40 kilometres from the Dutch camp in Tarin Kowt, 40 degrees Centigrade in the shade, almost 70 in the sun. Near Chora a number of important east-west thoroughfares cross the north-south roads along which, among others, weapons, money and drugs are transported. Therefore, this area is of major importance for the Taliban.³² Although Chora is one of the five provincial district centres, it was the only one without any permanent ISAF military presence. Once every two weeks the PRT visited Chora for its projects in the environment (a bridge across the Komisan Rud River, a road to the bazaar and a telephone network). Since the beginning of the Uruzgan mission Chora has been a support point for the Dutch, who want the population to view them in a favourable light. As security, the PRT was escorted by elements of the BG. Whenever they visited, they would stay in the whitewashed governmental building of the district chief, called the White Compound by the ISAF personnel. We follow the account of Lieutenant-Colonel Rob Querido, commander of the BG.³³

During a patrol on 24 April 2007 the Dutch troops find that a large number of police officers are leaving their posts and that the civilian population, too, is on the point of fleeing. On investigation, it appears that OMF are threatening to attack the small town of Chora and that the police have too few weapons and ammunition. Although the Dutch quickly re-supply, the OMF attack the police posts of Kala Kala and Niazi in the west of the valley on 26 April, brutally killing a number of police officers. Niazi barely manages to hold out. The BG sends an airmobile infantry company (ACoy) as reinforcement and on 29 April the police station is recaptured by the Afghan National Police (ANP), supported by the Dutch troops. After this incident the Dutch decide to secure Chora against the OMF until the Afghan authorities are able to do this on their own. From that moment onwards the BG keeps a permanent presence there, with a command post in the White Compound. There are combat contacts on a daily basis and as a result the number of Dutch troops rises. At the time an average day has the following pattern. The morning starts with a hostile mortar shelling from the Baluchi valley, followed by an attack on foot. During the hot afternoon hours there is a 'break' and from 18:00 hrs onwards until sunset the attacks are resumed. This situation lasts until 15 June, and the Dutch and Afghan troops can handle it.

On 16 June the mortar fire on Kala Kala and Niazi in the west is fiercer than before, and the infantry company takes up positions facing to the west. It then appears that the OMF are also attacking the police posts around Sarab from the north-east, and subsequently continue the attack with infantry in the direction of Chora. One platoon concentrates on this approach, while Afghan National Army (ANA) troops, together with the Dutch OMLT secure the town centre. During the day the pressure is mounting on Chora and Lieutenant-Colonel Querido decides to have a platoon keep the supply lines open south of the district centre. In the west the OMF enter the valley with 500 men; in the east some 300 fighters are active and from the north 300 men are approaching. So, a total of 1,100 OMF fighters are attacking Chora from three directions. Refugees tell of the reprisals of the OMF against the relatives of the police officers and the coercion of eligible men to fight along with the OMF against the Dutch and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Refusal to do so means death. The commander of the infantry company asks for further directions: "How valuable is Chora to us, do we make a stand or do we withdraw?"³⁴

In Tarin Kowt this is the moment that the decision making process by C-BG and C-TFU, Colonel Hans van Griensven, begins. Soon it is decided to hold on to (defend) Chora and to attack the OMF. Collateral damage must be limited to a minimum, and the civilian population is advised in all possible ways to leave the combat zone. Air actions and artillery support are prepared. Task Force Viper (special forces) together with a

platoon of the BG carries out a secondary attack from the south in order to fix as many OMF fighters as possible. C-BG forms a reserve, amongst others, with his own reconnaissance platoon in order to lead them to Chora as soon as possible as a reinforcement of the infantry company there. The reserve takes to the road at 03:00 hrs and is directed against the easterly threat from Sarab. They meet with heavy resistance, but with the help of air support they manage to make slow progress east and eventually neutralise a large part of the OMF in the vicinity of Sarab. As they cannot reach the police posts and the cohesion with the western part of the BG is even more important at night than during the day, they withdraw to the west again when darkness comes. The threat from the west near Kala Kala and Niazi is neutralised by the infantry, supported from the air. The OMF are seen to establish reinforced positions in the green zone.

In Tarin Kowt that night (18 on 19 June) the battalion staff has worked out plans to recapture the police posts. On approval, Querido reorganises his units south of Chora. From Dehra Wod a mechanised platoon (AIFV, with 25-mm gun) moves through the Murchai pass in the direction of Tarin Kowt, while also the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) of Camp Holland is made available. Also, the platoon that has cooperated with TF Viper, moves to Chora, bringing the total assault force up to 11 platoons, reinforced with a reconnaissance platoon and TF Viper.³⁵ A Coy will attack along the northerly axis, while ANA and OMLT will operate in the centre through the green zone. B Coy will attack along the southerly route, and the reconnaissance unit, finally, will secure in easterly direction, while the militias led by the local powerbroker Rosi Kahn will relieve the police posts near Sarab. The rest of the night is used for decision making and rest. The situation makes a great demand on the professionalism and decisiveness of commanders on all levels.

At 10:00 hrs on 19 June the attack commences, preceded by loudspeaker vehicles of the Tactical Psyops Team urging OMF fighters to lay down their arms, and calling upon the local population to flee or seek shelter. Both Dutch companies mainly carry out their attack mounted, supported by 'snipers' and Forward Air Controllers for air support. Wherever necessary – for instance, in case of resistance from the qualas – the men operate dismounted, supported with the guns mounted on the vehicles. The most tenacious pockets of resistance are destroyed with the help of air support. The ANA operates dismounted in the green zone, as they are particularly adept at discovering and detecting OMF fighters who do not want to fight (any more), or try to abscond from the fighting. The execution of Lieutenant-Colonel Querido's plan of operations is successful: after about 8 hours the western part of the Baluchi valley is back in their hands and the ANA can recapture the police posts in Niazi and Kala Kala. Also in the east the reconnaissance platoon and Rosi Kahn's militia have the police posts around Sarab in their hands.

After consolidation the situation is only 'unquiet'. The population blame the violence on the OMF and are very grateful to the Dutch troops. That week the Dutch contingent lost Private Smeehuijzen in a suicide attack in another location, and Sergeant-Major Leunissen in the battle around Chora.³⁶

Observations, reflections and some conclusions

What can be said about the way in which the Netherlands carried out its military operations in Uruzgan?

The first observation concerns doctrine. With its motto, 'reconstruction where possible, fighting where necessary', the Netherlands has chosen for an emphasis on reconstruction operations, which, however, can only be carried out adequately in a secure and stable environment. The PRT mainly contributes to the reconstruction operations, while the BG is more concerned with security, and, together, they create more stability. The TFU has apparently chosen for the eccentric method, often called the 'ink (or oil) stain method'³⁷ From Tarin Kowt and Dah Rewod it is attempted to gain control over a steadily increasing area. The extent to which this is successful is a matter for debate. Thus, only recently the '(non)-embedded' journalist Peter ter Velde announced on radio and television that, "the population in Uruzgan does not feel safer".³⁸ Others, however, admit that the 'ink stains' on which the Netherlands has concentrated have certainly become safer; as examples may serve not only villages and small towns in general, and Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood in particular, but also several rural areas, such as the Baluchi valley. Chora has been put on the map after the battle of the BG, although in all this it must be realised that both reconstruction and the fight against the insurgents is often a matter of tenacity. Add to this the fact that the international community contributes in very diverse ways to an integral approach of the problems in Afghanistan, and it will be clear that also the challenges in Uruzgan will not necessarily be brought to an even better end within the planned duration of the Dutch mission.

According to a questionnaire of the German Marshall fund, two-thirds of the Europeans (64 per cent) support the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, and not more than one-third (30 per cent) are proponents of combat actions of their troops.³⁹ Etzioni writes in *NRC Handelsblad* that the economist Easterley has systematically disproved the idea that higher financial support can lower poverty, or modernise states that have run aground, pointing at the key role that bad governance and corruption plays in these kinds of debacles.⁴⁰ He remarks furthermore, "that a recent study of the *The Economist* showed that the development of Afghanistan goes so badly, especially as a result of

the widespread corruption, the nepotism and the tribal relations, the lack of a sense of responsibility and gross mismanagement”.

The answer to all this seems to be the emergence of a social middle class and the establishment of a good educational system. This is what the Dutch PRT concentrates on. How hard this is may be illustrated by the fact that many European countries, among them the Netherlands, find it very difficult to reform their own educational systems. This kind of cultures has come about after a centuries-long formation, they are deeply rooted and therefore can only be changed slowly and from within. Lending a helping hand in this process as an outsider requires a cautious tenacity over a longer period of time.’ It also needs the ‘carrot and stick’ approach, carefully coordinated between C-PRT, C-BG, C-MRTF and C-TFU. What matters in this, is the influencing of tribal areas of tension, for which much good and expert information is necessary. Specific expertise, for instance from cultural advisers, from the *Criminele Recherche Informatiedienst* – Criminal Research Information Service of the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (KMar), or from the *Korps Landelijke Politie Diensten* - National Police Services Corps (KLPD) is extremely welcome. Intelligence is an important factor in all this, allowing the C-PRT room to manoeuvre. Apart from that, five Police Mentoring Teams (PMTs) will be set up, manned by KMar and armed forces personnel, which will work together with the local police forces and support and train them in the daily routine. This happens alongside the OMLTs, which support the ANA during the daily execution of its task. In RC-(S) 205 ANA Corps is being established at the moment with one brigade per province. In the Dutch Area of Responsibility (AOR) some 700 ANA troops became operational and with success.

Nevertheless, it is to be expected that the reconstruction of Uruzgan will be slow and quite demanding for the people involved. Quick Visibility Projects may help to influence the hearts and minds of people, but they do not make a structural contribution to the reconstruction of Uruzgan. Still, these short-term results must be given priority over long-term effects. It is better to finish a small number of projects than start a large number. However, there will be a structural unbalance between needed and available means. In any case – also according to Enzioni – security prevails over democracy and reconstruction.⁴¹ This is first and foremost a responsibility of the Afghan authorities, supported by the international community. The Netherlands perhaps contributes to this in more than a modest way.

The second brief observation relates to command and control (decision making, command and leadership). Although for reasons of security it is not possible here to go into the operations plan in great depth and detail, it is certainly justified to say that, in

general, there is a clear and sufficiently robust mandate and task which lie at the basis of the above-mentioned lines of operations, constituting the integrated or comprehensive approach. The military way in which the combined-joint decision making at all levels led to adequate operations plans, can be called sound at least and leads to reasonable effects on the ground and in the air. A major problem, however, remains the interoperability of various (national) command and control systems. Especially in international headquarters such as RC-(S) this means much improvisation with USB sticks or the swivel chair, which makes it possible to use other national command and control systems (the so-called “swivel chair-interfaces”). The way in which the Dutch military personnel function can be called good and professional, and also the young and relatively inexperienced leaders function more than adequately in this complex and sometimes/often dangerous environment. The necessity for ad-hoc compositions of units to carry out a diversity of tasks, makes high demands on professionalism, creativity, stamina and the leadership qualities of commanders on all levels.

In particular, the increased requirement for and necessity of more ad-hoc horizontal and vertical coordination, however, is problematic. After all, an organic infantry platoon under command of a lieutenant, with an experienced NCO as his deputy, consists of four vehicles, with an almost standard reinforcement in Uruzgan of a tactical reconnaissance capacity, IED reconnaissance capacity, forward air controllers (FAC), helicopters, medical capacity, liaison officers, a mission team of the PRT, various specialists (cultural, developmental and/or political advisers) and interpreters. That this demands far more of young officers and NCOs, needs no arguing. After all, they have to (re) act in a drill-like fashion one moment, then quickly make well-considered choices in complex situations at the next, with danger to their own lives and that of others. Composing (non-organic) units, and educating, exercising and training personnel as early as possible can make a difference here. It is essential to also exercise on the level of joint arms and service, so, at the level of the team, battalion and brigade, as there is a real joint and combined element only on these levels. Besides, the training, education and forming of *thinking* officers who can handle the mission command in such a complex environment can make an essential contribution to this. For this a scientific education - at least for a considerable part of the officer corps - is not an extravagant luxury.

Third, there are the means assigned to execute the military contribution to the integrated effect. The BG units can be called ‘light’ in military terms: airmobile and motorised infantry and an armoured infantry company equipped with AIFV and 25-mm guns for its heaviest armament. Heavier weapon systems for direct fire do not make up part of this, while at the same time the (inter) national tendency of increasingly lighter armed units seems to be waning slowly but assuredly. After all, apart from its many advantages,

'light' harbours the characteristics of small tactical mobility and great vulnerability. The inherent protection against the effect of small-calibre arms and resilience against IEDs and man-portable anti-tank weapons, the great tactical mobility, the lower physical burden for the personnel, the accurate and potent sensors, the great fire power of heavy, armoured units – in short, escalation dominance and the ability to sustain an operation for a longer time – have demonstrated the existence of almost forgotten possibilities, even in peace operations.⁴² With this the deployed Dutch ISAF units will regain a round-the-clock (24/7) capability to relieve own combined troops, control an area, and act as a quick reaction force or transform from a peace keeping to a peace enforcing or combat operation. Our allies already have such capabilities, and on top of that, the psychological effect of heavy units with tanks on the opponent must not be underestimated.⁴³ For Uruzgan this means that if heavier weapons systems than the 25-mm gun of the AIFV are necessary, the support of the air forces or fire support from the 155-mm pantzer howitzer has to be called in immediately, and this might lead to more collateral damage than otherwise would be necessary.

A deployment of heavier units, such as tanks with excellent sensors and direct fire precision weapons for the long distance, should, in my view be considered seriously in peace support operations, and should not a priori be discarded as 'old thinking' or 'too provocative'. After all, for good reasons the Canadians have reconsidered their decision to disband their tank units and have deployed tanks in Kandahar in support of their infantry.⁴⁴ Due to their ability to operate around the clock in all weather conditions, their excellent sensors and the small numbers of men necessary to operate them, the deployment of this type of units may even be more efficient than the light, personnel heavy units supported by helicopters. At the same time having heavy means makes a force less dependent on other scarce resources, such as (combat) helicopters and fighter jets. An added advantage is that simultaneously the necessity for coordination between and within various levels is drastically reduced, which simplifies command and control considerably.

Fourth, a few words on the ANA, 58,000 men strong, 39,500 of whom are land forces, with 33,000 ready troops. According to the Minister of Defence, the readiness of the 4th ANA Brigade of the 205th ANA Army Corps in Uruzgan is steadily increasing.⁴⁵ The various elements of the Brigade, Brigade Headquarters in Tarin Kowt, the two infantry battalions, the combat support battalion and the logistics battalion, are monitored by the Dutch OMLTs. The 1st Infantry battalion is operational and is located in the western part of Uruzgan, whereas the 2nd Infantry battalion, located in eastern Uruzgan, is partially operational because of a lack of the operational use of vehicles. In general, the quality

of ANA troops can be called good, which cannot always be said of police units of the Afghan National Police (ANP) or the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP).

Fifth, military operations require personnel that have been educated well so as to be able to carry out their tasks also in non-routine situations. That is why it is necessary that the Netherlands continues to rely on officers - and, of course, NCOs – who do not ‘only’ apply the skills and drills, but who keep thinking. To this end, a significant number of officers must be educated at a higher, even scientific, level. On top of that, the personnel in leadership positions must be trained continuously in the framework of mission command on the level of combined arms, so the team, battalion as well as brigade, and preferably as often as possible in international context. On deployment, commanders must have the means necessary to operate in a broad violence spectrum, without having to depend a priori on others.

Six, in COIN the opinion of the population is the centre of gravity, and information plays a major role in this, which makes Information Operations an essential element of these operations. The target groups are the opinion makers, the (inter)national and local press, (inter)national visitors and, finally, coalition partners, with their own interests and related ways of operating. This must be appreciated, which is mainly achieved by giving good information and underlining this information by doing good deeds. Talks with the Taliban should not be rejected a priori, and at the same time negotiations must be entered from a position of strength. This means that escalation dominance and force protection will be required for a long time; after all, according to Jones, the average COIN campaign lasts 14 years.⁴⁶

Seven, as in any major organisation, in the armed forces concepts such as effectiveness and efficiency play a large role. After all, the armed forces have to fulfil an important mission and have to do this with the means provided by the political leadership in a manner as efficient as possible. The uniqueness of the armed forces lies in the monopoly on the threat of or actual application of large-scale violence. When they are deployed, the armed forces must be *guaranteed* effective and be able to sustain this for a longer period of time. This requires a broad range of means, and in the Netherlands, at any given moment, more means should be made available than would, strictly speaking, be necessary at that moment, in order to be able to live up to the ever-changing demands of an expeditionary mission. This makes the armed forces an inefficient organisation by definition, as it is only in this way that they are enabled to fulfil their tasks at the expense of acceptable losses of valuable personnel and materiel. Over the past few years the balance between guaranteed effectiveness and efficiency seems to have been disturbed somewhat and shifted unnoticed into the direction of efficiency. Signs of this are, for

example, the strong emphasis on the peace management and the ensuing far-from-critical and too simple comparison between Defence and the world of business, the large-scale reorganisations, civilian-oriented shared service centres and automated control systems and procedures. But also trendy concepts, such as Network Centric Warfare and Effect Based Approach to Operations give the impression that it can all still be more efficient, 'surgical' with less collateral damage and with fewer military and civilian casualties. The daily practice of deployed military units during recent 'peace' operations in Bosnia after Srebrenica, Kosovo, Iraq, the Congo, but certainly also Afghanistan seem to prove this to be a mistaken notion.

Finally, it can be concluded that Dutch units in Uruzgan are most of the time effective and carry out their task in an efficient manner. The way in which Dutch and Australian troops of the successive task forces, battle groups, et cetera, have executed such operations in Uruzgan shows professionalism in difficult circumstances and thus deserves respect for this fact alone. The fights around Chora, but also elsewhere in the daily patrols and the execution of the other tasks, demonstrate that Dutch servicemen and women, should the occasion arise, are prepared to fight in order to fulfil their mission.

Notes

1. Colonel P. (Peter) J.E.J. van den Aker MSc is an associate professor and PhD-candidate at the Military Operational Arts and Sciences section of the Netherlands Defence Academy.
2. In writing this chapter I mainly used open sources. Where not, the safety of own forces, allies and others in current operations have been most important and therefore have prevailed above academic or other forms of freedom.
3. Amongst others, decision making, mission, terrain, time and space, own forces, grouping and operation plan.
4. *Gevechtsoperaties tegen een irregulier optredende tegenstander*, Landmacht Doctrine Publicatie (LDP), part IIC (2003), Zwolle: Plantijn Casparie.
5. LDP IIC, pp. 528-529.
6. LDP IIC, p. 529.
7. LDP IIC, p. 596.
8. See: A.C. Tjepkema (2008), 'Lyautey en de inktvlek', *Militaire Spectator*, Vol. 177, No. 12, pp. 685-695.
9. Intelligence Surveillance Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR).
10. A. Shurke (2008), 'A Contradictory Mission? NATO from Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.15, No.2, April 2008, p. 214.

11. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) is a US national-led operation which is aimed at searching and destroying Al Qaida and Taliban. This has not been authorised by UNSC.
12. Soldaat, P.B., Broks, D.J. e.a. (2009), 'Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan', *Militaire Spectator*, Vol. 178, Nr. 5, pp. 252-266 and Nr. 6, pp. 340-349. Here p. 259.
13. D.M. Brongers (2008), 'Network Enabled Capabilities bij het grondoptreden', *Militaire Spectator*, Vol. 177, Nr. 11, 2008, pp. 622-631.
14. B.R. Bot, H.G.J. Kamp and A.M.A. van Ardenne- van der Hoeven, letter to Parliament of 13 January 2006, http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/parlement/kamerbrieven/2006/1/20060113_afghanistan...9-10-2008.
15. Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG).
16. Bot, Kamp and Van Ardenne, letter to Parliament of 13 January 2006 (see note 14).
17. Letter to Parliament, 7 May 2005. *Periodieke evaluatie ISAF 1 jan 2005 – 31 dec 2005*, p. 4.
18. After the war of 1893 the British-Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, and the Afghan ruler of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman, agreed upon the border between Afghanistan and India.
19. Soldaat and Broks (2009), p. 256. Also: S.G. Jones (2008), *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, RAND Counterinsurgency Study - volume 4, Santa Monica, Chapter 4, pp. 37-66.
20. Letter to Parliament, 3 June 2005, p. 11.
21. Soldaat and Broks (2009), p. 258.
22. State of affairs of October 1, 2008.
23. N. van Bommel, 'Mart de Kruif: slim, sociaal, stabiel en stront eigenwijs', *De Volkskrant*, 21 October 2008, p. 2.
24. Davids, K.C., R.J.M. Beeres and F.J.A. van Zitteren (2009), 'Marktplaats Kandahar. Sourcing in Afghanistan', *Militaire Spectator*, Vol. 178, Nr. 1, 2009, pp. 26-36.
25. Kamerstuk 27925, nr. 194.
26. Letter to Parliament of 18 April 2006, Kamerstuk 27925, nr. 213.
27. Letter to Parliament of 21 December 2006, p. 5.
28. Letter to Parliament of 30 November 2007, p. 4.
29. Letter to Parliament of 30 November 2007, p. 16.
30. Jones (2008), pp. 93-95.
31. Letter to Parliament of 1 September 2006, pp. 3-4.
32. Vrijzen, E., 'Het gevecht om Chora', *Elsevier*, 5 January 2008, p. 16.
33. Querido, R. (2007), 'De Slag om Chora', *Vereniging Infanterie Officieren*, September 2007, pp. 4-7.

34. Querido (2007), p. 5.
35. According to well informed sources, there was a need of 16 platoons, but Querido did not get them.
36. Querido (2007), p. 7.
37. Also: Soldaat and Broks (2009), pp. 265-266.
38. Peter ter Velde, *Radio 1 Journaal*, Saturday 18 October and *NOS Journaal* on Sunday 19 October 2008.
39. Etzioni, A. (2008), 'De gevaarlijke fantasieën rondom wederopbouw. Wederopbouw In Afghanistan en vergelijkbare landen zijn overambitieuze projecten gedoemd te mislukken', *NRC Handelsblad*, 2/3 August 2008, p. 6.
40. Ibidem. See also: *NRC Opinie & Debat*, 7 July 2007.
41. Etzioni, A., *NRC Opinie & Debat*, 16 July 2007.
42. See also the editorial of *Militaire Spectator* number 2, 2002: 'Escalatiëdominantie en Force protection', pp. 130-131.
43. Zucchini, D. (2004), *Thunderrun. The armored strike to capture Baghdad*, New York: Rove Press.
44. Cadieu, T. (2008), 'Canadian Armour in Afghanistan', *Vereniging Infanterie Officieren*, September 2008, pp. 4-9, and in the same issue *Van de Hoofdredacteur. Tanks. Essentieel onderdeel van de verbonden wapens*, pp. 10-11. See also: P. De Vries, 'Tanks. Dat heeft onze missie nodig. Minder onschuldige burgerslachtoffers en geen diffuse verantwoordelijkheden meer', *NRC Handelsblad*, 24 January 2008. See also: P. de Bock (2008), 'De inzet van de Leopard 2A6 in Uruzgan. De Key Enabler voor tactische Mobiliteit', *Infanterie*, Nr. 3, September 2008, pp. 12-17.
45. Letter to Parliament of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 20 June 2008 ('*Periodieke Stand van Zaken*'), p. 20.
46. Jones (2008), p. xii.