

Canada and the Netherlands in Afghanistan

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Introduction: Two Smaller Allies and a War Far Away

Before Afghanistan, it had been a long time since Canada or the Netherlands had been in a war that felt like one: half a century to be precise. To be sure, both countries had been through some tough peace enforcement experiences in the 1990s, especially in the Balkans, and both had nominally participated in the Gulf War in early 1991. While Canada had officially stayed out of the 2003 Iraq War, the Netherlands were politically members of the “coalition of the willing,” but contributed no armed forces to the invasion to depose Saddam Hussein. The real starting point of comparison to put into context the extent of both countries’ engagements in Afghanistan—the most important being 158 Canadian deaths and 24 Dutch deaths there—is the Korean War, 1950-1953. A 2010 report published by the Canadian Library of Parliament observed that “Afghanistan represents Canada’s largest military commitment since the Korean War, at a cost of over 150 lives and the largest investment that Canada has ever made in a developing country. Apart from the Canada-U.S. relationship, during the past nine years no foreign policy priority has been more dominant than Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan.”¹ A year later the distinguished Canadian military historians J.L. Granatstein and David J. Bercuson wrote that in fact, “The war in Afghanistan became Canada’s third largest military effort, passing the Korean campaign in numbers of troops deployed

¹Gerald J. Schmitz, “Canadian Policy Toward Afghanistan to 2011 and Beyond: Issues, Prospects, Options,” Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 2010, 36.

and length of commitment.”² In other words, only the engagements in the First and Second World Wars were greater. The Dutch military historian Christ Klep recorded that the Royal Netherlands Army itself emphasized the Korean comparisons to Afghanistan and quoted a newspaper interview with the colonel commanding the battle group during the battle of Chora, who said “Our last war heroes were the men who seized a hill in Korea. Now we have added more to their numbers.” Klep, for his part, observed that in fact, the Afghanistan engagement was the largest commitment of Dutch forces overseas since the country’s lost war of decolonization in the late 1940s which attempted to put down Indonesian independence.³

The Dutch and Canadian efforts in Afghanistan, in the wake of the US-led invasion of that country strongly resembled each other. Their involvement began with the naval support both lent the United States soon after the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 prompted the US to action, and continued through the peacekeeping style forces the two smaller allies sent into Afghanistan after the success of the invasion, although the Canadians also sent earlier (and at the time secretly) special forces. But the similarity is most striking with respect to the largest and eventually most controversial of their commitments, which were to the a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) backed up by a battle group in the neighbouring southern provinces of Kandahar and Uruzgan. These operations, which began within months of one another in 2005-2006, were part of the efforts of the NATO-led Regional Command South (RC-South) of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Both Canada and the Netherlands also took their turns commanding RC-South. Indeed, a Canadian, Brigadier-General David Fraser, was in command in 2006 as the Taliban began an offensive that was exceedingly dangerous for the allies, and especially for the Canadians in Kandahar. The other major participating countries in the south were the US and the United Kingdom. The Dutch-led Task Force Uruzgan (TFU), whose central elements were the PRT and the battle group, varied in size from 1400 to 1800 personnel, as well as an Australian engineering unit with its own infantry protection force that totaled 700 personnel. The official designation of the unit was 1 NLD/AUS Task

²J.L. Granatstein and David J. Bercuson (with Nancy Pearson Mackie), “Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan?” Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, October 2011, 2.

³Christ Klep, *Uruzgan: Nederlandse Militairen op Missie, 2005-2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), 186, 9.

Force Uruzgan. Those numbers do not include 250 Dutch forces deployed in Afghanistan parallel to TFU, most notably in a F-16 detachment; the special forces; or the augmentation personnel sent while the Netherlands led RC-S. The headquarters of the Canadian Task Force Kandahar (TFK) was also that of Canadian Joint Task Force Afghanistan (JTF-A). TFA included around 2500 personnel, some outside of Kandahar, while its central elements were, like its Dutch counterpart, also a PRT and a battle group.

As the casualty numbers indicate, both the Canadians and the Dutch met resistance from the Taliban (or “opposing military forces,” as they were called, not euphemistically, but out of recognition that some insurgents were not, or not always Taliban) and were regularly in combat with them, the Canadians having a much rougher time in Kandahar with the enemy than the Dutch faced in Uruzgan. In both countries the missions became increasingly controversial, with similar outcomes to the controversy. While the Canadian government was able to obtain the endorsement of the House of Commons to renew the mission in Kandahar twice, and the Dutch government received the equivalent approval of the *Tweede Kamer* (literally the “second chamber”—the Dutch House of Representatives) to renew the Uruzgan mission once, both governments subsequently terminated these engagements amidst declining public support and sharp parliamentary criticism. The Canadian and Dutch withdrawals were especially a disappointment to the new US administration of Barack Obama, which was focusing U.S. attention and efforts away from Iraq and towards a surge of forces in Afghanistan.

A detailed chronicle of the Dutch and Canadian commitments in the Afghanistan conflict can be found in the Timeline (pp. 00-00). The commitments fell into four phases.

First, beginning in autumn 2001 Canada and the Netherlands sought to support the US campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda with forces operating outside Afghanistan. Both Canadian and Dutch warships, as well as maritime and transport aircraft were deployed to the area of operations of U.S. Central Command, while the Dutch also took over some US anti-drug operations in the Caribbean, freeing up US assets. As the Taliban regime was falling, Canadian and Dutch forces were sent to Afghanistan itself in very limited numbers: the Canadians deployed forty special forces operatives on the ground in Afghanistan, and the Dutch operated two P3-C Orion aircraft, based in the United Arab Emirates, that undertook reconnaissance.

The second phase began early in 2002, when both countries joined various post-invasion stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. The Dutch sent a

reinforced company to the then exclusively-European ISAF in Kabul, later followed by F-16 aircraft for close air support and at first at first operating out of Kyrgyzstan. In 2003 the Netherlands joined Germany in leading ISAF Kabul. In early 2002, the Canadians, initially shut out of ISAF, deployed a battle group to the then relatively calm province of Kandahar. With the transformation of ISAF Kabul into a NATO-led operation in 2003, the Canadians took over command from the Germans and Dutch, and increased the size of the ground commitment. In 2004 the Dutch sent an Apache helicopter detachment to support ISAF Kabul and later in the year took the lead over a PRT in the quiescent northern province of Baghlan; in 2005 they sent a Special Forces Task Group of 250 forces to the still relatively calm province of Kandahar, and a larger task force of Marines to northern Afghanistan in support of national elections.

The third phase involved major commitments in Kandahar and Uruzgan. The Canadian task force began operations there in the summer of 2005 during the Liberal government of Prime Minister Paul Martin. While the House of Commons, at the urging of the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, approved renewals in 2006 and 2008, Harper announced in 2009 that the commitment would end in 2011, and he stuck to that pledge. The Dutch began operations in Uruzgan in 2006 after the centre-right government of Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, a Christian Democrat, obtained the permission of the *Tweede Kamer*; the next year it approved renewal until 2010. But in 2010 a centre-left government, also led by Balkenende, fell apart partially over the issue of whether to stay in Afghanistan, and the mission came to an end later that year.

The fourth phase is outside the scope of this study. In 2011 both Canada and the Netherlands began non-combat roles outside of southern Afghanistan focused on police training under NATO auspices. The Canadians were based in Kabul, and the Dutch in Kabul and Konduz.

Both Canada and the Netherlands were surprised to find themselves in combat in southern Afghanistan. Not for nothing did Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang entitle their widely-read study of the Canadian decision-making that led to Kandahar *The Unexpected War*.⁴ But just who has blamed whom for the surprise has not been quite the same in the two countries. In the Netherlands, the Balkenende government was inveighed against by the parliamentary opposition and other critics, largely on the grounds of

⁴Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007).

how it originally had presented the mission. As soon as it became evident that there would be combat fighting in the south, a furor broke out in the Netherlands over whether the Uruzgan mission in reality was a “reconstruction” or “combat” mission, with charges being hurled that the Balkenende government had misled the country into thinking it would be the former. The response by senior Dutch decision-makers, both civilian and military, to the accusations of soft-pedaling the mission was on the order of: but we did tell you that it would be rough! We just did not realize ourselves how rough it would get. In other words, for them, too, it was an unexpected war.

While such charges of being misled were not unknown in Canada, with some Canadians claiming that they had been led to believe that Kandahar was a peacekeeping mission, they were more muted than in the Netherlands where the ultimately tiresome “reconstruction or combat” discussion long remained at the heart of the national debate. Whether or not they liked what they found themselves doing in southern Afghanistan, the Canadians were much less interested than the Dutch in discussing whether they had been misled by their government into going there and how the mission should be described. This invites a comparison of what the two governments said about the impending missions in 2005 and 2006. Maybe Ottawa did a better job of preparing the public for what was to come in the south.

But the debate over whether the government had told the truth over Kandahar was less strident in Canada than the one in the Netherlands over Uruzgan partially because the potential political target of criticism was gone: by the time the mission that Martin had authorized in Kandahar was underway, he and his party were out of office, defeated in the January 2006 election. Martin himself had left politics to write his memoirs. This certainly does not mean that there has been no debate at all, over how Canada got into Kandahar. Martin has implied in his memoirs that he himself was misled, especially by the chief of the defence staff, General Rick Hillier, about what would be in store for Canada in Kandahar. He claims that he was pushed by Hillier into deploying there; *The Unexpected War* largely sides with Martin. Hillier disputes this, saying that he wanted to deploy to the more peaceable Kabul, where running the airport could be a Canadian project: “We could paint a huge maple leaf on the middle of the runway. That way it would be the first and last thing everyone saw when they came to Afghanistan.”⁵ Thus, according to Kim Richard Nossal of

⁵Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 343.

Queen's University there are "two accounts of that decision. On the one hand, Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang claim that ...[Hillier] pushed the Kandahar assignment on an unwilling Martin government in an effort to revitalize the Canadian Forces. On the other hand, Hillier claims in his memoirs that the Martin government had already decided on Kandahar and he himself had pressed Martin for a deployment to Kabul. Whose account is more accurate cannot be known at this point. However, what we do know is that Stein and Lang have very close ties to the Liberal Party, which has a deep interest in distancing itself from the costly Kandahar mission that it authorized when it was in government."⁶

Given that there are so many former decision makers in both Canada and the Netherlands emphasizing today how very surprised they were by how difficult the missions turned out to be, it is worth examining—to the limited extent possible today with the records still closed—what the Canadian and Dutch governments knew about the situation in southern Afghanistan in 2005, and how that affected the decisions that took them respectively into Kandahar and Uruzgan. This will be one of several points in this study looking at the interaction between the Dutch and Canadians: Dutch intelligence reporting over southern Afghanistan and discussions with Dutch officials played a role in the Martin government's deliberations. The Canadians worried in 2005 that the Dutch ultimately might not go to Uruzgan, calling into question the viability of the NATO efforts in southern Afghanistan, including Canadian operations in Kandahar that already were underway.

Yet even if Ottawa and The Hague did not realize exactly how rough it eventually would get, and whatever they told their publics at the time, it still stands out that at the outset they clearly understood they were signing their countries on for fairly robust missions that in southern Afghanistan would put them in the company of the Americans and the British, and not of the Italians, Germans, and French, NATO allies who limited their involvement in the Afghanistan conflict to unquestionably safer missions in unquestionably more tranquil regions. Why did Canada and the Netherlands, two smaller members of the alliance, take on such challenging missions unlike those other allies who opted to play it safer? The answer you will instantly hear in both countries—and it is often intended as a reproach—is: to make the Americans happy. The Dutch have a term for this: they call

⁶Kim Richard Nossal, "Making Sense of Afghanistan: The Domestic Politics of International Stabilization Missions in Australia and Canada," paper presented to the Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand, 5 July 2010.

it (often these days also with reproach) their “trans-Atlantic reflex.” It is sometimes said that Ottawa felt especially obliged to stay in Afghanistan in order to steady a relationship with Washington made rocky by the Canadian decisions not to support the Iraq war and not to participate directly in the continental missile defence system that the administration of George W. Bush had authorized. The Dutch government had no need to fix things with Washington, for it was in very good graces with the Bush administration, having supported the Iraq invasion and having fairly swiftly sent forces to the ground in Iraq to join in post-invasion stabilization operations. Yet it, too stayed in Afghanistan after 2003 and took on its heaviest role there in 2006.

Seeking to maintain good relations with Washington (whether or not they needed fixing) did indeed play a significant role in both the Canadian and Dutch decision-making over Afghanistan, including the heavy commitments in the south. Keeping the Americans happy still is not a very satisfying explanation by itself though, for two reasons. First, it just leads to another question: Why for these two smaller allies might being responsive to the Americans be more important than for other allies? Second, even at first glance there obviously is a lot more to the story of Canada and the Netherlands in Afghanistan than just kneejerk Dutch trans-Atlantic reflexes or Canadian continentalist ones. Other interests—and other reflexes—clearly also were at play. In his standard history of Dutch foreign policy, Duco Hellema finds the government’s support for the US-led war on terror, including its support for the war in Iraq and its involvement in the war in Afghanistan, to be a puzzle. “It is not so easy,” he writes, “to say why the Netherlands so resolutely fell in line with America’s militant approach and why it needed to stand ready to participate ‘up to the highest level of violence’ in operations far outside its borders led by Washington or NATO.” He goes on to say “There certainly appears to have been a mix of Dutch motivations ... that varied by government department.”⁷ Arif Lalani, the former Canadian ambassador in Afghanistan, turns to similar words when explaining his country’s involvement (and in rejecting the argument that it was done simply to placate Washington). Again there was a mix: “Canada’s decisions to move from Kandahar (its initial deployment in 2001) to Kabul and then back to Kandahar were based, I would argue, on a mix of bureaucratic, military, political and national security interests. The same is likely true for every other Canadian peacekeeping mission

⁷Duco Hellema, *Nederland in de Wereld: De Buitenlandse Politiek van Nederland* (Houten-Antwerpen: Spectrum, 2010), 420–21.

or military deployment.”⁸ How did the exact Dutch mix of motivations compare to the Canadian?

The robust roles in Kandahar and Uruzgan were intended to be a very particular form of engagement—not concentrated solely, or even mainly, on physically eliminating, driving off, or deterring enemy forces. In other words, and as the allied jargon in Afghanistan had it, “kinetic” or combat efforts were only to be part of the picture. Economic and social development was intended to be central, going hand in hand with security. The Canadian and Dutch militaries were not the only officials from their countries in Afghanistan; they were joined by diplomats and civilians from other government agencies, especially from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Netherlands Department of Development Cooperation. Including the neighbouring province of Helmand, where the British took the lead, there was to be in southern Afghanistan in 2005-2006 a full rolling out of the PRT model in which the military not only provided and enhanced security for the local population and development efforts, but at times joined directly in those development efforts itself. The Americans had first introduced PRTs in Afghanistan and then later in Iraq; the Dutch already had had an experience with the model in Baghlan. In fits and starts, the role of the Canadian and Dutch civilians in the two provinces increased, with in the end diplomats playing a prominent role in directing the efforts on the ground, the Canadians and the Dutch adopting somewhat different structures for a lead diplomat.

The terms used by the Canadians and the Dutch (and other allies) to describe what they were attempting with the PRTs varied, including “three block war,” “3D” (for defence, development, and diplomacy, the latter meaning in Afghanistan the encouragement and support of local good governance), “whole of government,” “comprehensive approach” and eventually encompassing counter-insurgency (COIN), a term that was initially avoided by the Dutch because it sounded too belligerent, but by the end of their deployments in Kandahar and Uruzgan largely embraced by the Canadians and the Dutch because of the conceptual and doctrinal clarity it, and the theory behind it, provided. “It is hard to keep up!” said the doyen of Canadian foreign policy scholars, Denis Stairs in 2006 about this

⁸Arif Lalani, “Canada and Afghanistan: Regaining the Muscle-Memory of Leadership,” in Fen Osler Hampson and Paul Heinbecker, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2009-2010: As Others See Us* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 203.

ever changing terminology.⁹ Several years later the Netherlands Advisory Council on International Affairs grumped in a report to the government that “it is doubtful whether the constant invention of new terms contributes to policy in this area, as it creates confusion and may even lead to irritation between the various actors.”¹⁰

Both the Dutch and the Canadians sought to apply in southern Afghanistan an “ink spot” or “oil stain” approach to expanding the area of security, development, and good governance, a notion originating in COIN theory. Within the ink spot, the key was, in the famous phrase, to “win the hearts and minds” of the local populace and turn them away from the insurgents. Klep makes the point that “The countries that, beginning in 2006, took the lead in southern Afghanistan created in a certain sense, their own laboratory situations: how well would their approach work?”¹¹ In retrospect, it is evident that it could not work very well. Neither the Canadians in Kandahar, nor the Dutch in Uruzgan, nor the rest of the NATO alliance in Afghanistan, including the Americans, had in 2006-2009 enough combat forces on the ground to undertake successful COIN operations against the unexpectedly resurgent Taliban operating from bases across the border in Pakistan. The corruption of the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai, and the slow development of the Afghan army and police, did not help. The Obama surge was intended to address this shortage of forces. But by the time that the surge was underway both the Dutch and the Canadians were ready to get out of the south, the esteem in which the new U.S. president was held in both countries notwithstanding.

Kandahar and Uruzgan were in that same certain sense adjoining laboratories allowing for comparisons between the more specific Dutch and Canadian approaches that combined development, defence and diplomacy. However, the comparison cannot be exact for an important reason: the tougher resistance the Canadians encountered from the Taliban in Kandahar than the Dutch did in Uruzgan not only cost them many more lives in combat, but also set back and limited their development work more. Kandahar is, as an American analyst, Carl Forsberg, has explained, “strategic

⁹Denis Stairs, “The Menace of General Ideas in the Making and Conduct of Canadian Foreign Policy,” O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture, 2006, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade; available at <http://www.international.gc.ca/odskelton/stairs.aspx?lang=eng>.

¹⁰Netherlands Advisory Council on International Affairs, report 64, “Crisis Management Operations in Fragile States: The Need for a Coherent Approach,” March 2009, 15.

¹¹Klep, *Uruzgan*, 192.

terrain because it is the heart of the Pashtun south, the birthplace of the Taliban movement, the former *de facto* capital of the Taliban government, and the home of President Karzai. Contesting Kandahar is important for the Taliban's attempts to appear a viable rival to the Afghan government."¹² This was made spectacularly and bleakly evident early on when Glyn Berry, the diplomat who was the first leading civilian on the Canadian PRT, was killed by the Taliban just as the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar was getting away. Not until the US forces surged into Kandahar starting in 2009 was the security situation brought under reasonable control and at that point the Canadians began to concentrate their development efforts in just a few districts of Kandahar province. The Dutch inkspot spread out sooner and somewhat wider across Uruzgan—although certainly not as broadly as had been expected at the beginning of the mission.

Still, independent of the security situation differences between the two provinces, it appears that the Canadians had more difficulty conceptualizing the mission and getting their government agencies, especially back in Ottawa, working together on 3D efforts in southern Afghanistan than the Dutch did. This appearance is worth exploring. After a caustic report by an independent panel (the "Manley report") the Harper government created a cabinet committee on Afghanistan and backed it in the cabinet office with a special secretariat headed by a senior official. These are the kind of steps that the Dutch never felt necessary. There were differences in military approaches, too. Among them, the Dutch insisted on bringing tactical air support of their own. The Canadians brought tanks, to the initial dismay of the Dutch, who saw them as too heavy-handed. It is worth noting here, though that this is not a study of the operational or tactical details of the Dutch and Canadian missions in Afghanistan. This is the spot to identify another matter that will not be examined in the following pages, namely the treatment by Afghan authorities of prisoners handed over to them by Canadian or Dutch forces. It can nonetheless be briefly noted here that while the fate of such prisoners was a matter of concern in both countries, dramatic leaks and accusations pushed the issue into the public arena much more in Canada than in the Netherlands.

This laboratory metaphor can be turned around, too. In another sense, both Canada and the Netherlands were themselves put into a laboratory situation, especially in southern Afghanistan, but also stretching back to

¹²Carl Forsberg, "Counterinsurgency in Kandahar: Evaluating the 2010 Hamkari Campaign," *Afghanistan Report* 7, Washington: Institute for the Study of War, December 2010, 6.

the beginning of their security engagements in that country, in which it is possible to compare how their politicians, armed forces, civilian government agencies, and publics reacted. That certainly applies to the decisions taken in Ottawa and The Hague eventually to end the Kandahar and Uruzgan missions, and thus to walk away from combat roles in Afghanistan even while the war still underway, and despite entreaties from the Obama administration to stay. It was not the combat deaths that eventually drove the decline in public support in both countries. This was contrary to the initial expectations or apprehensions of many, among them General Hillier, who wrote in his memoirs that, “If anybody had told me that we were going into intense combat operations, sustain casualties of over 100 soldiers killed and about 400 wounded and suffer all these losses within three years and that Canadians would still support the mission, I would not have believed it.”¹³ Hillier apparently shared the view that democracies could no longer accept the loss of its soldiers in combat, especially when confronted with them by the modern media. This might especially be the case with two countries that had not been at war for a half century and that tended not to think of themselves as warfighters any more. The Canadians had gone further than the Dutch and had embraced the notion of themselves as peacekeepers as part of the national identity, although the Dutch for their part recently have developed a national myth, that at first only grew stronger in Afghanistan, according to which they had developed a softer, more culturally sensitive, and ultimately more effective form of peace support or counterinsurgency called the “Dutch approach.” It can be added that outsiders, such as the Americans and the British, did not think of either the Dutch or Canadians as warfighters either, and were thus sometimes surprised to find them in a robust role in Afghanistan. Reportedly, some American officers in Afghanistan were initially skeptical of the willingness of the Dutch, and also, although somewhat less, of the Canadians to fight—until they did.

As the Dutch scholar, J.S. van der Meulen acidly wrote in 2009, “The notion that ‘nowadays’ the death of soldiers is much less acceptable, or is accepted quite differently has managed somehow to work its way into how we see our own society. The media is quite seized with the idea, and the tossing around of body bags --I am intentionally saying this disrespectfully—belongs to the fixed repertoire of journalism.”¹⁴ In the past several

¹³Hillier, *Soldier First*, 429.

¹⁴J.S. van der Meulen, “Stemmen over Afghanistan en de risico’s van het vak,” *Militaire Spectator* 178:3 (2009), 142.

years, students of public opinion in both Canada and the Netherlands (and other countries, for that matter) have demolished the notion that combat deaths drove declining support for the Afghanistan missions, having made this topic a sort of fixed repertoire of their own. This still leaves the question, however: if not the combat deaths, why the weak support, and why the pullouts? A look at the politics of withdrawal in Ottawa and The Hague is in order.

In one narrower sense, those pullouts were easy to engineer. The two governments let everyone know that they were not going to renew commitments that always came with a deadline. The Harper government did this far in advance. When the clock ran out, the troops came home, the two countries having met their formal commitments. That's a funny way to have fought a war, though, even an unexpected one. It opened both Ottawa and The Hague to the kind of reproach made by Paul Heinbecker, a former Canadian diplomat whose career had culminated as ambassador to the UN. "Responsible countries do not set arbitrary deadlines that are unrelated to the situation on the ground," he wrote. "Setting a deadline for departure, without regard to the circumstances prevailing on the ground when the time arrives to leave is not serious policy making."¹⁵ The acerbic Dutch historian and newspaper columnist Thomas von der Dunk made the same point, but pushed it much further. When the Dutch parliament approved the two-year renewal of the Uruzgan mission in 2008, von der Dunk noted that "Making war just a little bit just won't work." If the government really believed in the struggle in Afghanistan and its importance for international security, it would bring back conscription and send over many more troops. Moreover, those troops "would not stay for two years, but for twenty, without frequent rotations of forces back home... If western soldiers are not ready largely to live as a new kind of Lawrence of Arabia giving up western style security and luxury because back home wife, kids, and soccer club are impatiently waiting for them, they will, unlike the Taliban, be just visiting."¹⁶

This brings us back once again to what the Canadian and Dutch governments were trying to achieve by going to Kandahar and Uruzgan, not just initially, after which they unexpectedly found themselves at war, but also when they renewed their commitments, always with those deadlines and

¹⁵Paul Heinbecker, *Getting Back in the Game: A Foreign Policy Playbook for Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011), 208.

¹⁶Thomas von der Dunk, "Nederland in Uruzgan: een betrekkelijke tijdelijkheid," *Internationale Spectator*, 63:3 (March 2008), 166.

other limitations. That may be no way to win a war, but it may have been enough to achieve other foreign policy goals. Responsible governments need to keep an eye on those, too. After all, the motivations for the various Canadian and Dutch deployments in Afghanistan were mixed.

And finally it raises the questions of what lessons Canada and the Netherlands will learn from their decade in Afghanistan. Was Afghanistan the laboratory where the two countries developed peacekeeping and COIN approaches that they could again apply and will want to do so? Will they retain the capacity to do so—not just in combat forces, but also in institutional memories and structures, including those involving the other government agencies that are essential to a comprehensive approach? Or is the real lesson of southern Afghanistan that COIN is just too hard to do and it is better not to even try? More generally, does the experience leave them more likely or less likely to once again use force abroad as part of a multinational operation? Joeri Boom, a journalist who spent time in Afghanistan, some of it embedded with Dutch forces, concluded in his widely-read book that “The mission in Uruzgan has ended, but undoubtedly will be followed by other operations in which Dutch soldiers are deployed on combat missions.”¹⁷ That could be true, too for the Canadian Armed Forces after Kandahar, although Douglas Bland of Queen’s University argued in 2008 that Afghanistan would be “Canada’s last war,” adding that “No government will again commit Canada to any mission even *suggestive* of the situation previous governments committed themselves to in Afghanistan.”¹⁸

¹⁷Joeri Boom, *Als een Nacht met Duizend Sterren: Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Podium/BKB, 2010), 316.

¹⁸Douglas Bland, “The Afghan mission has taught our politicians a lesson,” *Globe and Mail*, 27 November 2008.

Canada and the Netherlands: Players, Allies, and Peacekeepers

On 11 September 2001 Jaap de Hoop Scheffer was leader of the opposition Christian Democrats (CDA) in the *Tweede Kamer*, the Dutch House of Representatives. After a stint as foreign minister in the first and second Balkenende governments, he would become NATO's third Dutch secretary-general in 2004, a solid indication of the Netherlands' place in the western alliance. When he appeared on television to comment on the events that had occurred earlier on that terrible day, he said, "I think that the world will no longer be the same."¹⁹ But, in reality, the world was not changed enough by the 9/11 attacks to knock either his country, or Canada, off the fundamentals of the international security policies that they had begun pursuing during the Cold War (if not earlier,) and had been continuing to pursue in the decade since the Cold War's end. Those policies showed three striking similarities. First, both the Netherlands and Canada sought, often quite self-consciously, to be active players in world affairs. Second, both had strong trans-Atlantic orientations that were in some ways mirror-images of each other. Finally, both had become, after initial doubts and despite recent setbacks, increasingly committed to participating in more sophisticated international peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, relying on their expeditionary armed forces.

Canadians will find instantly recognizable the ways the Dutch describe their international urges and what those urges lead to. For example, they regularly talk about "trying to punch above our weight." Jan Rood calls

¹⁹Quoted in J. Eijssvogel, "Nederland in de wereld na 9/11," *Militaire Spectator* 180:9 (2011), 377.

the Netherlands “a country which, to say the least, pursues an ambitious foreign policy.”²⁰ Or as a government-sponsored research council has put it, the Netherlands has “a deeply rooted need to play a robust role...we take a seat at every table and we participate everywhere.”²¹ That could just as easily be Canada.

It is hard to pin down where these sorts of urges come from. Maybe it is because both the Netherlands and Canada see themselves as long having been part of something bigger. The Netherlands was literally once something grander, namely a great maritime and commercial power in the seventeenth century, and a colonial power well into the twentieth. Canada was part of the French and British empires and matured while nestled in John Bartlet Brebner’s “North Atlantic Triangle,” constantly being influenced by, seeing itself in relationship to, and measuring itself up against both Britain and the US. The Netherlands did not give up its empire voluntarily and the North Atlantic Triangle just about disappeared on Canada. Even after the Dutch had been forced out of Indonesia by its independence movement and at the insistence of the United States, they hung on to the colonial remnants in the form of Netherlands New Guinea which, “remained until the beginning of the 1960s something to cling to for those who would not let go of the idea of the Netherlands as a state with global interests.”²² For its part, J.L. Granatstein has argued that Canada was forced into the arms of its good friend and partner the United States by Britain’s weakness.²³

Making the link between past status and the more modern Dutch and Canadian itch to be involved just about everywhere possible is the tricky part. It is hard to imagine that anyone in Ottawa or The Hague would ever invoke the imperial or colonial past to argue for present policies; if that past has influence it is at a much deeper level in the habits, mindsets, traditions or the culture. Perhaps the Netherlands and Canada have acquired a self-image from that past that propels them into action. Perhaps.

²⁰Jan Rood, “Nederlandse buitenlandse beleid in de spiegel van de toekomst,” *Internationale Spectator*, 8.

²¹Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Aan het Buitenland Gehecht: Over Verankering and Strategie van Nederlands Buitenlandbeleid* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2010), 10, 37.

²²Bart Tromp, “Van afscheid van de neutraliteit tot postmoderne identiteitscrisis,” *Internationale Spectator* 60:11 (November 2006), 590.

²³J.L. Granatstein, *How Britain’s Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States: A Melodrama in Three Acts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

Another explanation for Dutch and Canadian international activism is simply that they have to. The Dutch also like to talk about whether they are the largest of the small powers or the smallest of the large powers. While their populations are small, the Dutch with 16 million, the Canadians with twice that figure, their economies are not: the Netherlands stands at 17th in world GDP rankings, Canada at 11th. Yet they are still small enough to be pushed around by other countries, in ways that negatively affect their interests. This includes their economic interests, if only because of their heavy dependence on foreign trade and international capital flows. While both countries have maintained respectable militaries, neither could defend its territory by itself against a determined larger adversary. So they have had to scramble. This suggests that like Canada, the Netherlands is a middle power—to use the term once fashionable to describe Canada but then all but abandoned, probably because of overuse, inexactitude, and then gentle ridicule when John W. Holmes called Canada a “middle aged power.”²⁴ Joris Voorhoeve, a scholar turned politician, including service as defence minister, added just a dose of faint ridicule of his own when in 1995 he called the Netherlands a “pocket-sized middle power.”²⁵ That was a step down from how he had described his country some fifteen years earlier. “The Netherlands,” he had written in 1979, “geographically one of the smallest states, pursues a world-wide foreign policy as if it were a miniature Super Power.”²⁶

Whatever the sources of modern Dutch and Canadian international activism or, to use that now unfashionable term just one more time, middle-powermanship, it is clear when it fully emerged, namely the mid- to late 1940s, that is, during the end of and just after the Second World War. Both countries needed not only to respond to the larger changes in the international environment, especially the threat from the Soviet Union and Europe’s parlous economic condition, but also to rethink their own status. As a result, it can be said that, in a sense, both stepped out anew after the war into the world. Neutrality, the centerpiece of Dutch security policy in Europe since the founding of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1813-1815, had not protected it against the Germans in May 1940. Two hundred thousand

²⁴John W. Holmes. *Canada: A Middle-Aged Power* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

²⁵J.J.C. Voorhoeve, “Nederland: Een Middelgrote Mogenheid in Zakformaat,” *Internationale Spectator* 44:2 (1991): 54–61.

²⁶J.J.C. Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles: A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 3.

had died and much of the Dutch economy had been wrecked. The Dutch government, after initial hesitation, was ready for a new approach, all the more so when the empire in the East Indies was lost shortly after the war's end. Unlike the ruined countries of Europe and Asia, Canada had emerged from the war with its economy not only intact but strengthened, and in good part reoriented towards the US. Although it had made a substantial commitment to the allied war effort it had largely been ignored by the bigger allies. It was ready to make its voice heard and functionally try to throw some of its weight around internationally. Both countries threw themselves into international diplomacy and were largely satisfied with their efforts and the results. Rood also writes that from the point of view of the active exercise of Dutch foreign policy the first two decades of the Cold War were "golden years."²⁷ For similarly reasons Canadians have long referred to the early Cold War as the "golden age" of Canadian foreign policy.

This is not the place to trace the history of Canadian and Dutch international activism in the Cold War. Some of it will appear below in the discussions of NATO and international peacekeeping. Nor is the place to enter the debates over the meaning or appropriateness of the Canadian and Dutch moralizing that sometimes has gone hand in hand with such activism—usually to the irritation of Americans. Former US secretary of state Dean Acheson famously wrote that "Canadians feel about their moral superiority as the authors of the American Declaration of Independence did... 'We hold these truths to be self-evident!'" In world affairs Canada saw itself, as Acheson put it (quoting Wordsworth) the "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God."²⁸ A country could be called worse things. Acheson's successors had ample opportunity to mutter similar imprecations, if not worse things, about the Dutch, especially when they were in full *gidsland* mode. The word means "mentor state," and, as Joost Herman explains, has been reflected in a "Dutch drive to set moral standards in international relations and to guide other countries in the proper direction."²⁹

After the Cold War, that activist urge certainly did not disappear in either the Netherlands or Canada. In the Dutch case, according to Yvonne

²⁷Rood, 9.

²⁸Dean Acheson, "Canada: Stern Daughter of the Voice of God," in Livingston Merchant, ed., *Neighbors Taken for Granted: Canada and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 134.

²⁹Joost Herman, "The Dutch Drive for Humanitarianism: Inner Origins and Development of the *Gidsland* Tradition and its External Effects," *International Journal* 61:4 (Autumn 2006), 860.

Kleistra, “this need apparently became so firmly anchored that after 1989 it also remained an important underlying motivation for Dutch decision-making concerning new global issues.”³⁰ The moralizing side to the Dutch approach did not disappear, either. According to Herman, “one can say that this process reached its peak in the 1990s in several changes in the Dutch constitution, the last of which resulted in two articles outlining the Dutch drive for law, order, and humanism in international relations.”³¹

Canada too was on a roll of sorts at the end of the 1990s. “Indeed,” wrote Fen Osler Hampson and Dean F. Oliver, two scholars at Carleton University in 1998, “at the dawn of a new millennium, Canada is once again a significant player on the world stage whose voice is heard on a wide range of international issues. Not since the so-called ‘golden age’ in the 1950s have Canadians appeared so self-conscious of their global role or so assertively or overtly ‘internationalist.’” The credit went in large part to the energetic Lloyd Axworthy, who was foreign minister from 1996 to 2000. Axworthy argued that Canada was in a good position to employ “soft power” to lead international coalitions in pursuit of a global “human security agenda” that placed the protection of individuals above the interests and sovereignty of states. It dovetailed nicely with, and supported, the post-Cold War thawing and revival of the United Nations. Axworthy’s greatest concrete achievement was shepherding into existence through an “Ottawa process” a global ban on anti-personnel land mines in the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction. He also threw Canada firmly behind the proposal to establish an International Criminal Court, a project very close to the heart of the Dutch government, which eventually saw the tribunal established in The Hague. Hampson and Oliver found some things to praise in Axworthy’s approach, although on balance they were critical, especially of his reliance on what they called “pulpit diplomacy”—the kind of Canadian approach that once so irritated Acheson.³²

Another Canadian approach that also bugged Acheson was how Ottawa persistently tried to make the North Atlantic Treaty area into something

³⁰Yvonne Kleistra, “Nederlands buitenlandbeleid als een donut,” in Duco Jellema, Mathieu Segers, and Jan Rood, eds., *Bezinning op het Buitenland: Het Nederlands Beleid in een Onzekere Wereld* (Den Haag: Nederland Instituut voor Buitenlandse Betrekkingen “Clingendael,” 2011), 139–40.

³¹Herman, “Dutch Drive for Humanitarianism,” 860.

³²Fen Osler Hampson and Dean F. Oliver, “Pulpit Diplomacy: A Critical Assessment of the Axworthy Doctrine,” *International Journal* 53:3 (Summer 1998), 379–406.

more than just a military alliance. Both Ottawa and The Hague subscribed to NATO's fundamental tasks at its establishment, famously summarized by its first secretary general, Lord Ismay as "keeping the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down." But they had other interests to pursue as well. Canada and the Netherlands often have been described as having been both pulled and pushed into their dependence on NATO. The pull, so it is said, comes once again from the loss of status. It has become commonplace in Canada to suggest that Ottawa's trans-Atlanticism can be seen as an attempt to recreate the old North Atlantic Triangle in which Canada nestled so relatively comfortably, with Europe, especially NATO Europe taking the place of the faded Britain.

Voorhoeve also sees historic continuity in the Dutch attachment to NATO; in his view, it is driven by the old, westward oriented, maritime and anti-continental tradition in the Netherlands that often has been at odds with the landwards one. He points out, as well that in the long period of neutrality, 1814-1940, the underlying assumption was that the British would act as the ultimate guarantor of Dutch security. Viewed in that light, the Dutch simply replaced a tacit alliance with the British by an open one with the Americans.³³ The Dutch also talk about finding "compensation" in NATO. For example, it has been said that J.M.A.H Luns, longstanding foreign minister and NATO's second Dutch secretary general, saw the alliance as "primarily a defensive league of sea powers and, as such, an ideal form of compensation for the traditional overseas role of the Netherlands..."³⁴

The push comes from the neighbours—the US in the Canadian case and the French and Germans in the Dutch case. While the Canadians may see the Americans as their best friends, they still do not want to spend all their time with them. In the Dutch case, the pressures from France and Germany makes it is more complicated. But the Dutch and Canadians alike use the term "counterweight" to describe what they are trying to find in the North Atlantic arrangements to offset the inconveniences of their immediate geographic neighborhoods on their respective continents. For the Dutch it is the United States that is the counterweight and NATO the instrument through which its involvement in European political-military affairs can be guaranteed. For the Canadians the trans-Atlantic counterweight is not quite so clear; sometimes it is Europe, sometimes NATO Europe and sometimes

³³Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles: A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy*, 3–12, 102.

³⁴A.E. Pijpers, "Dekolonisatie, Compensatiedrang en de Normalisering van de Nederlandse Buitenlandse Politiek," *Internationale Spectator* 45:2 (February 1991), 65.

even the alliance itself. Holmes provides a classic formulation of this in political terms: “Canadians also saw NATO as a counterweight. . . It would give Canada a multilateral forum, in which, by combining with other lesser powers . . . it could make its weight be felt and so be relieved, at last psychologically, of the inhibitions of life with one gigantic neighbour.”³⁵

Canada’s heyday in NATO came in the early days of the alliance. After playing a major role in the negotiating of the North Atlantic Treaty, Canadians provided the alliance with a significant portion of its forces in the 1950s, especially its air forces in Europe. The idea of linking the nations of the North Atlantic region in a security pact against the Soviets seems to have arisen in many capitals simultaneously in the mid-1940s. Some Canadians, pointing to a 1947 speech to the UN General Assembly by Canada’s foreign minister, Louis St. Laurent, and the subsequent diplomatic activity by the likes of Lester B. Pearson and Escott Reid, have gone so far as to claim that the alliance was principally a Canadian idea. That was pushing it a bit. As Holmes later wrote in his chronicle of Canadian foreign policy, “The extent to which these articulate Canadians were parents of NATO has perhaps been exaggerated in Canadian accounts and underestimated in the accounts of others.”³⁶ In the historical sweepstakes over who thought of NATO first the Dutch have their own very strong candidate in E.N. van Kleffens, the foreign minister in the government-in-exile in London, who began calling for a postwar Atlantic alliance even before the Second World War was over. It is no exaggeration to say that it was the Canadians more than anyone else who sought to transform the alliance into something more than just a defence pact. Pearson, at the time Canada’s foreign minister, called for an alliance that would “rally the spiritual as well as the military and economic resources of Western Christendom against Soviet totalitarianism.”³⁷ To the sometime irritation of the Americans and the British, who thought they were in the process of negotiating just a security pact, the Canadians persisted until there was agreement to put into the North Atlantic Treaty an article, numbered two but soon called the “Canadian” article, that vaguely called for political, economic and social cooperation among the signatories. The Canadians tried a couple of times in the 1950s to breathe economic life into

³⁵Holmes. *Canada: A Middle-Aged Power*, 128.

³⁶John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 105.

³⁷Quoted in Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 65.

the article, but to no avail. This broad Canadian approach to North Atlantic cooperation was compatible with the interests of the Dutch who, with the loss of their Indonesian colony, were busy reorienting their economy towards the North Atlantic region. It is not evident how much support, if any, they provided the Canadians for their article two efforts. The Canadians became particularly keen on finding an economic counterweight in Europe as their trade dependence on the US increased; to this end they negotiated a “contractual link” with the European Community in 1976. It did not deliver much and Canada went on to negotiate and sign a free trade agreement with the US.

The Dutch North Atlantic heyday came somewhat later—not until the 1960s. The Netherlands was at its peak, able to punch above its weight in the trans-Atlantic world, for within Europe the role of West Germany was still limited, European integration along with the French-German axis within it was still crystalizing, and Britain was still on the outside. With Luns at the helm, the Dutch threw that weight fully behind maintaining the unity of NATO under American leadership, earning for themselves the cliché that they still often use to describe themselves: “the loyal ally.”

With the end of the Cold War, Ismay’s rationale for NATO unraveled. The Americans were no longer needed to keep the Russians out, and the job of keeping the Germans down was partially no longer necessary, partially abandoned, and partially handed off to the European Union. Well before then Canada’s role in NATO had come under question. Canada had never found the economic counterweight it was looking for, European integration was threatening to turn the North Atlantic into a “dumbbell alliance” between the old continent and the United States squeezing Canada out, and the Canadian military had been reduced to a presence in Germany that was barely above the symbolic. The titles of John Holmes’s writing on NATO provides a good reflection of Canadian thinking at the time: “The dumbbell won’t do” and “Odd man out in the Atlantic Community.”³⁸ When the Canadian government first decided in 1992 to reduce the Canadian military presence in Germany to the intentionally symbolic level of 1000 personnel, and then decided a year later not even to bother with the symbol and to pull the troops out entirely, it looked like Canada’s active role in NATO might have been played out.

³⁸ John W. Holmes, “The Dumbbell Won’t Do,” *Foreign Policy* 50 (Spring 1983), 3–22; “Odd Man Out in the Atlantic Community,” in *Canada: A Middle-Aged Power*, 129.

Instead, Canada rediscovered the value of NATO. David Haglund was among the first scholars to point out what had been occurring. For Canada, he wrote, the alliance was turning into “the NATO of its dreams” or even “the best of all possible NATOs.”³⁹ The costs for Canada were lower, now that the army and air force were out of Germany. In Brussels, Canada—ever the player in international affairs—had a seat at the institution that, expectations to the contrary, the earlier bets having been placed on the Conference (later the Organization) for Security Cooperation in Europe, had turned into the premier security forum in Europe, as it took in former members of the Warsaw Pact like Poland, and tried to establish a cooperative relationship with Russia.

Beginning in 1992 NATO took on new responsibilities for peacekeeping and peace enforcement “out of area,” and thereafter active roles in the Balkans, to the relief, and with the encouragement of Canadians who as much as anyone else knew the shortcomings of the ad hoc UN peacekeeping arrangements in rougher environs. Moreover, Canadians were worried, as ever, about the “dumbbell,” and still saw NATO as the preventative to it. As Nicholas Gammer explained, “The Canadian government continued to press for NATO to have a stronger interventionary capability in the Balkans. Its consistent support for NATO involvement was tied closely to Canada’s interests in maintaining a European connection in the face of mounting forces and events promoting the greater exclusion of North America from the new united Europe promised by the Maastricht Treaty.”⁴⁰ The alliance’s 1999 Strategic Concept formalized the commitment to be able to act “out of area.”

To be sure, the costs of NATO participation rose again: Canadians, having pulled their forces out of Germany and having contemplated that the job in Europe might have been done and their role in the alliance at an end, found themselves sending thousands of troops right back to Europe under NATO auspices for the Balkan peace enforcement operations. And as Haglund warned, the new NATO might eventually exert pressure on Canada to join it in an operation out of area.

There was no better indication of NATO’s renewed importance for Canada than Axworthy’s support for the NATO bombing of the former

³⁹David G. Haglund, “The NATO of Its Dreams? Canada and the Cooperative Security Alliance,” *International Journal* 52:3 (Summer 1997), 464–82.

⁴⁰Nicholas Gammer, *From Peacekeeping to Peacemaking: Canada’s Response to the Yugoslav Crisis* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 108.

Yugoslavia in the 1999 Kosovo War. Although Axworthy had often touted “soft power” as the preferred alternative to what he argued was the waning importance of military power in post-Cold War international affairs, he found himself defending, in the name of human security, the use of the Canadian air force to bomb Serb targets. The Canadian air force, like its Dutch counterpart, undertook a significant number of the sorties. Canadian diplomats even tried out in those days calling NATO “the human security alliance.”

In the decade after the Cold War, the counterweight across the Atlantic still mattered to the Dutch, too. This was especially the case at the beginning of this period under Hans van den Broek, one of the most Atlanticist foreign ministers that the Netherlands has ever had. He was convinced that the American presence remained essential, partially as an insurance policy against a resurgent Russia, but also with an eye on European stability, not to mention preservation of a Dutch international role. Hellema calls it “striking” that Dutch Atlanticism “remained in place at the end of the Cold War, even though the Soviet Union had fallen apart. . . Dutch touchiness during the reunification of Germany makes it clear that Atlantic unity and American leadership were not least of all seen as a counterweight to a France and Germany that were too strong.”⁴¹ The Dutch tried in particular to put the brakes on the development of the foreign and defence policy capabilities of the then European Community, that could compete with the US—and subsume the Dutch voice.

The Canadians and the Dutch were not always positive about international peacekeeping. The Canadians warmed up to it earlier and eventually more enthusiastically than the Dutch. For inventing modern peacekeeping during the 1956 Suez crisis Lester B. Pearson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but not the thanks of the electorate. The St. Laurent government was turned out of office at the next election, in part because it had not supported Britain in the crisis. One of his successors as foreign minister told an American audience in 1964 that “peacekeeping is politically difficult at home because of the risks; and we get small thanks abroad for our work. We do it not for the glory but as a duty, since there are not many of us willing and able to move in quickly with an effective force.”⁴² That same year peacekeeping was formally recognized in a defence white paper as a Canadian military

⁴¹Hellema, *Nederland in de Wereld*, 355.

⁴²Paul Martin, 18 June 1964, quoted in J.L. Granatstein, “Peacekeeping: Did Canada Make a Difference? And What Difference Did Peacekeeping Make to Canada?” in John

priority. But officials, especially in the Department of National Defence, often remained skeptical, and the military saw peacekeeping as a distraction from their Cold War responsibilities in Europe, North America and at sea. The Canadian military did very little special peacekeeping training, and, until the 1990s at least, developed little peacekeeping doctrine. Special peacekeeping units were not created. At National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa each new peacekeeping responsibility was handled as just another overseas contingency operation, with the adage in mind that a good soldier is a good peacekeeper. Ottawa was disillusioned when the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) that Pearson had done so much to create was expelled from Egypt in 1967. Ottawa's 1971 defence white paper downgraded peacekeeping as a priority. The long and frustrating experience on the International Control Commission in Indochina and the interminable operation in Cyprus keeping Greeks and Turks apart made things worse.

Yet, operation by operation, Canada's record of participation in peacekeeping slowly grew longer over the course of the Cold War, and then expanded very rapidly at the Cold War's end. The Progressive Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney responded with obvious enthusiasm to the increase in the UN's peacekeeping responsibilities, and committed the Canadian Forces to just about all of its missions. The Mulroney government warmly endorsed and supported the UN's 1992 *Agenda for Peace* that sought to modernize and expand the role of the international organization, including its peacekeeping operations. Much of the groundwork for the roll Canada was on during the Axworthy foreign ministership was done in the previous years of Mulroney international activism. By the 1990s peacekeeping had become very, very popular. It made Canada markedly visible as a player in the world and also was another sort of counterweight to the United States. Because of the realities and the unwritten rules of the Cold War, Americans were largely shut out of peacekeeping missions. "Peacekeeping," Norman Hillmer told a Commons committee in 1993, "is seen as an independent, distinctively Canadian activity and our internationalism as an antidote to too much continentalism."⁴³ Hal Klepak

English and Norman Hillmer, eds., *Making a Difference: Canada's Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992), 181.

⁴³Canada, House of Commons, Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, 1 April 1993, 30:9.

told a Senate committee that militarily it was “what we do that is not with the United States.”⁴⁴

It is no exaggeration to say the notion of Canada as peacekeeper became a deep part of the national identity, and rather swiftly at that. The government encouraged the trend, for example supporting the construction of a national peacekeeping monument in the heart of Ottawa and featuring peacekeeping on the ten-dollar bill. Politicians (and not just politicians) began to talk about peacekeeping having been written into the Canadian national DNA. The Canadian peacekeeping myth was born. Noah Richler, a strong supporter of keeping peacekeeping a national priority, dislikes the term and prefers to call it the Canadian “peacekeeping story.” It flourished, he wrote in 2012, and “became an integral part of the national character; a determination of how the country believed its foreign policy should be conducted and of what sort of global citizens Canadians imagined themselves to be. Whether its positive thinking was a true reflection of the nation or no more than a mask for Cold War military strategies, whether the very idea of peacekeeping was, in fact, invented by a Canadian or thrust into the country’s lap by chance, for fifty years the peacekeeping story offered a plausible and unchallenged idea of the country as it was, and as it saw its future.”⁴⁵

For a long time the Netherlands was markedly unenthusiastic about the United Nations and all its works. The feeling often was reciprocated at the UN. The Netherlands worried about being pushed around as a smaller country there in general, and about its colonial empire in the East Indies in particular—with good reason. The UN exerted pressure on it to give up first Indonesia, and then Netherlands New Guinea. While Pearson was forging ahead at the General Assembly during the Suez crisis, the Netherlands was threatening to boycott future sessions out of solidarity with its allies and fellow colonial powers, Britain and France. It is no surprise, then, that Dutch forces did not join UNEF peacekeepers in Egypt. While Canada has always avidly sought a seat on the UN Security Council, in 1963 the Netherlands turned down the opportunity out of irritation over the loss of Netherlands New Guinea.

But once the empire in the east was entirely gone, Dutch attitudes towards both the UN and peacekeeping changed. As the standard history of

⁴⁴Canada, Senate, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Security and National Defence, 12 May 1992, 3:11.

⁴⁵Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2012), 58–59.

Dutch peacekeeping and peace enforcement by Christ Klep and Richard van Gils puts it, “The Dutch image in the Third World left a lot to be desired, especially after the difficult decolonization of Indonesia and New Guinea. Active support of UN peace operations could polish up the national reputation, according to thinking at the foreign ministry.” The Dutch also concluded, as the Canadians had, that peacekeeping service might bolster the western cause by preventing regional conflicts from getting out of hand and entangling the Americans: “What was good for the UN was good for NATO.”⁴⁶ The Dutch told the UN in 1963 that they were maintaining a “standby force” for potential use in peacekeeping. The first major Dutch involvement in peacekeeping came twenty-three years after Canada’s and was with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, beginning in 1979—only after considerable commotion at home. At issue was whether the government could and should send conscripts outside the country on a mission that involved some risk, fifteen UNIFIL peacekeepers already having been killed. When the mission was over—a long six years later—the leadership of the Royal Netherlands Army reacted with “barely hidden relief. The personnel involved could once again devote themselves fully to their NATO tasks.”⁴⁷

Those tasks soon disappeared, though. Since 1949, the chief responsibility of the Dutch army had always been, and still was, the defence of the homeland, within the NATO arrangements. The Canadian army, by contrast, was a volunteer force whose combat responsibilities were abroad, namely in Europe. This reflected not only the Canadian aversion to conscription, after the national unity crises it provoked in the two world wars, but also its geographic location. Unlike the Netherlands—in fact unlike any other of the US allies in NATO—the homeland defence of Canada did not rest on the NATO arrangements. Canadians profited from what the famed strategist R.J. Sutherland had called in what is now a classic work on Canadian defence policy, the “involuntary American guarantee” of their security.⁴⁸ The US would have to treat any attack on Canada as an attack on itself. James Eayrs once coolly concluded that, as a result of this American guarantee, “we would be as safe from attack by any conceivable aggressor with no armed

⁴⁶Christ Klep and Richard van Gils, *Van Korea tot Kabul: De Nederlandse Militaire Deelname aan Vredesoperaties sinds 1945* (Den Haag: SDU Uitgevers, 2005), 55.

⁴⁷Klep and Van Gils, *Van Korea tot Kabul*, 95.

⁴⁸R.J. Sutherland, “Canada’s Long Term Strategic Situation,” *International Journal* 17:3 (Summer 1962), 169.

forces at all, as with the armed forces we now have, or any combination of armed forces we may care to have.”⁴⁹

The disappearance of the Soviet Union and the absence on the horizon of another threatening power in Europe suddenly left the Netherlands, for the first time in its history, in the same position as Canada in one respect: its armed forces were no longer needed for the immediate defence of the homeland. While Canada’s fundamental security situation at home in North America had not changed at the end of the Cold War—the U.S. “involuntary guarantee” remained in place—its armed forces nonetheless were bereft of the same task as the Dutch forces had been: the defence of western Europe. Therefore both the Netherlands and Canada were left with the question of the extent to which they wanted to maintain the ability to deploy their armed forces abroad. Thanks to the positive developments in Europe, they both had what was in effect, surplus military capability.

A hypothetical option for both would have been to cash in their peace dividends completely and limit themselves to forces to send abroad that could simply take part in classical “blue beret” peacekeeping operations. Not surprisingly given their internationalist orientations, both rejected this option and found themselves increasingly involved in more robust and more complex international interventions throughout the 1990s in failed and failing states. Such missions outran the ability to define them. In English, they were usually called “peace enforcement operations,” although in the early 1990s they were also called “second-generation peacekeeping.” The Dutch, also struggling for a definition, usually included them in their language under the umbrella term *vredesoperaties* (“peace operations” and “peace support operations”) that could also cover peacekeeping; later, they often used *stabilisatie-operaties* (“stabilization operations”). These new operations differed from classical peacekeeping in two ways. First, force played a greater role. The peace enforcers could resort to the use of violence in order to protect the local populations and maintain order. This meant that they, in turn, also ran a greater risk of being subject to attack. Second, they were more complex, as the international force sought to do more than just monitor a truce, but rather to stabilize and restore the failed or failing state. The missions often had a large civilian component, and were involved in

⁴⁹James Eayrs “Military Policy and Middle-power: The Canadian Experience,” in J. King Gordon, ed., *Canada’s Role as a Middle Power* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1965), 84.

monitoring elections or in supervising local governments and police forces. There was thus also talk of “peace building.”

Moreover, the 1991 Gulf War seemed to indicate that in the post-Cold War world the international community, led by the United States, was prepared to muster force against intransigent regimes, an indication strengthened at the end of the decade by the Kosovo War. Both Canada and the Netherlands made token contributions to the efforts to liberate Kuwait from Iraq, shying away from a land force contribution. However, both deployed naval forces. The Canadians also sent fighter aircraft; the Dutch were willing to send them but could not find a temporary base for them in the region. That the attack on Iraq also could be called a “peace enforcement” operation only underlined the terminological blurring underway, not to mention the broadening range of international interventions that now were possible. A “peace enforcement” or “peace” operation now could mean anything from a very challenging truce monitoring mission to war.

The Hague and Ottawa announced in white papers issued within a year of one another their responses to the new international security environment. For the Netherlands this entailed dramatic change, as was revealed in its 1993 white paper on defence priorities. Conscription would come to an end after 180 years and the military would be transformed from one devoted to homeland defence into a professional, expeditionary force capable of contributing to peace enforcement and international stability. In Rob de Wijk’s words, “With this decision, the Netherlands put itself among a select group of countries which had both the political will and the means to undertake complex, risky operations on behalf of its interests or international security.”⁵⁰ Among that select group of countries remained, of course, Canada. With its all volunteer force already oriented to deployment overseas, the crucial decision its own 1994 defence white paper revealed was not transformation, but rather the retention, of what it called “multi-purpose combat-capable forces.”

Despite Dutch moralizing and the *gidsland* tradition, peacekeeping never entered much into the Netherlands national identity the way it did in Canada. This may in part be because the Dutch got started with peacekeeping decades later than the Canadians. It probably also means that the Dutch national identity is more stable and secure than the Canadian one. This notion would probably come as a surprise to the Dutch who, after profound

⁵⁰Rob de Wijk, “Balkenende’s defensie: doorgaand verval met behoud van kwaliteit,” *Internationale Spectator* 64:9 (September 2010), 454.

domestic social change in the 1960s and 1970s, including the virtual disappearance of the religious and other sectarian pillars upon which their society had rested, and now under the twin pressures of immigration and European integration, have been doing a considerable amount of agonizing these days over what it means to be Dutch. In all that agonizing though, there is little to no consideration of the place of the armed forces. Unlike Canada, there was earlier no widely-embraced military tradition within the Netherlands national identity upon which to build a newer peacekeeping one. Wim Klinkert, in his oration upon accepting a professorship in military history at the University of Amsterdam, said that “The Dutch self-image has been determined for more than a century and a half by an emphasis on tolerance, openness, law before power and freedom. Military elements have no place in this.”⁵¹ On the other hand, both military elements and war have long had a place in the Canadian identity, as anyone who has ever attended a Remembrance Day ceremony in Canada since 1919 on 11 November could attest, where the sacrifices of veterans are recalled. Some Canadian historians have taken in recent years to lamenting how little Canadians know about their history, especially their military history. It still seems fair to conclude, though, that while Canadians are probably fuzzy at best about their military history before the twentieth century they have at least a general awareness of the contributions and sacrifices of their soldiers, sailors and airmen and women in the two world wars. War, specifically the Second World War (the Dutch having succeeded in remaining neutral during the First World War) does have a place in the Dutch national identity, and as a result there is now also a Remembrance Day in the Netherlands, observed on 4 May. But it not just the sacrifices of the veteran that is recalled on that day, but also all the losses suffered by the defeated and occupied country from 1940 to 1945.

Still, participation in peacekeeping had public support in the Netherlands, too—even after the notorious incident at Srebrenica in August 1995, when as part of the UNPROFOR mission in Bosnia, a Dutch peacekeeping force of battalion strength, lightly armed and without sufficient air support, failed to protect a Muslim enclave against Bosnian Serb troops, who proceeded to slaughter some 8000 Bosnian men and boys. The shock in the Netherlands at the time was great. Terms like “the shame of Srebrenica,” “the national trauma” and “lost innocence” were common, and much later

⁵¹Wim Klinkert, *Van Waterloo tot Uruzgan: De Militaire Identiteit van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA, 2008), 1.

the Kok II “purple” cabinet ceremoniously resigned just before the normal end of its time in office in 2002 as an act of contrition.⁵² Yet Srebrenica did not dislodge the Dutch from participation in peace enforcement or the maintenance of the expeditionary force along the general lines set out in the 1993 white paper on defence priorities. On the contrary: support for the armed forces and for involvement in peacekeeping actually increased. To be sure, in reaction to Srebrenica the armed forces tightened up the internal command and control of their military operations under the chief of the defence staff, while the politicians resolved to carefully scrutinize the conditions of any proposed new mission in the future. It also seemed evident to everyone that robust peace enforcement needed to be embedded in a better external structure—preferably provided by NATO—and always given sufficient tactical air support. Such were indeed the conditions of the IFOR/SFOR operation in Bosnia, which the Dutch joined enthusiastically within scant months of Srebrenica.

In its overall impact on the Netherlands, Srebrenica is reminiscent of the impact of the Somalia atrocities, two years earlier, on Canada. Criminal misconduct, including torture and murder, by Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia led to similar national shock, and similar talk of national shame. The Somalia atrocities were followed by the disbandment of an airborne regiment that had been branded as rogue and by reforms within the military, especially in training, and a tarnishing of the military’s reputation. But after the initial shock they did very little to affect the popularity in Canada of peacekeeping.

However, the Somalia peacekeeping mission, together with the operations in the Balkans, in Rwanda and in Haiti, did change Ottawa’s attitudes towards how best to intervene. Having begun the 1990s enthusiastic about the prospects for more Canadian involvement in more classical peacekeeping missions around the world under UN auspices, in the wake of the troubles those missions encountered Ottawa was obliged to recognize that more robust interventions were needed and that the UN, although essential for providing legitimacy, largely was not up to the task of managing them. And having initially resisted the temptation to cash in the peace dividend, Ottawa’s parlous fiscal condition in the mid-1990s led to a serious squeeze on the defence budget. Moreover, the burden of frequent peacekeeping operations since the end of the Cold War was wearing on the Canadian Forces; the chief of the defence staff, General Ray Henault, worried about

⁵²Klep and Van Gils, *Van Korea tot Kabul*, 136.

this. In March 2001 the Chrétien government decided that it would try to apply the “early in, early out” approach to any future peacekeeping or peace enforcement commitments. Also called the “vanguard” approach, this would entail Canada’s having its readily deployable, highly trained, professional armed forces helping to get new missions up and running. Then the Canadians would bug out.

Like Canada, peacekeeping and peace enforcement afforded the Netherlands another way to be a player in world affairs. While their high-profile peacekeeping roles in the 1990s undoubtedly resulted in their being seen as a player, both the Canadians and the Dutch governments, especially the foreign ministries, also very clearly hoped that it would allow their voices to be heard at the proverbial tables in New York, Brussels and Washington. No doubt it generally did. When it comes to influence it largely is better to be on the inside than the outside. How much is not at all evident, influence being notoriously difficult to measure and the evidence not only being very anecdotal, but sometimes served up by Dutch or Canadian diplomats determined to show that a connection exists between military engagement and their foreign policy successes. One Dutch defence minister in the 1990s, A. L. ter Beek, later went public in his memoirs over his contempt for the ease with which the foreign ministry, in order to impress foreign capitals, sought to deploy the troops for whom he felt personally responsible. As he put it, the diplomats were always “ready to open a can of marines, F-16 aircraft or whatever.”⁵³ This clearly does not always work, though. Both countries were sorely disappointed (and the Dutch government publicly angry) when they were shut out of the contact group for the Balkans by the great powers, despite their heavy IFOR/SFOR contributions there.

Nonetheless, Canadian and Dutch peacekeeping was not entirely about national self-interest. At the risk of rousing the ghost of Dean Acheson, it is not starry-eyed to conclude that the Canadians and the Dutch, when it came to peacekeeping and peace enforcement, also have been motivated at least in some part by altruism or simple international voluntarism. In other words, they sometimes really are self-prompted to go out and do good in the world. To the extent that peacekeeping and peace enforcement have helped alleviate suffering and has contributed to regional and international stability, it has afforded Canadians the opportunity to do

⁵³Quoted in Klep and Van Gils, *Van Korea tot Kabul*, 106.

just that. In the late 1990s the Canadians and the Dutch responded to the challenges of peace enforcement not only with contributions that were beefed up militarily, and by placing a new emphasis on NATO, but also by developing 3D approaches to support civil society in the failed and failing states where those contributions were being made. Their impact will be described in the next section.

Into Afghanistan, 2001-2006

Both the Dutch and Canadian prime ministers reacted to 11 September 2001 with public reserve, for which they both came under some criticism at home. Wim Kok held an emergency cabinet meeting that day. Immediately thereafter, when he appeared before the cameras, he not only expressed the cabinet's solidarity and sympathy with the American people (his voice breaking with emotion) but also explicitly called upon them to respond "with dignity." The next day the Dutch government briefly hesitated before agreeing to NATO's declaring that, under the terms of the Treaty of Washington, the United States had been attacked, a step that Ottawa had all but immediately signed onto. Kok soon lost his public reserve, though; a week later he stated that the terrorist atrocities had been a declaration of war on the West, and that "the Netherlands was at war, too."⁵⁴ By contrast, Jean Chrétien maintained his low profile. There was no emergency cabinet meeting; he rebuffed appeals for recalling parliament; and he tempered his rhetorical support for Washington. This was, Stein and Lang say "entirely in keeping" with his "risk-averse managerial style." "Even immediately after 9-11 when Canadians' public sympathy for their American neighbours was at an all-time high, the prime minister seemed reluctant to become—and to be seen to be—too close to George Bush."⁵⁵

Despite the initial public reservations of the two heads of government, The Hague and Ottawa fell in behind the United States in its efforts to topple to Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Chrétien announced in October that Canada would support the United States militarily; the approval of the Dutch cabinet for military support came in November. Thereby began the

⁵⁴Hellema, *Nederland in de Wereld*, 414–15.

⁵⁵Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 11.

first phase of their involvement in the Afghanistan war. The two countries would not directly join in the attack, though. As Klep and Van Gils have summarized the Dutch decision: “The government of the Netherlands supported the American plan of approach and endorsed the right to self-defense, but did not yet wish to actively participate with ground troops on Afghan soil in the struggles against the Taliban and Al-Qaida ... from a political point of view and because of the risks it was more attractive in the first instance to deploy air force and naval units.”⁵⁶ All of this was true for Ottawa, too. It was a repetition of the approach the two governments had taken in the Gulf War of 1991 and would feed speculation that the Canadian and Dutch publics, like their governments, were deeply averse to casualties.

However it is essential to emphasize that Washington was not interested in having Dutch or Canadian ground forces join in the toppling of the Taliban and the driving out of al-Qaida. It was planning a quick campaign relying almost entirely on its own armed forces and some special capabilities of the British and the Australians. The limited, overwhelmingly naval contributions the Dutch and the Canadians made in late 2001 and into early 2002 were fine from the American perspective and were welcome.

The Royal Netherlands Navy was in a unique position to support the American invasion of Afghanistan far away from that unhappy land. Relying on the Dutch island of Curaçao in the former Netherlands Antilles, it relieved the Americans from drug interdiction activities in the Caribbean in 2001-2002. In naval parlance these are called “backfill operations”; in this case they entailed a frigate, a submarine and three Orion P-3C maritime patrol aircraft.

Dutch and Canadian naval vessels were also sent to the waters off the Arabian peninsula in late 2001. Two Dutch frigates were deployed; in 2002 a submarine was also involved. Canada deployed a “small but potent flotilla” to the region consisting of a destroyer, three (later two) frigates and a supply vessel.⁵⁷ The Dutch and the Canadian warships supported or engaged in US-led efforts to prevent the relocation of terrorist leaders and weapons, and escorted vessels. As a result of not only the greater number of Canadian ships; but also the command and control facilities on board the Canadian destroyer, and the overall interoperability of the Canadian navy with the US navy, the Canadian efforts in the region were significantly

⁵⁶Klep and Van Gils, *Van Korea tot Kabul*, 176.

⁵⁷Richard Gimblett, *Operation Apollo: The Golden Age of the Canadian Navy in the War against Terrorism* (Ottawa: Magic Light Publishing, 2004), 54.

more extensive than those of the Dutch. The commodore on board the destroyer was given command of a coalition naval task force in the region. The Canadian supply vessel passed fuel and other supplies onto coalition vessels, including the Dutch frigates.

These multinational naval efforts were also supported by a detachment of Dutch Orion P-3Cs varying from six to eight in number that was deployed to the United Arab Emirates and operated closely with Canadian Aurora P-3Cs that were deployed there, as well. After the quick fall of the Taliban, and at the request of the US, the Dutch government gave permission in December 2001 for the Orions, which had recently been equipped with an advanced infrared detection system, to fly reconnaissance operations above Afghanistan.

The Royal Netherlands Air Force was also affected by the rapid progress of the American war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The Hague originally had agreed to the deployment of six F-16s to Kyrgyzstan for reconnaissance missions—and not for combat—above Afghanistan. By time they arrived in 2002, though, Kabul had fallen months earlier. The restriction on combat was lifted and the aircraft were authorized to provide close air support, especially for the Dutch unit that would be taking up peace enforcement responsibilities in ISAF.

Despite the overall intention of the Canadian government (like the Dutch government) to stay out of the ground effort to topple the Taliban, there was one exception during this first period. In December 2001, Art Eggleton, the minister of national defence, revealed that forty commandos, members of the Canadian Forces special forces unit Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2) had been deployed to Afghanistan earlier in the month. It was the first time that the still fairly new task force had been sent into combat. The Canadian Department of National Defence has maintained a policy of strict secrecy and little has appeared in print. Peter Pigott has summarized in two sentences what has been revealed or leaked: “Later it was made known that as part of U.S. Task Force K-Bar in actions against Al Qaeda, JTF2 strike teams had killed at least 115 Taliban and captured 107 senior Taliban leaders. The Canadian commandos had led a mountain climb to reach a high-altitude observation post in support of Operation Anaconda and for its service its members were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.”⁵⁸ The policy of secrecy is unlike the one maintained by the Netherlands Ministry of Defence, which has

⁵⁸Peter Pigott, *Canada in Afghanistan: The War So Far* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007), 86.

released more information about special forces and supported the publication of an official history, written by Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm, of the Royal Netherlands Army's special forces unit, the Special Forces Regiment, including details of its operations in Afghanistan.⁵⁹ Thus there will be mention from time to time below of Dutch special forces in Afghanistan, but none of the Canadians.

Once the Taliban were dislodged from power, Washington turned to its allies to supply troops on the ground in Afghanistan for the post-invasion phase. The United Nations provided the necessary supportive resolutions, and in Bonn the wealthy nations drew up plans to reconstruct the poor country. Under these circumstances, participation by both Canada and the Netherlands seems like a political no-brainer. Still, it has been claimed that the government of the ever-cautious Chrétien approved without enthusiasm the deployment of a battalion from the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), especially once it could not be sent to join a multinational force in Kabul. This force of 750 arrived in Afghanistan in February 2002 and, in accordance with the "vanguard" approach that the government had adopted in early 2001, was back home six months later. According to Paul Chapin, a former senior diplomat, ultimately "The Chrétien government undertook the operation in large part because it couldn't avoid doing so in the face of overwhelming support for participation from the public, Parliament, media, allies and the United Nations."⁶⁰ To that list should be added the Canadian military, which wanted a mission in Afghanistan alongside traditional allies.

There were discussions about having the Canadians join the British-led ISAF brigade that was to provide security in Kabul. That did not pan out, though and the Patricia's were sent to Kandahar instead, alongside American forces located there. The mission in Kandahar was expected to be significantly tougher than in Kabul where ISAF's responsibilities would not be unlike recent international peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions in failed or failing states. In Kandahar the Canadians were to help the Americans clear out Taliban and remaining al-Qaeda.

Why going to Kabul in 2002 did not pan out for Canada is the subject of a still unresolved debate. According to some accounts, the British agreed to

⁵⁹ Arthur ten Cate and Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau: Het Moderne Korps Commandotroepen 1989-2012* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012).

⁶⁰ P.H. Chapin, "Into Afghanistan; The Transformation of Canada's International Security Policy since 9/11," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40:2 (June 2010), 194.

keep ISAF a European club, with Canadians either not welcome or welcome only in insultingly limited numbers; Stein and Lang endorse this view. That left Kandahar as the only possible option for a reluctant prime minister and cabinet.⁶¹ According to others, however, Ottawa really wanted all along to go to Kandahar alongside the Americans. Claire Turenne Sjolander argues that “Canadian participation in the US combat mission conferred the obvious benefit to Ottawa policy makers of permitting Canada to be actively involved in the US war against terror in a much more prominent way than in the United Nations-authorized, multinational ISAF would have allowed.” She also sees in the decision the first stirrings of the Canadian military’s efforts to shed its image as a peacekeeper.⁶² There is a way to reconcile the two versions: officials, especially in the Department of National Defence, were plumping for Kandahar and were pleased when the cabinet, and its hesitant prime minister, found itself put in a box by the British. In the event, the Patricia’s encountered a relatively quiet Kandahar during their six months there. The tour was, however, marred by a friendly-fire incident in which four Canadians troops were killed by a bomb dropped by a US Air National Guard F-16.

The Dutch went to Kabul in 2002. They fit smoothly into the European arrangements there for ISAF, whose primary task was to back up the local security forces, providing security in the power vacuum after the fall of the Taliban and while the Karzai government was getting established. In January a Dutch infantry company of about 200, reinforced by special forces commandos joined, along with a Austrian company, a German battle group in Kabul. Patrols in the city, undertaken whenever possible in light vehicles, established presence. As Ten Cate and Van der Vorm describe the start of the mission, “The ISAF soldiers were seen by the Afghans as insurance against a new civil war between the militias, of the kind that had raged in 1990s and had ravaged the city... ISAF was within a month’s time part of the street scape in a Kabul that had been liberated and seemed as if it had been reborn.”⁶³ The next year the Dutch and the Germans took the lead in ISAF for six months, deploying for that purpose elements of their

⁶¹Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 18–19.

⁶²Claire Turenne Sjolander, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Road to Kandahar: The Competing Faces of Canadian Internationalism?” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 15:2 (Summer 2009), 78.

⁶³Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 134.

joint High Readiness Forces Headquarters that they maintained in Munster, Germany. The Netherlands sent an additional 400 personnel.

ISAF did not remain a European club. In the summer of 2003, a Canadian battle group of nearly 2000 personnel was sent to Kabul, and Canada succeeded the Netherlands and Germany as lead nation in ISAF. Things had not changed much since the Dutch arrived more than a year before. A Canadian reporter wrote that “In the early days . . . operations in Kabul didn’t seem too much different than peacekeeping in Bosnia. The main effort was presence, patrolling through the city, clearing up after the war and protecting Kabul’s outer reaches from any encroaching disorder.”⁶⁴

As Granatstein and Bercuson have carefully and skeptically put it, Ottawa’s decision, taken in February 2003, to join and lead ISAF Kabul is “widely believed to be aimed at ending pressure from the United States for Canada to participate in the forthcoming invasion of Iraq.”⁶⁵ Their skepticism is well founded. True, several members of the Chrétien cabinet have said that they understood Kabul to be the alternative to Iraq. But there simply is no indication that Washington ever was set on the Canadian military joining the invasion of Iraq, anymore than it had wanted Canadian participation in the invasion of Afghanistan. So there never was such pressure. Washington certainly hoped and pushed for Canadian political support of the invasion, which it did not get largely because the invasion was not blessed with a resolution from the UN Security Council. The Americans also might have welcomed Canadian participation in the multinational post-invasion stabilization operations of Iraq. Ottawa might very well have been willing in principle to participate (as the Dutch did in practice) because those operations were ultimately conducted under the authority of a UN resolution. It is unlikely, though that the Canadian military in 2003 was in shape to go in significant numbers to both Kabul and Iraq.

In short, for Canada Kabul was indeed the alternative to Iraq—but not to the invasion of Iraq. That was fine with Washington, too. As the Americans made clear in the fall of 2002 to the Canadians, some of whom were expecting to be pressured to fight in Iraq, they really wanted ISAF put on a firmer basis. This entailed giving it more ground forces and turning it over to NATO. The Canadians could not only provide extra forces but could also take the lead during the transition into a NATO organization. So

⁶⁴ Adam Day, *Witness to War: Reporting on Afghanistan, 2004-2009* (Kingston: CDA Press, 2010), 19.

⁶⁵ Granatstein and Bercuson, “Lessons Learned?” 3.

the Americans really wanted Canada in Kabul, too. The NATO secretary general, Lord Robertson, supported the project. It was a way to give solid form to the organization's "out of area" aspirations. As did the Dutch and the Germans, whose turn at the lead of ISAF was coming to an end and for which there was no other successor nation in sight. The Germans appear to have been especially eager for the Canadians to come on board and were prepared to keep themselves a significant force in Kabul, which was reassuring for the Canadians. It really becomes difficult to imagine Ottawa turning down a request supported by Washington, Brussels and Bonn (and also endorsed by London, not to mention The Hague) to take charge of a high-profile, UN Security Council endorsed, NATO-led peacekeeping-style operation. More Canadian it does not get.

Canada was suddenly visible in Kabul. With "the most effective large troop contingent in ISAF," it temporarily became, in fact, "the major player in the Afghan capital, the United States excepted."⁶⁶ It was not just the troops. Ottawa opened an embassy in Kabul and appointed a young, energetic foreign service officer to head it. The Canadian International Development Agency was given \$150 million to spend in the city. Moreover, Canada—namely General Hillier—developed a unique instrument whereby the military could assist in the development of a stable and effective Afghan government. While serving as ISAF chief of staff in 2004, Hillier sent a group of officers to advise the Afghan ministry of finance on how to elicit international aid. It turned out to be a temporary effort. But Karzai had been impressed by it and when Hillier subsequently became chief of the defence staff in Ottawa, he worked with Karzai to provide a more institutionalized version, called the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan (SAT-A). Headed by Mike Capstick, an artillery colonel, it consisted of thirteen Canadian officers and several Canadian civilians. In his memoirs Hillier notes that in 2005 SAT-A "went to work helping the Afghan government develop an effective way to develop and use proper budgets, administer their departments and do all the small vital things that keep governments running properly while delivering effectively what the population needed."⁶⁷

The SAT-A did not survive long; it was disbanded in 2007. There were charges that the team had developed "client-itis," whereby it began to see itself working more for the Afghan government than for the Canadian. Some

⁶⁶Granatstein and Bercuson, "Lessons Learned?" 5.

⁶⁷Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers 2009), 424–35.

Canadian civilians were simply uneasy at seeing the military so heavily engaged with civil governance. Most importantly, the SAT-A was caught up in a power struggle both in Kabul, over whether the SAT-A should report to the Canadian embassy, and back in Ottawa between the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of National Defence over who would control development efforts, and ultimately the Canadian mission itself in Afghanistan.

The Department of Foreign Affairs won, with the support of ministers in the Harper cabinet. Thereafter, a recurring theme of the Canadian effort in Afghanistan would be the need to civilianize it. That is equally true of the Dutch efforts. In both the Canadian and Dutch cases civilianizing meant not just sending more civilians, but also increasing the authority of diplomats on the ground in Afghanistan, with such titles as political advisor or civilian representative. However, the Canadian experience with the SAT-A raises the question whether diplomats really have such a unique, or superior set of skills compared to those of modern military officers, such that complex international interventions ultimately are better off with the diplomats at the helm. As Capstick put it, "Planning Afghanistan's national economic development strategy or civil service is not a heck of a lot different than planning General Fraser's campaign in terms of the skills needed and the steps."⁶⁸ Hillier acerbically concluded that "Those who helped get rid of the SAT soon realized they had a problem: they didn't have the people willing to go into Afghanistan; they didn't have the organizational wherewithal to put them on the ground and they certainly didn't have the trained strategic planners we had in the Canadian Forces--in short, they just couldn't do the work."⁶⁹

The Dutch went to Iraq in 2003. Unlike the Chrétien government, the Balkenende cabinet lent its political support to the US invasion, thereby making the Netherlands a member of the "coalition of the willing." While the Netherlands did not contribute forces to the invasion, it did send a reinforced battalion of marines to Al Muthanna province in British-occupied southern Iraq as part of the post-invasion stabilization operations. The Iraqi mission lasted almost two years and had an impact on how the Dutch government later approached the mission in southern Afghanistan.

⁶⁸Quoted in Andy Tamas, *Warriors and Nation Builders: Development and the Military in Afghanistan* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 62.

⁶⁹Hillier, *Soldier First*, 426.

The Dutch tried to draw lines between what they were doing in post-invasion Iraq and what the British and Americans did. The Balkende cabinet followed up its first calibrated Iraq policy of “in the coalition but not in the invasion” with one of “on the ground but not in the occupation.” It emphasized that although the Netherlands was taking a certain amount of responsibility for Al Muthanna (“our province” as some Dutch officials began to call it), legally and organizationally it still was not an occupying power like the US and the UK. The Dutch mandate came from the UN. The Dutch battle group’s task was military; it was there to provide security. The British and the Americans were responsible for all civil matters, including policing, civil administration, and development. But on the ground in the province the distinction was “not always tenable” as the authoritative history of the mission politely puts it while describing just how untenable it was. Maintaining security overlapped with policing and the reconstruction of the local civil administration. The Dutch also found themselves doing a considerable amount of local development work.⁷⁰ But for the Balkenende cabinet the distinction was useful, as had been the one between being in the coalition and not being in the invasion, to justify and maintain domestic political support for the mission in the Netherlands.

The Dutch military drew an even more imaginative distinction between itself and other foreign armed forces in post-invasion Iraq, giving birth to the myth of the “Dutch approach” that would carry over to the engagement in Afghanistan. The “Dutch approach” was said to entail a “softer” more culturally sensitive approach to peace enforcement than that of the Americans and the British. Thijs Brocades Zaalberg has tracked down the origins, the evolution and the impact of the “Dutch approach.” The term first became publicly known in a television documentary about how the Netherlands had responded to a domestic hostage crisis in the 1970s. When an army press officer sought to explain why Al Muthanna province was so quiet compared to the others where violence had broken out he, having seen and remembered the TV program, used the catchy term in material he provided. The notion made it into the press in both the US and the Netherlands. So did the suggestion by the serving battle group commander in Al Muthanna that the US might do well to adopt it in places like Bagdad where it was having a tough time dealing with local violence. Brocades Zaalberg points out that “Few people realised that this upbeat message on operations in Iraq

⁷⁰Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate, *Missie in Al Muthanna: De Nederlandse Krijgsmacht in Irak, 2003-2005* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 102.

was part of an effort to boost the image of the Royal Netherlands Army, which—despite its rather successful participation in several NATO peace support operations in the Balkans in the previous eight years—continued to be haunted by reports and inquiries in relation to its UN peacekeeping role at the time of the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995.”⁷¹

And few in the Netherlands, Brocades Zaalberg goes on to say, also sought to examine “whether there actually was a clear causal link” between the “Dutch approach” and the calm in Al Muthanna.⁷² There was not. In reality, as a senior Dutch official later put it “the stars were aligned in the right way in Al Muthanna.”⁷³ It was a peripheral, tribally-balanced, overwhelmingly Shi’ite province thereby already prone to tranquility. In other words, the Dutch had been lucky when they drew it, and were afforded the luxury of treading relatively softly. And after the Dutch were replaced by the British, the province remained quiet. It also seems to have occurred to few in the Netherlands that there was a good deal of inherent tension between the official policy of not engaging in development work in Iraq and the emphasis of the “Dutch approach” on close cooperation with the locals.

What is especially interesting about the “Dutch approach” is that it brought the Netherlands into Canadian territory. Indeed, there long has been a belief in a “Canadian approach,” and one might say that the Dutch were only catching up in the myth-making department—and very quickly at that. Looking back at his tour of duty in Kandahar in 2003, a PPCLI officer later told a university audience that how the Canadians maintained security at the airfield “proved to be an interesting example of the differences between American and Canadian cultures.” While the Americans just maintained presence patrols, the Canadians also tried to get to know the locals, even playing soccer with them every Sunday. All in all it was “a reflection of the Canadian way” that “won the respect of our American friends.”⁷⁴

In a recent study, Matthew Willis argues that Canada’s decision to go to Kabul in 2003 meant that its ongoing engagement in Afghanistan was baked into the cake. “From the moment it took over the ISAF mission, NATO had been implementing its plan for the consolidation of ISAF’s presence in Kabul, following by a phased expansion built on provincial reconstruction

⁷¹Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, “The Use and Abuse of the ‘Dutch Approach’ to Counter-Insurgency,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36:6 (2013), 12.

⁷²Ibid, 12.

⁷³Quoted in *ibid*, 14.

⁷⁴Quoted in Pigott, *The War So Far*, 88–89.

teams. This is a fundamental point: the plan had been approved by the North Atlantic Council and every country had known its implications. For Canadian officials in the defence and foreign ministries, the plan meant that the country would eventually field a PRT.⁷⁵ This plan had the support of those Canadian officials. According to a study undertaken by DND looking at the government's own decision-making, as early as March 2003 "there was "strong interest by Canadians senior officials in having Canada lead a PRT."⁷⁶ But Canada did not just field any PRT in 2005. It took a tough one accompanied by a battle group in Kandahar. The Netherlands fielded two: first a relatively easy one in the north, Baghlan, and then in 2006 the southern tough one with a battle group in Uruzgan.

Murray Brewster, one of Canada's best defence correspondents, discovered that when it came to the decision to go back to Kandahar in 2005, "it's hard to get two people in Ottawa to agree about their perceptions and recollections of how the country ended up there." In large part this was because "Just about everyone, it seemed, had a score to settle" once the mission turned out to be so difficult. "The arguments, claims, denials, and counter-denials, especially when things were going badly in 2006 and 2007, were churned out almost faster than we could report them."⁷⁷ Chrétien has claimed that Martin dithered so long in reaching a decision that the more tranquil provinces were snapped up by other allies before Canada could get one. Martin, for his part, says he didn't dither; Hillier made him do it. Hillier says he wanted Canada to stay in Kabul.

After conducting extensive interviews with American, British, Canadian, Dutch and NATO officials, Willis came to a conclusion similar to Brewster's: "How Kandahar became the location of Canada's deployment and not *another* southern province remains unclear."⁷⁸ Still, it can be said that the Canadians were familiar with Kandahar, having been there in 2003 and the airport was a positive feature. The embassy in Kabul firmly supported Kandahar, although that support did not extend throughout Foreign Affairs. Moreover, the outgoing chief of the defence staff, General Henault, favoured it as a location, and Canadian strategic planning for it got

⁷⁵Matthew Willis, "An Unexpected War, A Not Unexpected Mission: The Origins of Kandahar 2005," *International Journal* 67:4 (December 2012), 990.

⁷⁶Chief Review Services, "Evaluation of CF/DND Participation in the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team," December 2007, 21.

⁷⁷Murray Brewster, *The Savage War: The Untold Battles of Afghanistan* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada, 2011), 52–53.

⁷⁸Willis, "Unexpected War," 996.

underway in late 2004, points which strengthens Hillier's claim that when he took over, for practical purposes the decision had all but been made. Hillier became chief in February 2005.

The Canadian cabinet gave preliminary approval to Kandahar in May 2005, whereupon it was announced by Bill Graham, Martin's minister of national defence, with final cabinet approval coming in August after the military had completed a round of preparations. It was for a two-year commitment, 2005-2007. The political authority of the prime minister over cabinet is much greater in the single-party Canadian cabinets than in the Dutch coalition cabinets. So Martin's decisions were the ones that really counted. Martin says he gave his approval after being assured by Hillier that the mission would not tie up all the available troops, leaving none for other missions. Parliamentary approval was not needed in the Canadian system, although with the Liberal government in the minority, the opposition parties in the House of Commons were in a position to block the mission if they wished. In the event, Graham's announcement of the Kandahar deployment met with very little debate.

These uncertain matters in Canada—concerning precisely “who” and precisely “where”—are clearer in the Netherlands. There is no disagreement that the Balkenende cabinet eventually decided to go to Uruzgan upon the advice of the commandant of the defence forces, (Hillier's counterpart), General Dick Berlijn, among other officials. Approval by the *Tweede Kamer*, while not legally required in the Dutch system, had become the practice. It was granted, upon request of the Balkenende cabinet, in February 2006, bringing to an end a long, laborious decision-making process that had lasted over a year, reflecting not only the serious doubts about the mission held by politicians, but the difficulties of reaching an agreement within in the Dutch multi-party system, both at the cabinet table and in parliament.

The choice of Uruzgan as the location can be traced, apparently reliably. With the Canadians going to Kandahar (which the Dutch also had their eyes on, even though it probably was too big for them) and the British to Helmand, that made Uruzgan, located between the Canadian and British provinces, the most attractive option for the Dutch, although they also examined a couple of other options. The Dutch also signed on for a two-year commitment, 2006-2008.

The larger questions remain for both the Dutch and the Canadians: what attracted the government to a robust mission in the south—no matter which province—and how difficult did the government think the mission was going to be? Looking back at the decision to go to Kandahar, Graham, the

defence minister, later told Stein and Lang that “We sold ourselves that we could do this and that it was possible... We were probably drinking too much of our own bathwater.”⁷⁹ Graham was talking about the 3D approach. The Canadians thought that they were getting good at that sort of thing and had figured out how to get even better. Ottawa, like The Hague in 2004-2005, was convinced that having recently been developing robust and complex peace enforcement techniques in failed and failing states in the Balkans and elsewhere, it now was ready to apply them in a next and still more challenging step, the following point on a continuum, namely in southern Afghanistan. It had new conceptual tools. Or as Graham had put it in 2005, “Canadians should know...that we have developed some very special skills in dealing with these complex situations.”⁸⁰

While the Canadian military would focus on “three block war,” it would also cooperate with other agencies in a “whole of government” approach. Precisely how Ottawa came to embrace the term “whole of government” is not clear. On the other hand, how it came to adopt the notion “three block war” is. Hillier imported it from the United States, where the term had been coined by General Charles Krulak, commander of the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999. The US military at the time was also reacting to the challenges of intervening in failed and failing states. Krulak suggested as metaphor for conceptualizing future interventions: “In one moment in time our service members will be feeding and clothing displaced refugees, providing humanitarian assistance. In the next moment they will be holding two warring tribes apart—conducting peacekeeping operations—and, finally, they will be fighting a highly lethal, mid-intensity conflict—all on the same day ... all within three city blocks. It will be what we call the Three Block War.”⁸¹

The term did not get very far in the US military or international organizations, at least officially. But it was embraced by Hillier, who apparently learned about it while serving on exchange as deputy commander of a US army division in Texas. When he became chief of the land staff in 2003, he used it as a point of departure in efforts to transform the army. While being interviewed as a candidate for chief of the defence staff in 2004 he

⁷⁹Quoted in Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 186.

⁸⁰Bill Graham “The Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan: Canadian Policy and Values in Action,” address, University of British Columbia, 9 November 2005.

⁸¹Quoted in Walter Dorn and Mike Varey, “The Rise and Demise of the Three Block War,” *Canadian Military Journal* 10:1 (2009), 39.

introduced the defence minister and the prime minister to the idea, both of whom saw it as a powerful and visionary way to organize the Canadian military's contributions to international security. The defence section of the Martin's government's 2005 white paper on Canada's international relations reflects their conversion. The government was committed, it said, to responding to the crises in failed and failing states. The military's ability to undertake three-block operations would be "critical" to such efforts. At the same time a "whole of government" approach would be required, "bringing together military and civilian resources in a focus and coherent fashion."⁸²

That there was a good deal of wishful thinking going on in Ottawa about Canada's ability to change failed states for the better did not go unnoticed at the time. In a remarkable address given in 2006 at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Professor Denis Stairs spoke as a Canadian Cassandra. Making it clear he was talking about 3D and related concepts, he said that it seemed "that we have become excessively optimistic about our capacity to transform, in ways that we think would be beneficial, societies in which other folks live, and in which the operating norms, traditions and circumstances are very different from our own. . . We appear, that is, to have concluded that the transformations we have in mind can be accomplished in the relatively short term with the help of reasonably modest investment applied, not in an imperial (whether of the heavy version or the 'light') but in a liberal spirit. . . The premise is that by pulling several levers at once—manipulating a number of variables simultaneously—we can fundamentally transform the society, the polity, the economy, even the culture of the communities we target."⁸³

The Dutch, too had grown confident about their ability to mount a complex intervention in a failed state using the professional, expeditionary armed forces they had been building since the 1990s. This was a turnaround. During the peace enforcement operations of the 1990s the Dutch military had resisted getting involved in civil affairs and local development, seeing this as "unwanted 'mission creep.'"⁸⁴ Yet they were obliged to during their participation in the 1999 NATO-led mission in Kosovo. They wound up there in charge of an area where the local administration had collapsed,

⁸²Canada, Minister of National Defence, *Canada's International Policy Statement, A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, Defence, (Ottawa, 2005).

⁸³Stairs, "Menace of General Ideas."

⁸⁴Arthur ten Cate, "Voor het winnen van de vrede: 1(NL) PRT Pol-e Khomri in historisch perspectief," *Militaire Spectator* 175:6 (2006), 267.

along with not only the police, fire, and garbage departments, but also the delivery of water, gas, and electricity. The Dutch military had no choice but to get the province up and running. Afterwards, The Hague slowly came to the realization that not only was such involvement in civil affairs and development going to be an essential element of modern peace enforcement, but that in Kosovo it had learned a good deal about how to do so. The same was true of the Dutch mission in Iraq, where, despite the official downplaying of development, the military was engaged in activities related to “energy supplies, public security, irrigation, bridges and roads, education, health care, agriculture, industry, water supply, electricity, and sewerage.”⁸⁵

In 2004 the Netherlands took up the opportunity to try out its developing capability for a complex intervention by agreeing to start up and lead temporarily a PRT in Afghanistan’s quiescent Baghlan province. The mission consisted at the start of 130 personnel and grew to over 220, overwhelmingly military. The commander was provided with a political advisor, drawn from the foreign ministry. During their two years in Baghlan, the Dutch worked on urging good governance upon local officials, training policemen, and disarming the forces of local warlords. It engaged in small-scale development projects and, thanks to a budget of 5 million euros provided by the Development Cooperation Department bigger ones, too, most notably a local television station. Then the Dutch handed the PRT off to the Hungarians—but not before the Dutch government had learned at least one important lesson. The original intent had not been for the PRT to engage in any larger-scale development projects. The Development Cooperation Department had preferred to fund solely national projects in Afghanistan, in the assumption that Baghlan would simply get its share. The political advisor launched a successful pitch to the minister for development cooperation to change this policy while sitting next to her in her car while she was visiting Afghanistan.

While the Baghlan mission was underway, a Dutch special operations task group of about 250 personnel, built upon a company from the army’s Special Forces Regiment, was deployed to Kandahar in 2005. It was sent in response to a request from the US that had been on the table since 2002 and represented a noteworthy departure from the approach that The Hague had taken to peace enforcement, inasmuch as the commandos were being made expressly available for, and were expected to take part in, land

⁸⁵ Brocades Zaalberg and ten Cate, *Missie in al Muthanna*, 243.

combat. The task force was placed under the operational command of the US Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), although, as is standard practice in such cases within the alliance, command still rested in national hands. The Balkenende cabinet apparently felt politically free to take this step because the war in Afghanistan appeared to have largely been won, and it entailed a very limited commitment of an elite special forces unit that deserved a chance to use its combat skills. Nonetheless, the deployment was not entirely without controversy. The opposition Labour Party (PvdA) voted against it in the *Tweede Kamer*, a warning to the centre-right Balkenende cabinet as it considered throughout 2005 a much larger commitment in southern Afghanistan that a larger land combat mission could lead to a sharp public dispute. The commandos' mission continued until 2006. Kandahar, as it had been during the brief Canadian deployment there in 2002, was still relatively quiet in 2005-2006. Although the deployment there of the army commandos had "firmly begun as a war operation and had the potential to be one ... in fact no combat operations took place, and no offensive operations against the OMF."⁸⁶

The course of events in Baghlan were all encouraging to the Dutch government. While the mission was still underway, and with NATO planning the expansion of ISAF missions in Afghanistan, the ministers responsible for international relations (the ministers of foreign affairs, defence, and development cooperation, and the associate minister for economic affairs) issued a statement in early 2005 summarizing what the government had learned about reconstruction after armed conflict. The most important conclusion it had drawn in recent years was the same one that the Martin government had embraced in its foreign policy document, that had been issued at about the same time. As the Dutch ministers put it, "Reconstruction is a complex process that requires an integrated approach in which the following aspects need to be recognized: security and stability, governance, and social-economic development."⁸⁷ 3D, in other words. While it is wise not to read too much into such documents, it still is noteworthy that the Dutch statement on reconstruction had been signed by all three ministers after it emerged by the interdepartmental and cabinet process. The Martin international policy statement included a separate document on development

⁸⁶Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 226.

⁸⁷"Wederopbouw na gewapend conflict," Brief van de ministers voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking, van buitenlandse zaken en van defensie, en de staatssecretaris van economische zaken, 22 March 2005, TK 2004-2005, 30075, no. 1.

signed by the CIDA minister and making just a brief reference to “whole of government” cooperation with the military.

Of course thinking that one has the special skills to do a job well usually is not enough to make one want to do it. There were a number of reasons the Dutch and the Canadians had for wanting to go to southern Afghanistan. It was in no one’s interest for Afghanistan to fall into complete turmoil or, worse, back into the hands of the Taliban; trying to prevent it was the right thing to do. There was, in particular, a moral debt to the Afghans. As Martin puts it in his memoirs, “We were in Afghanistan for the right reason and having been part of displacing the Taliban regime, we continued to have a duty to help construct something sturdy to replace it.”⁸⁸ That was true for the Dutch, too.

One can make a convincing case that the physical security of Canada and the Netherlands continued to be served by making sure that al-Qaeda could never again use Afghanistan as a home base. Martin did so in his own section of the 2005 white paper: “As the boundary between the domestic and international continues to blur, Canada’s defence and security policy must change. Today’s front lines stretch from the streets of Kabul and the rail lines of Madrid to our Canadian cities.”⁸⁹ Dutch official sometimes made similar statements. But they do not seem to have believed it very much. In both the Dutch and Canadian cases it was at best, a background motivation.

Just about all accounts of the decision-making in Ottawa and The Hague during 2005 emphasize how a high profile role in southern Afghanistan was caught up in the never-ending Dutch and Canadian search for international influence and status. The Martin government (to cite just one Canadian account) “did it not only because it was the correct and courageous decision, but also because they wanted the world to know that Canada had arrived back on the international scene.”⁹⁰ The Dutch defence and foreign ministries (to cite just one Dutch analysis) were agreed that “Taking part in the mission in southern Afghanistan would enhance Dutch influence on the international level.” Moreover, the foreign ministry felt that “It would give the Netherlands an opportunity to create a profile for itself internationally,

⁸⁸Paul Martin, *Hell or High Water: My Life In and Out of Politics* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008), 391–92.

⁸⁹Canada, Prime Minister, *Canada’s International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, Overview (Ottawa, 2005), 12.

⁹⁰Granatstein and Bercuson, “Lessons Learned?” 22.

project the country into the ‘major league of countries,’ improve its international position, and increase its influence.”⁹¹

In the Canadian case there was a twist. Canadian officials believed that the Canada-US relationship had been damaged by Ottawa’s decisions to stay out of both the Iraq war and the US ballistic missile defence (BMD) program, and hoped to repair the damage with a significant commitment in southern Afghanistan. This was odd, inasmuch as the Americans were no more set on Canadian involvement in missile defence than they had been on Canadian participation in the invasion of Iraq. In neither case did they give any indication of wanting to punish Canada. Martin says in his memoirs that he paid no attention to the worries about the bilateral relationship in considering the Kandahar mission and gives a convincing reason why: “In these cases, as in many others in my experience, the Canadian officials who deal directly with their American counterparts are often spooked by the dreadful consequences as they have been led to imagine and so it was with Iraq.”⁹²

The Dutch focused on another form of damage limitation. It was not to their relationship with Washington, which was in excellent shape, but to the North Atlantic alliance. The split in the alliance over Iraq between Washington and the Franco-German axis in which the Netherlands ultimately chose for Washington had been especially painful and Dutch decision makers were eager to put it well in the past. Afghanistan was the war that everyone agreed on and the expansion of ISAF was a NATO project that just about all the allies were engaged in to some measure. As Emile de Bont, a Dutch diplomat, later recalled, his government saw putting ISAF on a firmer basis as “the first step towards repairing the deep split in the alliance that had arisen from the political controversy over Iraq.”⁹³ The Hague was also mindful that Afghanistan had turned into a test case of the alliance’s developing out-of-area capabilities. Failure there would be a significant setback for NATO. Presumably, the Canadians had these considerations in mind, too.

It may be easy to overlook the group dynamics within the alliance that affected Canadian and Dutch decision-making. As Ottawa, The Hague, and

⁹¹ Lenny Hazelbag, “Political decision making of the mission in Uruzgan, a reconstruction,” NL-ARMS, 2009, 253-254. Available <http://hbo-kennisbank.uvt.nl/cgi/nda/show.cgi?fid=1481>.

⁹² Martin, *Hell or High Water*, 391.

⁹³ Emile de Bont, *Onder Taliban en Krijgsheren: Nederland en de Oorlog in Afghanistan* (Nieuw Amsterdam Uigever, 2011), 194–95.

London each moved closer to a decision to deploy in the south, it became easier for the others to do so, too, knowing that they would have reliable partners in the region. The Canadians and the Dutch began in early 2005 to discuss with each other going to the south. The Dutch needed more than just partners in the region, though; they also wanted one in Uruzgan itself. This condition was met in June 2005 when Australia agreed to send seven hundred personnel.

The Dutch defence ministry also wanted the mission because it thought it would be good for the armed forces. The military still saw itself as being in the process of change from a conscript force devoted to the defence of the homeland into one that was a professional and expeditionary force. A tough mission in Afghanistan could be the next step in that process. As Major Lenny Hazelbag of the Royal Netherlands Army has summarized the defence ministry's thinking about this in 2005, "The services had already gained experience in the 1990s and the beginning of the present century in various missions in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq, but the mission in southern Afghanistan was to be the 'toughest since Korea'... Surely this would be a good experience for the armed forces."⁹⁴

It is tempting to conclude that the Canadian military, especially its chief, was similarly motivated. The robust mission in Kandahar dovetailed well with Hillier's personal campaign to reinvigorate the Canadian military that he, in effect, began when he sold Martin and Graham on the notion of the three-block war. With Canada in Kandahar, Hillier seized the moment to press for major changes and acquisitions which in normal circumstances would have been delayed, canceled or scaled back by the political leadership. He launched a "transformation agenda" that included the creation of a special command within the Canadian Forces to support operations such as the one in Kandahar. He said in 2008 that "we have been able to use Afghanistan as a lever to change fundamentally in a microcosm of time things that would have taken us a decade to get at."⁹⁵ He became enormously visible in public, more so than any of his predecessors clearly with the goal of changing the image of the Canadian military into that of a fighting force. Some Canadians began to talk about "Hillier's war."

In other words, Hillier believed that the mission was a good experience for the Canadian Armed Forces, too. Nonetheless, all this activity *after* the mission was decided on still does not prove that Hillier wanted to go

⁹⁴Hazelbag, "Political Decision-Making," 253.

⁹⁵Interview with Hillier, "Transforming Force," *Vanguard*, April 2008.

to Kandahar at the time the decision was made. For the moment there is no getting around the fact that he insists, contrary to the Martin (and Stein and Lang) account, that he supported staying in Kabul. Willis notes that “Every soldier yearns to take on challenging missions, but Canada’s generals were not desperate.”⁹⁶

Martin and Hillier agree on at least one thing, however. Martin says, “I don’t think anyone, including me, expected the Taliban resurgence that Canadian troops encountered when they moved to Kandahar.”⁹⁷ Hillier puts it in almost the same words. “Nobody predicted the resurgence of the Taliban... It came as a complete surprise.”⁹⁸ The surprise extended down the line. Granatstein and Bercuson point out “that everyone from the minister down to the battle group commander were ultimately shocked at the intensity and complexity of the fighting and the difficulties of the mission.”⁹⁹

Still, the Canadian government knew that Kandahar was going to be a rougher mission than earlier ones in Afghanistan and elsewhere, probably involving Canadian casualties, and by the end of 2005 it had so informed the public. It is worth going into just how this was done in some detail, in order to compare it to the Dutch government’s ill-considered campaign to explain and defend the Uruzgan mission largely as a “reconstruction” mission. Graham later characterized his approach as to describing Kandahar as to the public as “peacekeeping heavy.”¹⁰⁰ This “peacekeeping heavy” theme can be first be seen in his testimony before a parliamentary committee in May 2005, shortly after he had announced the Kandahar mission. “I would like to point out,” he said, to what extent peacekeeping operations are different today than those we carried out in the past, especially in Cyprus, in Golan Heights or places like that, where the situation is stable. Today, we intervene in unstable, dangerous situations which require combat-ready troops, troops that can defend themselves.”¹⁰¹

Graham was annoyed that Hillier was grabbing the headlines in the summer of 2005, potentially ruining his nuanced approach. In one media interview, Hillier had said that being a soldier meant, “you go out and bayonet somebody. We are not the Public Service of Canada. We are not

⁹⁶Willis, “Unexpected War,” 1000.

⁹⁷Martin, *Hell or High Water*, 395.

⁹⁸Quoted in Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 289.

⁹⁹Granatstein and Bercuson, “Lessons Learned?” 23.

¹⁰⁰Quoted in Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 200.

¹⁰¹House of Commons, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, 16 May 2005.

another department. We are the Canadian Forces and our job is to kill people.” In Afghanistan, he said, the Canadian military was going to go after “detestable scumbags and murderers.”¹⁰² Graham was prepared to talk tough too, though. In response to a question, he told an October 2005 press conference in the Afghan capital that the Kandahar mission “will be much more dangerous than the one here in Kabul.” It would be “more in the nature of a combat mission.” The Canadian military would “meet in the field” those who sought to destabilize Afghanistan, “and destroy them.”¹⁰³

Later in 2005, the minister went out into the country to defend the mission on what Canadian reporters called at the time his “body bags tour.” One of the speeches he gave was at the University of British Columbia in November. Perhaps in response to Hillier’s emphasis on bayonetting, he tried just a bit of the old “Canadian touch.” A British general had told him, he said, “that the Canadian troops are appreciated by their NATO allies because of their willingness to stop and help, or extend a patrol when needed, and how this is an inspiration and encouragement to other members of the ISAF mission to get out and actively engage the population, not necessarily a natural reaction in other military cultures.” The rest of the speech was tough, though, and blunt. “Canadians should be under no illusion,” Graham said. “Kandahar is a very complex, challenging and dangerous environment and mission. The part of Afghanistan we are going to is among the most unstable and dangerous.” There was indeed a body bag warning. The Canadian soldiers going to Kandahar were fully aware that “this will be dangerous work with a risk of injury and the potential for casualties that come with the job... Canadians, too, must recognize this aspect of their mission and be ready to support them in every way if that occurs.”¹⁰⁴

Graham also made sure in the address that the Canadian government would not fall into the kind of linguistic and conceptual trap from which the Netherlands later would have a hard time escaping. Was the Kandahar mission peacekeeping or peacemaking? “This in my view is a rather abstract and academic debate and it obscures the reality of today’s operations. Each mission is unique and our mission blends many elements, including peacekeeping and combat.” To which he notably added, “And if you have

¹⁰²Quoted in Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 199, and CBC News, 15 July 2005.

¹⁰³“Transcript: National Defence Minister Bill Graham Participates in a Teleconference While in Afghanistan,” 12 October 2005.

¹⁰⁴Graham, “The Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan.”

any doubts about the need to be ready for combat, ask the Dutch about Srebrenica.”¹⁰⁵

Graham never mentioned the word “war” and it apparently never was used by any other senior Canadian official during this period, including Hillier. Moreover, Graham clearly did not want to abandon entirely the applicability of the word “peacekeeping.” Yet by the time the new Kandahar mission began, after what Graham and Hillier had said, any Canadian who thought that it would be a binoculars and blue helmets operation without combat was just not paying attention.

Pace Hillier, it is not quite true that “nobody” predicted the resurgence of the Taliban. The Dutch military intelligence service, the MIVD, did. Its pessimistic October 2005 report on Uruzgan shook decision-makers in The Hague and Ottawa. While its contents remain classified, various researchers have been able to piece together a picture, based on interviews with those who have seen the text. It contained at least three worrying conclusions: there would be Dutch casualties; Uruzgan was potentially the most dangerous of the southern provinces; and Dutch forces could be faced there with what the report specifically called “*een guerrilla*,” that is, “a small war.”¹⁰⁶ This reinforced warnings that the Dutch commando forces in southern Afghanistan had been sending about a “deteriorating security situation.”¹⁰⁷

At the end of October, General Berlijn presented his formal military advice to Henk Kamp, the right-wing (VVD) minister of defence in the Balkenende cabinet. According to Hazelbag, Berlijn “described the mission as challenging, but feasible and sound, an assessment that seemed to be at odds with the critical MIVD report.”¹⁰⁸ For Kamp, the dichotomy between Berlijn’s comparatively upbeat recommendation and the pessimistic MIVD report (the text of which he also received) was too much. Instead of approving the mission, he drew up a list of 16 conditions which needed to be acted upon first. The most important of these involved security guarantees from the allies in case Dutch troops in Kandahar were in danger, and the treatment by the Afghan government of prisoners handed over to it by Dutch forces.

As the defence and foreign ministries sought to meet Kamp’s conditions, the defence ministry also put the MIVD under pressure to soften its assess-

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 230.

¹⁰⁸ Hazelbag, “Political Decision-Making,” 256.

ment, or “take its sharp edges off.”¹⁰⁹ The MIVD stuck to its pessimistic tone, including the warning of Dutch casualties and its description of Uruzgan as the most dangerous province. But it agreed to scrap in the report’s next iteration the word “*guerrilla*.” It was this second version to which members of parliament later were given access (with some additional deletions) once their deliberations were underway.

Kamp’s setting of the sixteen conditions, and other signs that the Dutch were hesitating in October and November, led to worries in NATO that the rollout of ISAF forces in southern Afghanistan, of which the Dutch were to be an integral part in Uruzgan and at RC-South headquarters, was in jeopardy. This was especially a concern to Ottawa, some of whose forces were already on the ground in Kandahar. Kamp told Graham about the MIVD reporting. As later Graham recalled, “The Dutch were much more cautious, their intelligence was much gloomier than ours. Henk used to say to me, ‘Our intelligence is not as rosy as what you’re telling me.’”¹¹⁰

Stein and Lang report that National Defence Headquarters insisted that the gloomy Dutch intelligence in the fall of 2005 was “just a manifestation of the ‘Srebrenica’ syndrome.” They also attribute the term itself to Hillier, and seem to imply that he also at the time dismissed the Dutch intelligence reporting. “The Dutch were shell-shocked by their experience Hillier explained, and that was why they were so nervous about Uruzgan [sic].”¹¹¹ But things are not so clear. Hillier could have been reacting not to the MIVD report but Kamp’s insistence that there be security guarantees for the Dutch forces in southern Afghanistan, a concern that can be indeed traced back to the Dutch experience at Srebrenica. With all this talk of Srebrenica in National Defence Headquarters that fall, it is no surprise that it made it into Graham’s speech at the University of British Columbia.

In early December 2005 the Dutch foreign minister, Ben Bot, announced that, in his view, sufficient guarantees had been received from the allies and the Afghans concerning the protection of Dutch troops and the protection of prisoners. General Berlijn then formally presented the mission to cabinet where it was backed by the foreign and defence ministers. After the cabinet approved it at the end of the month, it found itself in a politically tricky position securing the parliamentary endorsement that was needed and, by extension, defending it to the public. The caucus of the smallest

¹⁰⁹ Interview.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 207.

¹¹¹ Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 207, 205.

partner in the coalition government, the centre-left D'66 party refused to endorse the mission. Moreover, the caucus of the largest party, the Christian Democrats, insisted that the mission could only go ahead if it obtained a two-thirds vote in the *Tweede Kamer*. This meant that it needed the support of the Labour Party (PvdA), the very party that had voted against the land combat mission of the commandos earlier in the year.

Article 100 of the Dutch constitution requires the cabinet to notify the *Tweede Kamer* when it is deploying the armed forces. Then, as a matter of practice, the cabinet's notification, called an "article 100 letter," triggers debate and voting in parliament. The Balkenende cabinet submitted its letter on Uruzgan at the end of December 2005. The lengthy document was later criticized for omitting the word "war" while including the word "reconstruction" fifty-one times. It also did not include the words "guerrilla," "insurgency," or "counterinsurgency," although, as will be discussed in the next section, it undoubtedly in several spots was based on concepts taken from counterinsurgency doctrine. Nonetheless, it still contained several blunt warnings about the nature of the Uruzgan mission that were as direct as anything in Bill Graham's speech text on Kandahar the month before. At one point in it the cabinet underlined that "The risks associated with this mission are considerable." It involved a "deployment to an area where Dutch troops will engage the OMF." and "it cannot be excluded that there will be Dutch losses in combat operations."¹¹² Anyone who read this statement at the time and who still thought that Dutch forces were just going to do some peacekeeping with development in Uruzgan was not paying attention.

But who really reads such documents, even when they are shorter than this lengthy one? The impression the public got of the impending mission came not from the article 100 letter but from the media utterances of government spokesmen, and there the emphasis was considerably different. Especially with a view of keeping the support of Labour, the Balkenende government rolled out one more time a calibrated approach of being alongside but not like the Americans.

After the release of the article 100 letter, General Berlijn played a visible role in the effort as he sought to ensure parliamentary and public support for the mission. Where Hillier had sought to toughen the image of the Canadian military going to Kandahar, Berlijn sought to soften, hauling out a legacy from Iraq. The forces being sent to Uruzgan would use the "Dutch

¹¹²Brief van de ministers van buitenlandse zaken, van defensie, en voor ontwikkelings-samenwerking, 22 December 2005, TK 2005-2006, 27 925, no. 193.

approach,” he said (using the English words) in an address that was widely reported in the press; it was, he also said, “based on respect and understanding for the cultural situation.”¹¹³ He followed it up with a press interview in which he sought specifically to distinguish between US and Dutch tactics. The American way had not worked. The time had come for “digging wells, helping get the police on its feet, job opportunity projects. We Dutch have shown elsewhere that we can do just that. We know that you can’t just go rampaging through the streets in tanks with the tank hatches closed.”¹¹⁴

Cabinet members sought to draw a sharp distinction between Operation Enduring Freedom, which they characterized as an anti-terrorist combat mission led by the too-aggressive Americans, and the multinational ISAF, where the emphasis was on reconstruction. To be sure, there were attempts to puncture the claim. When the debate over the mission got underway in the *Tweede Kamer* the parliamentary leader of the D’66 party asked the government the very good question, “But do you really think that in situations where foreign forces engage in combat the populace in Uruzgan will be able to see a difference between the Americans in Enduring Freedom and the Dutch, who sometimes will need to undertake offensive action as part of the ISAF mission? ... Isn’t combat combat?”¹¹⁵

Such questioning was to no avail, however, especially where it really counted in the short run, namely with the Labour Party. Its leader pronounced himself especially impressed with the distinction being made between the combat mission of the OEF and ISAF’s reconstruction mission. When the vote was taken on 2 February 2006, Labour supported the mission. While public opinion polls showed the country just about evenly divided, there was a substantial majority in the house, 127 out of 150 members. The Labour members were not the only ones convinced by the notion of a reconstruction mission. Later in 2006, a platoon commander in the first rotation of Dutch forces in Uruzgan recorded how surprised he was to be under rocket fire—“I seem to have had in the Netherlands another, entirely incorrect picture of the day-to-day reality in Uruzgan”—and in danger while patrolling—“The mission was sold to us as a reconstruction mission.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³“Zonder troepen blijft de nodige hulp uit; Hoogste militair pleit voor missie Uruzgan,” NRC Handelsblad, 10 January 2006.

¹¹⁴“Dick Berlijn: Soms moet je meeveren,” Elsevier.nl 18 January 2006.

¹¹⁵TK Handelingen, 2005-2006, no. 45, pag 3013-35, 2 February 2006.

¹¹⁶Quoted in J.M.H. Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*: “Getuigenissen van een missie,” 2012, 32, 37.

Stalemate and Counterinsurgency in Kandahar and Uruzgan

When the Canadians began to arrive in Kandahar in 2005, and the Dutch in Uruzgan the next year, they shared the same, basic, ISAF-endorsed concept for their respective provinces: establish, and then build upon what were called “Afghan Development Zones” (ADZs). As Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, commander of the first battle group in the new Kandahar mission later recalled, the Canadian ADZ “incorporated the triangular area around Kandahar City and foresaw massive coordinated initiatives for enhance security, governance, and development in this small area to create a ‘shining example’ of political, economic and social success that other districts would quickly want to emulate by evicting Taliban forces and transforming from poppy crop to legitimate crop economies.”¹¹⁷ The Dutch set out to establish two such zones in Uruzgan, a primary one in the area around Tarin Kowt, the provincial capital, and a secondary one around the town of Deh Rawod. Their plan, as summarized by Sebastiaan Rietjens, was to “establish and expand the ADZs, and to identify and develop future ADZs. The next step was to establish a connection between the ADZs both within and around Uruzgan.”¹¹⁸ There was an agreement among the ISAF countries not to discuss the ADZ’s in public while they were being rolled out, lest it look like a reprise of the Soviet strategy of hunkering down in key cities.

¹¹⁷Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-Insurgency fight in Afghanistan* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 51.

¹¹⁸Sebastiaan Rietjens, “Between Expectations and Reality: The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan,” in Nik Hynek and Péter Marton, eds., *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2012), 72.

The ADZ has been called a “textbook COIN concept.”¹¹⁹ It does indeed bear a strikingly strong resemblance to the “ink spot” or “oil stain” of classic counterinsurgency theory, and almost certainly was inspired by it. As Hope also recalls, the ADZ concept “originated in General Hillier’s ISAF Headquarters during his tenure in command of ISAF in 2004.” Hope was on the staff there and personally involved with the project. The concept, which he calls a “counterinsurgency methodology,” was “fully developed by a group of Canadian staff officers” before being handed off to the British general and his staff, who next took over ISAF would roll out the ISAF mission in southern Afghanistan.¹²⁰

Despite the adoption of the ADZ concept with its overtones of counterinsurgency, the Canadians did not think they were sending their forces off on a counterinsurgency campaign in 2005. The word “counterinsurgency” was not used by senior Canadian officials publicly to describe the Kandahar mission at its outset; they stuck to terms such as “3D” and “whole of government.” It is of course conceivable that they were hiding the truth. But Hillier was never hesitant about such matters, especially during the summer of 2005 when he was talking about bayonetting and taking out despicable scumbags. A more convincing explanation is that in Ottawa the mission in 2005 largely was thought of not as a counterinsurgency operation but as Graham originally did, namely as “peacekeeping heavy.” Or, at worst, it might be “a short, sharp, counterterrorism fight with some aid thrown in.”¹²¹ This is borne out by an internal study by the Chief Review Services of the Canadian Forces that at one point looked at the overall instructions the Kandahar PRT had been given. It found (and regretted) that the PRT had not been told to conduct a counterinsurgency mission. In particular, it reported that it had “not found linkages to any existing NATO or ABCA counterinsurgency doctrine, or indeed to any emerging links to CF counterinsurgency thinking, in the background documents for the employment of CF personnel in Kandahar.”¹²²

There are indications that the Dutch officials at various levels began to be influenced by counterinsurgency theory in 2005-2006. One of The Hague’s sources of information on the ground was the Dutch commandos

¹¹⁹Francis Conliffe, “Military Development and Diplomacy in Afghanistan,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9:4 (2009), 100.

¹²⁰Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman*, 51.

¹²¹Brewster, *Savage War*, 136.

¹²²Chief Review Services, “Evaluation of CF/DND Participation.”

based in Kandahar, whose tasks included accompanying several fact finding missions in the summer and fall of 2005 as ISAF prepared its rollout in the south. Afterwards, according to Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, they sought in several reports not only to warn The Hague about the dangers posed by the deteriorating security environment in southern Afghanistan, but also urged it “to prepare a campaign plan according to the principles of counterinsurgency.”¹²³ Yet it is not clear that the commandos actually understood those principles; they may well have been invoking the term as a war fighting or combat concept simply to strengthen their warning that the Uruzgan task force should be prepared to fight.

A Dutch diplomat who served in Afghanistan, Emiel de Bont, sees signs in the article 100 letter of December 2005 that counterinsurgency doctrine had penetrated at the top or at least those who wrote documents for the top. Specifically, the letter mentions several of the tasks that are inherent in the classic counterinsurgency approach: winning the support and acceptance of the local population, expanding the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Afghan government and training Afghan security forces. Yet the word “counterinsurgency” is still entirely absent in the document. According to De Bont, “It remained politically impractical to call it like it was.” He sees it as having been a problem with the possible translations of the term “counterinsurgency” into Dutch, all of which have unfortunate associations, one with the suppression of the Dutch resistance by the Germans during World War II, another with the putting down of Latin American liberation movements by right-wing dictators.¹²⁴ This argument about translation is not entirely persuasive. Unlike the French, the Dutch have little problem working with English words and often adopting them right into their language. There is no better example than the term, “Dutch approach.” This is pretty much what eventually happened to the words “counterinsurgency” and “COIN.” Moreover, with his musing on translation, De Bont might be recalling a period after 2005-06, when the Dutch and other ISAF militaries started to think and talk a lot about in public about counterinsurgency theory.

Yet De Bont was clearly on to something with respect to how the word itself was understood at first in the Netherlands. It seems likely that, to the extent Dutch officials were thinking about counterinsurgency—if not in 2005 then during the next two years when they clearly began to turn to

¹²³Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 232.

¹²⁴De Bont, *Onder Taliban en Krijgsheren*, 217.

counterinsurgency theory—they often avoided the word in both English and Dutch because they worried that it would undermine their case that Uruzgan largely would be a reconstruction effort and not a combat mission. Those worries would have been justified: later, in the public debates, some sought reassurance that the Dutch forces would undertake a sophisticated “hearts and minds” strategy rather than counterinsurgency, understood to be simply killing bad guys as part of counter-terrorism, was what the Americans had done. It may even be this misunderstanding of counterinsurgency as mainly killing bad guys was what the Dutch commandos were thinking of when they urged The Hague in the summer of 2005 to do it. And De Bont is certainly right that a taboo attached itself to the word at the start of the Dutch mission.

Just as Dutch officials were more aware than the Canadians of the growing dangers of the insurgency in southern Afghanistan, they also were just a little more aware of what a counterinsurgency approach might offer in combatting it. They bit their tongue about it in ways Hillier probably would never have, making it hard now to trace their thinking about it at the time. Nonetheless, the use of counterinsurgency notions here and there publicly by senior Dutch officials in 2005 and 2006 seems to be little more than cherry-picking of terms and concepts by decision-makers and document drafters at somewhat lower levels who were just beginning to learn about counterinsurgency theory. As Brocades Zaalberg concludes, “The Netherlands did not consciously approach the Uruzgan mission at the political-strategic level as a counterinsurgency mission. To be sure several classical lessons of counterinsurgency were slipped from underneath into the operational concepts, partially by studious officers.”¹²⁵ The same can be said of Canada, with LCol Hope and his colleagues slipping them in from above at ISAF headquarters in Kabul.

Likewise, the Canadian military did not turn to counterinsurgency theory when it was getting the Kandahar PRT off the ground in 2005-2006. Looking back from a nearby vantage point in 2007, the Chief Review Services was struck by just how ad hoc and unformed the arrangements at the operational level for the PRT had been at its start. “There was an initial lack of coherent vision of what the KPRT was meant to accomplish and how objectives would be attained. Complicating this lack of a coherent vision was the fact that within the CF, the KPRT was never universally viewed as

¹²⁵Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, “‘Hearts and Minds’ of ‘Search and Destroy?’ Leren van Klassieke Counter-insurgency,” *Militaire Spectator*, 176, 7/8 2007, 299.

a key counterinsurgency tool, and it doesn't appear in any CF doctrine."¹²⁶ That doctrine itself was still under development in 2007. The CF was beginning to learn about, and how to do counterinsurgency, as best it could, under the pressure of the deteriorating security environment in Kandahar.

The Canadians had been expecting so benign a security environment in Kandahar that they originally intended to model the PRT there on one that the British had led in the quiescent northern province of Mazar-e-Shariff. One of its central features was that a diplomat was the putative head of the team, with the military commander in a subordinate, supporting position. When the Canadians arrived in Kandahar in the summer of 2005 they realized that the security situation had deteriorated so much that the military commander would need to retain the lead in all security-related matters, while sharing responsibilities with the civilian director for the overall direction of the mission. One of the principal tasks of the civilian director was expected to be mentoring the new, modern governor of the province recently appointed by President Karzai. Beside the civilian director, among the original members of the PRT were two other diplomats, one CIDA official and two members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who, for their part, would train and mentor the local Afghan National Police. At the same time, the Canadian military saw the mentoring of the Afghan army as one of its important tasks in Kandahar and established an Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) for that purpose.

The security situation only got worse, resulting in the military's taking an even greater role. While deploying to Kandahar, the Canadians came under a series of intermittent vehicle-borne suicide bombing attacks. The most damaging of these occurred just as the Canadian battle group under LCol Hope was arriving. The first civilian director of the PRT, Glyn Berry, a diplomat, was killed in an attack on 15 January. Development efforts were set back as civilian Canadian officials were then confined to Kandahar airfield, leaving Canadian-sponsored development activities "outside the wire" to soldiers and Afghan civilians. Hillier was infuriated by the decision. "It meant that 3D was a farce," he claimed in his memoirs, directing much of his ire at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. "We went from having an active and engaged senior diplomat in the PRT to having just one person under orders not to leave the safety of the PRT camp under any circumstances. That made Foreign Affairs pretty much completely ineffectual at doing their jobs and set our operations in

¹²⁶Chief Review Services report.

Kandahar back a minimum of two years... Two of three elements of the government's 3D approach, defence, diplomacy and development, were now largely out of picture."¹²⁷

"Whole of government" had turned out to be more difficult than the Martin government had optimistically expected. That third "D," for "development" suffered not only from the sequestration of the civilians. There were deeper issues with CIDA and its relationship with the military. Caroline Leprince writes that the development "had initially expressed resistance in joining the PRT and work in an integrated fashion with the military." When nonetheless instructed by the Martin government to do so, "CIDA chose to send a small contingent and mostly junior officers to the PRT."¹²⁸

It needs to immediately added, though, that CIDA, like the Netherlands Development Cooperation Department, tended not to send employees into the field. It had a tradition of working with NGOs and recipient countries. Sending its people to work on a PRT was a far greater break with culture, its practices, and its procedures than it was for the military. Just as problematic was the clash in priorities between CIDA and the military. As Leprince notes, "CIDA's vision consisted of investing in long-term development and building the institutions of the Afghan state; the results would thus only be visible in years, if not decades."¹²⁹ The military, faced with a deteriorating situation on the ground, wanted projects that would be immediately visible, in order to demonstrate progress to and win the support of the local populace. That lack of visible progress caught the attention of the Senlis Council, a new development think tank on whose advisory board Lloyd Axworthy sat. Warning in early 2007 that "Canada's incoherent development strategy is failing to address even the basic needs of the Kandahar's people and this failure is increasing support for the insurgency," it urged Ottawa to relieve CIDA of the responsibility of providing aid in Kandahar and to appoint a special envoy to take charge.¹³⁰

Rather than pointing the finger directly at CIDA Gavin Buchan, (Glyn Berry's successor in Kandahar and thereafter head of the Afghanistan desk at DFAIT), later identified a structural vacuum in Kandahar as having afflicted Canada's efforts at the start: "When Canada began its deployment,

¹²⁷Hillier, *Soldier First*, 399.

¹²⁸Caroline Leprince, "The Canadian-led Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team Experience, A Success Story?" *International Journal* 68:2 (2013), 366.

¹²⁹Ibid, 365.

¹³⁰The Senlis Council, "Policy Paper: Canada in Afghanistan: Charting a New Course to Complete the Mission," Ottawa, May 2007.

the varying degrees of delegated authority and the incompatible reporting chains meant that most coordination was either worked out informally on the ground or referred to Ottawa. There was no option of in-theatre coordination about the working level because the civilian departments had not deployed any in-theater headquarters capability.¹³¹ While CIDA was a notably centralized department, with decisions largely being made in Ottawa, the other two civilian departments, DFAIT and the RCMP, also put significant limits on their employees in the field. Astonishingly, there was no unified civilian-military action plan. “Ultimately,” according to Elissa Golberg, the senior diplomat who later would be given a major role in fixing the bureaucratic relationships in Kandahar, “even though they lived and worked in the same province, the military and civilian staff did not possess the same analysis or have the same interlocutors, and were not working towards the same objectives to enable the government of Afghanistan to extend its reach and influence in Kandahar.”¹³²

The Chief of Review Services report agrees with Buchan about how well the mission worked at the lowest level at the start. It said that the KPRT had profited from “the strong working relationships established by the KPRT participants who want to ‘get the job done.’” It pointed to another structural vacuum, this one back in Ottawa, where there was no mechanism that effectively could deal with interdepartmental differences, especially between CIDA and DND, and provide a harmonized framework for budgeting and coordinating development projects. The Chief Review Services phrased it carefully and bureaucratically when describing this second vacuum: “Challenges exist at higher levels within Canada, where interdepartmental committees and working groups have been created to facilitate policy integration and the resolution of emerging issues.”¹³³ Stein and Lang were later more direct in their description. “The 3Ds are not working well together and some are now working well alone. In Ottawa, words, like *dysfunctional*,

¹³¹Gavin Buchan, “Civil-Military Coordination: Canada’s Experience in Kandahar: 2005-2009,” in Michael Rostek and Peter Gizewski, *Security Operations in the 21st Century: Canadian Perspectives on the Comprehensive Approach* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, Queen’s Policy Studies Series, 2011), 100.

¹³²Elissa Golberg and Michael Kaduck, “Where is Headquarters? Diplomacy, Development and Defence,” in Janice Gross Stein, ed. *Diplomacy in the Digital Age: Essays in Honour of Ambassador Allan Gotlieb* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2011), 131.

¹³³Chief Review Services.

debilitated and *broken* are common descriptions of the institutions at the centre of Canadian foreign policy.”¹³⁴

Although Dutch military intelligence had been right when it warned of a *guerrilla* or “little war” or insurgency in southern Afghanistan, it was wrong when it had called Uruzgan the most dangerous province. That turned out to be Kandahar. ISAF, for its part, lent priority to Helmand province, where the British were in the lead. All that left the Canadians in a tough spot. Upon its arrival in 2006 the Canadian battalion-size task group was hopelessly small in numbers in the face of the Taliban resurgence that had broken out and was focused on Kandahar. The Afghan military and police were in no shape to accept a significant share of the burden. The Canadians then held out, largely by themselves until American reinforcements that arrived in 2009 as part of the Obama surge. Without the necessary force densities until the surge in 2009, any real spreading of the ADZ around Kandahar city and a full-fledged counterinsurgency approach in and around it were both out of the question. Major-General Jonathan Vance has summarized the Canadian situation in Kandahar during the 2006-2009 period: “The resources necessary to conduct effective counter-insurgency (COIN) operations were absent: more troops, more capacity to apply ‘civil effects’ in a timely and focused manner, more effective indigenous forces, more emphasis on civil policing capacity and so on. Without these enablers, we were left to use our sparse resources selectively to deal with the most urgent and immediate threats while building a base upon which future and better resourced COIN operations could be conducted.”¹³⁵

The most dramatic moments of the Canadian mission in Kandahar came early. During the summer of 2006 there were signs that Taliban forces were massing conventionally to threaten Kandahar city. Some have argued that these forces intended to drive the Canadians and with them both ISAF and the Karzai government’s nascent institutions right out of the city. The threat, while still acute, was not quite so grave. The Taliban hoped to move in a position where they could continually threaten the city, isolate it, and demonstrate the weakness of the national government. Brigadier-General Fraser, the RC-South commander, ordered the Canadians to undertake a major clearing operation. What resulted in September—the battle of Pashmul, better known under the name of Operation Medusa—was an “epic

¹³⁴Stein and Lang, *Unexpected War*, 260.

¹³⁵Major-General Jonathan H. Vance, foreword to Bernd Horn and Emily Spencer, eds., *No Easy Task: Fighting in Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2012), 9.

combat engagement.” It was not only “NATO’s first battle in its nearly 60 years of existence,” but also “the first deliberate, major Canadian combat offensive operation since the Korean War.”¹³⁶ It was a conventional battle, beginning with preparatory artillery and aerial bombardments, and a river crossing by two Canadian companies and ending with the Taliban abandoning their positions and melting away.

While the Dutch, newly arrived in Uruzgan, declined to join directly in Op Medusa’s clearing operations (to the irritation of the Canadians), they did support the Canadians in three ways during the battle. Approximately 100 Dutch soldiers relieved Canadian forces holding Forward Operating Base Martello, and wound up repelling two Taliban attacks on it. On the periphery of the battle area, a Dutch-Danish force screened off access between Kandahar and Helmand provinces. And the powerful PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzer that the Dutch had with them was used against Taliban positions. According to the journalist Joeri Boom, the Netherlands defence ministry downplayed the involvement of its troops in combat in order not to spoil the image of the reconstruction mission.¹³⁷

Operation Medusa was a clearcut tactical victory for ISAF, at the cost of five Canadian lives. The immediate threat to the city had been lifted. NATO and the Karzai government were given a political and psychological boost. However, the Taliban were far from beaten. In a study of the battle and its aftermath, Colonel Bernd Horn has concluded that although the ISAF forces “had soundly defeated the Taliban’s attempt at concentrating forces and holding ground, they had also pushed the Taliban to evolve into a much more dangerous and difficult foe to fight. In essence, OP Medusa forced the Taliban to adopt asymmetric attacks as their operational methodology. The fight would evolve into a much more complex, frustrating and difficult war.”¹³⁸ It was one in which the Canadian would continue to be hobbled by small numbers, leaving in place the stalemate that would last until 2009. By the end of its first year in Kandahar, Canada had lost over thirty soldiers.

The Netherlands also wound up in a stalemate in Uruzgan. But it was a less dangerous stalemate, and it took a bit longer to become evident. In 2006 Uruzgan was relatively quiescent, especially when compared to Kandahar,

¹³⁶Colonel Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 13, 148.

¹³⁷Joeri Boom, *Als een Nacht met Duizend Sterren*, 62.

¹³⁸Colonel Bernd Horn, “Lesson Learned: Operation Medusa and the Taliban Epiphany,” in Horn and Spencer, *No Easy Task*, 191–92.

to which the Taliban had given priority in their attacks. Offensive operations by American and Australian Special Forces in Uruzgan outside the ink spots also made it easier for the Dutch within those spots. The task force's role, according to its Master Plan, was not defined in terms of counterinsurgency. Rather it was put in terms of helping the local authorities. As the Master Plan was worded, (in the original, tortured Dutch/Australian military English) the task force would assist "the local government in building its capacity, authority and influence and prioritising and synchronising reconstruction and development programs with assisting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in order to set the conditions for a secure and stable Uruzgan province."¹³⁹ The extent to which the task force might have begun to work early on with counterinsurgency concepts, regardless what was in the Master Plan, today still is not clear. If so, the task force was not pointing it out at the time, because of the taboo.

For the moment, it was Iraq all over again. But the Dutch had wound up in the best province in the region. In fact, and in stark contrast to the Canadians, Task Force Uruzgan suffered no combat losses that year. Reflecting on this period, the government told the *Tweede Kamer* in 2009 that "The TFU was able to create, from the beginning of the mission in 2006 to the beginning of 2007, in a short time a relatively stable climate in the ink spots around Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawod. Although there were some setbacks, the situation improved with the passage of time within the Afghan Development Zones so much that foot patrols could be undertaken and economic activity increased."¹⁴⁰ The ADZs were also expanded around the two towns. The Dutch also did OMLT work, which they were able to share after 2008 with French and Australian teams.

This idyll with images of friendly Dutch soldiers on foot fueled the notion in the Netherlands that there really might be something to the "Dutch approach." Here, too, it was Iraq all over again. When a British newspaper bought into the notion, reporting in January 2007 that "The Dutch aim to beat Taleban [sic] by inviting them round for tea" and when the *New York Times* (reprising the kind of reporting it had done on the Dutch in Iraq) chimed in with "Dutch soldiers stress restraint in Uruzgan," it created the

¹³⁹"1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force Uruzgan Master Plan," Task Force Uruzgan 2006, quoted in Rietjens, "Between Expectations and Reality," 71.

¹⁴⁰Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008, September 2009, 6.

kind of media feedback loop that regularly exists in Canada-US relations.¹⁴¹ The Brits and Americans repeated what the Dutch told them and the Dutch then took it all the more seriously because it came from foreigners.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that no Dutch forces were in combat in 2006. To prepare for, and then support the task force as it deployed, army special forces commandos were sent to Uruzgan, and given the task of reconnaissance and disruption of the enemy. Two instances of the commandos in action that year deserve mention. A June clash with the Taliban led to a platoon commander, Captain Marco Kroon, being awarded in 2009 the oldest and highest honour in the Netherlands, the *Militaire Willems-Orde*, the first time it had been given since the Korean War. In October, American, Afghan and Dutch commandos came under massive attack near the town of Wanu while searching houses for a bomb maker; a firefight resulted. The Dutch forces were being accompanied at the time by an embedded filmmaker, whose documentary on the battle was broadcast on Dutch television in November. Historically, it was the first time that the Dutch public ever had seen recent images of their soldiers in combat. These images alone might have fueled the debate over whether Uruzgan really was a reconstruction mission. Their impact was all the greater because the filmmaker included with them interviews with the commandos during which they firmly expressed “the meaning that the situation in Uruzgan had been incorrectly characterized. According to the commandos, that had been intentionally done to ‘sell’ the mission to the Dutch public and to the *Tweede Kamer*.”¹⁴²

“Whole of government” also turned out to be more difficult in 2006 than the Balkenende cabinet had expected in 2005. When the government-sponsored Netherlands Advisory Council on International Affairs looked back, it concluded that “There was clearly a problem at the start of the operation.” It was the same kind of problem that had plagued the Canadian PRT in Kandahar, at its start, namely “The PRT in Uruzgan initially received very little support on the ground from diplomats and civilian experts. As a result, the military was initially forced to take on too much responsibility for preparing and performing reconstruction tasks.”¹⁴³ The mission started with 1450 military personnel and three civilians, (a political advisor from

¹⁴¹ “Dutch aim to beat Taleban by inviting them round to tea,” *Daily Times*, 6 January 2007, and “Dutch soldiers stress restraint in Uruzgan,” *New York Times*, 6 April 2007, quoted in Klep, *Uruzgan*, 44 and 41.

¹⁴² Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 260.

¹⁴³ Netherlands Advisory Council on International Affairs, 39.

foreign affairs, a development advisor from the development cooperation agency and a cultural advisor) fewer civilians than the Kandahar PRT. A “skeleton crew,” of civilians according to Rietjens.¹⁴⁴ Although the council itself emphasized in its report that the foreign ministry and the development agency actually had a very limited pool of experts that could be deployed, the military in Uruzgan nonetheless often was frustrated. Some took it as a lack of support of the mission by the foreign ministry and development agency. Not only was the number of civilians small, but they came with their own plans and budgets. Just as in the Canadian case, there initially was no common, overall civilian-military plan.

However, strikingly unlike the Canadian case, missing in the Dutch one is the sense that there was an urgent problem that needed to be fixed, either with budgeting, or coordinating interdepartmental efforts, either in the field or back home. Above all, the budgetary lesson of Baghlan had been learned. While aid projects at the national level still were given priority by the development cooperation agency, there also was significant funding for PRT’s projects in Uruzgan. As Rietjens put it, “The TFU had the benefit of ample financial means, either directly through the military chain of command or through the civilian representatives within the TFU who were tasked to manage the funds of the Dutch embassy in Kabul.¹⁴⁵ The Australians in the task force brought their own finances, too.

“From the perspective of the coherent approach and in comparison to other countries, the Dutch contribution in Afghanistan deserves full marks,” the Advisory Council also concluded. While the council had suggestions for the improvement of the coordinating mechanisms in The Hague, which consisted of several interdepartmental bodies and a special role for the foreign ministry, these were tweaks or fairly minor adjustments. The interdepartmental body for coordinating military operations seemed to be working well. In a sceptical aside, the council inadvertently managed to underline a feature of Dutch politics and public administration that appears to have helped keep the coordination problem limited. The existing structures in The Hague had fit “seamlessly into the ‘polder model’ of Dutch governance culture: nobody is more important than anyone else, nobody has sole decision-making power and everyone helps solve the problem.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴Rietjens, “Between Expectations and Reality,” 81.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Advisory Council, 66, 38.

The “polder model” seems to have been at work among the Dutch officials in Uruzgan, as well.

Political pressure played a big role, too. The government’s ill-begotten overemphasis on “reconstruction” that so distorted public debate had a beneficial side effect. The military, the development agency, and the foreign ministry all were mindful Uruzgan had been sold as such and it put them all under heavy pressure to cooperate and not complain. As a study of the Uruzgan mission done by Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute for International Relations, concluded, the mission had been given either a “push or a curse from parliament.” Thus “party politics gave the 3D approach a head start and may have given it a dynamic it would otherwise not have gained so quickly.”¹⁴⁷

Militarily, the situation of the Dutch in Uruzgan in mid-2007 began to resemble more that of the Canadians in Kandahar. In other words, things got worse. The first Dutch combat death occurred in April when a soldier on foot patrol stepped on an IED. Just as the Taliban had massed the previous year to threaten Kandahar City, in June 2007 they massed and then caught the Dutch by surprise with a well-coordinated conventional attack by a large force on Chora, located at the eastern edge of the expanded Dutch “ink spot.” The Dutch tended to view the threat that had emerged in Chora in the same critical, almost apocalyptic terms as the Canadians had the year before. In De Bont’s words, “Here stood the prime enemy once again at the gate: hardcore Taliban, reinforced by foreign jihadis, in great numbers. This was a direct assault on the authority and credibility of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan. And thereby on all of ISAF and the government of Hamid Karzai.”¹⁴⁸

The outnumbered Dutch battle group held off the attack and launched a counterattack that, like the Canadian attack during Operation Medusa, was the army’s largest combat action since the Korean War. Air support was provided by the Dutch in-theatre Apache helicopters and F-16s. The battle group commander later compared it to a scene out of *Saving Private Ryan*: “exploding shells and bombs, incoming bullets, bomb technicians

¹⁴⁷Jair van der Lijn, “3D: ‘The Next Generation,’ Lessons Learned from Uruzgan for Future Operations,” The Hague, Netherlands Institute for International Relations, Clingendael, 2011, 32.

¹⁴⁸De Bont, *Onder Taliban en Krijgsheren*, 226.

under cover fire blowing up whole rock walls, whereupon a company would proceed house to house.”¹⁴⁹

Chora had two other similarities to the much larger Medusa counter-offensive. On the one hand, it also resulted in a tactical victory for the ISAF force, in this case with the combat loss of one Dutch soldier. The immediate threat had been lifted. The Taliban would no longer attempt a conventional assault in the province and would resort to asymmetrical attacks. But on the other hand, the Dutch too were now stalemated, just like the Canadians. Because it also had to maintain a significant presence in Chora, Task Force Uruzgan was at its limit, with local Afghan forces not yet ready to play a major role. As the government later put it, “At the end of 2007 it became, after the fast initial growth of the ink spot, a matter of stagnation.”¹⁵⁰ In fact, the Uruzgan ink spot had stopped growing and would on several occasions even shrink. Moreover “ink spots” would be a better term, because the road between Deh Rawod and Tarin Kowt was not entirely safe. Nonetheless, after Chora the Dutch were able to provide a significantly higher level of security and development within the ink spots than the beleaguered Canadians in Kandahar, which continued to have a higher priority for the Taliban.

The battle of Chora significantly boosted the self-image of the Royal Netherlands Army. The army had seen itself as still in the process of transformation into a professional, modern, combat capable, expeditionary force. There was a poignant link with Srebrenica. The same unit that had been surrounded by Serbs in Srebrenica, the 13th Battalion of the Airmobile Brigade, also found itself at Chora enveloped by the Taliban. A veteran of the battle told Joeri Boom that “The big difference with Srebrenica was that this time we had the means to blow them away.”¹⁵¹ The army also concluded that having fought and stood, its stature also had risen not just in the eyes of its allies in RC-South but also of the Afghans, friend and foe. Earlier, the allies had noticed the emphasis on the “Dutch approach” and the reluctance of the Dutch to leave Uruzgan at the time of Operation Medusa. Brewster, the Canadian journalist, says “I heard more than one US soldier refer to the Dutch as ‘wooden shoes, wouldn’t shoot.’”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹Klep, *Uruzgan*, 185.

¹⁵⁰Tussentijds evaluatie, 7.

¹⁵¹Quoted in Boom, *Als een Nacht met Duizend Sterren*, 115.

¹⁵²Brewster, *Savage War*, 157.

It is hard to gauge the extent to which Chora really changed outside perceptions of the Dutch; there may be an element of projection here in the part of the army itself. De Bont, as a diplomat and thereby a somewhat outside observer (all the more so since he was not posted in Uruzgan), thinks it was true in respect to the Afghans. While he too admits the impact was hard to gauge, he still argues that the fact that at Chora “the Dutch had shown that they were ready to fight—and die—for their mission” had “changed political relations in Uruzgan. The Dutch had proved themselves. The Afghans saw that.”¹⁵³ Rietjens agrees that Chora was a “turning point” in how the Dutch army was seen by the allies, “most notably” the Americans, the British and the Australians.¹⁵⁴ He does not mention the Canadians.

Ironically, the army was glad to have lost much of the “Dutch approach, tea with the Taliban” image which some of its own spokesmen had helped create. Beginning with the *Saving Private Ryan* images of the battle of Chora, the Dutch public regularly saw and read about its army in combat during 2007 and learned about its combat losses. For the government this meant calling Uruzgan simply a “reconstruction mission” no longer would do.

Once the missions in Kandahar and Uruzgan were well underway, both the Canadian and Dutch political systems were obliged to respond to the unexpected level of violence, and (especially in the Canadian case) the difficulties in making “whole of government” actually work. In Canada, the minority Conservative government of Stephen Harper, elected in January 2006, inherited the Kandahar operation just as it was getting underway and the violence immediately intensifying. The Conservative political machine was split vertically over the war shortly after it took power. As Brewster recounts it, “On the one side, there was Harper and a select number of cabinet ministers who possessed a ‘damn the torpedoes’ mentality, an approach the opposition happily played up. Then there was the cadre of campaign-hardened political staff and advisors who, as the research rolled in the door, realized with horror that the public wasn’t with them, and that Afghanistan was a huge political liability.”¹⁵⁵ However, Harper called the shots. His attitude at the time is best characterized by his later oft-quoted remarks to the troops in Kandahar in March 2006, that “There will be some who want to cut and run, but cutting and running is not my way and is

¹⁵³De Bont, *Onder Taliban en Krijgsheren*, 229.

¹⁵⁴Rietjens, “Between Expectations and Reality,” 78.

¹⁵⁵Brewster, *Savage War*, 86.

not the Canadian way.”¹⁵⁶ At that point some Canadians—Stein and Lang prominently among—began to call it “Harper’s war.”

The treatment of the war by Canada’s two major parties in 2006 and 2007 was not edifying. Both used it as a “wedge issue” to bash the other.¹⁵⁷ In addition to being personally committed to the war, Harper was afforded the opportunity to exploit the horizontal division in the Liberal Party that had opened up at its top since the election, between the Martin wing that supported the Kandahar mission, and the Chrétien wing that did not. With the 2007 deadline for the mission still far away, and although not constitutionally required to do so, Harper put a motion to the House of Commons in February 2006 authorizing extension of the mission from the original deadline to 2009. It passed, 149–145. As expected, the Liberals split. Among the Martin Liberals supporting the government was the former defence minister, Bill Graham who had become the interim leader; among the Chétienites who voted “no” was Stéphane Dion, who later that year was chosen to replace Martin as leader. The two smaller parties voted against the resolution.

Dion, once established as leader, tried to turn the tables on Harper the next year, capitalizing on weak public support for the Kandahar mission. His caucus now united behind him, Dion introduced a resolution in the Commons calling for the 2009 withdrawal deadline to be set as definitive. Harper threatened dissolution and an election if the motion passed, and with his minority Conservatives now the only party supporting the mission that appeared to be a real possibility, at least arithmetically. But it was only appearance. None of the parties wanted an election that year; to prevent it, the social democratic New Democratic Party voted with the government, so that the motion was defeated 150–134. The New Democrats were obliged to defend their decision by what Kim Richard Nossal has called “pretzel logic: they argued that since they were in favour of an *immediate* withdrawal from Afghanistan, they could not possibly support a motion that set 2009 as the withdrawal date.”¹⁵⁸

While holding tough in 2007, Harper still could not ignore the predicament the country, and his government, were in. While cutting and running may not have been the Canadian way, continuing with a mission that

¹⁵⁶“Canada committed to Afghan mission, Harper tells troops,” *CBC News*, 13 March 2006.

¹⁵⁷Granatstein and Bercuson, “Lessons Learned?” 29.

¹⁵⁸Nossal, “Making Sense of Afghanistan,” 10.

manifestly was not working did not make sense. Casualties remained high. “Because Operation Medusa received so much attention there is a mistaken impression that it was the apex of the bloodletting,” Brewster has noted. “But if you parse the statistics, the period between February and August 2007, when the campaign settled into a raw standoff, was the worst.”¹⁵⁹ Canadians were confronted not only with higher casualties than they had expected, but with persistent reports that the development efforts in Kandahar were not succeeding. But Harper did not just have to justify the war to the Canadian people; since he was the head of a minority government, if he was to continue the war he needed the acquiescence of the opposition Liberals. That might be hard to get since he and the Liberals had taken turns using the war to bash each other.

In a move that stunned political Ottawa, Harper turned in October 2007 to a former Liberal deputy prime minister, John Manley, and with him a group of four other Ottawa notables to chart the way beginning with the question whether the mission should be continued beyond 2009, the expiry date of the renewal. The Manley Commission, formally the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan reported three months later, in January 2008. Its key recommendation was for renewal of the Kandahar mission beyond 2009 as part of what it called ISAF’s “counterinsurgency campaign”—but on two conditions. The first was that the allies come up with at least 1,000 additional troops to back up the hard-pressed Canadians. It is hard to see why the panel picked this number, except that it was equivalent to another battle group. It had to realize that 1000 soldiers would not be augmentation enough to allow the task force to establish a secure environment in Kandahar. The second was that the government acquire new medium-lift helicopters and high performance unmanned aerial vehicles for the task force.¹⁶⁰

While there was little love lost between the two major opposition parties, neither was yet ready for an election. The Manley report, especially its strong recommendation for continuing the mission, gave Harper and Dion something around which to reach a compromise. They agreed on a parliamentary resolution approving renewal of the Kandahar mission until 2011; the Manley report had not named a date. The accord prevented not an

¹⁵⁹Brewster, *Savage War*, 168.

¹⁶⁰“Report of the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan,” January 2008.

immediate election, but also Afghanistan becoming an issue between the two major parties when the election was held later that year.

As Nossal notes, the Harper-Dion agreement was based on the “unspoken assumption” that the Kandahar mission would not again be renewed in 2011.¹⁶¹ With both the Liberals and Conservatives voting this time in the Commons for renewal, the NDP now voted against it in safety. After having been used for two years as a wedge issue, the war all but disappeared as a partisan issue, as far as the two main parties were concerned.

In August the US army sent an infantry regiment to bolster the task force, a battalion size force of about 700 soldiers that was interpreted as meeting the first of the Manley conditions. The Canadian press and military took sometimes to calling the US force “the Manley battalion,” no doubt to at least the initial bewilderment of the Americans.

That same month the government announced a speeded-up helicopter acquisition program and the leasing of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), meeting the second. The Canadians had gone into Kandahar knowing that they needed new medium-lift capability and were planning to acquire new Chinook helicopters, to replace the Canadian Chinooks that improvidently had been sold to the Netherlands in 1991 and wound up being deployed in Uruzgan. The unexpected violence of the Taliban resurgence made this urgent; Canadian soldiers were vulnerable when being transported on the ground. Ottawa made arrangements in 2008 to acquire six Chinooks swiftly from U.S. stocks for Canadian use in Afghanistan, while Boeing would build sixteen new ones. The Canadians also swiftly acquired Nyala armoured vehicles built in South Africa, while the Dutch made haste to buy Bushmaster armoured vehicles, made in Australia.

The Canadians also had decided to deploy Leopard tanks in Kandahar. This was a turnaround. Hillier earlier had decided that the Canadian army having shed over a decade earlier its role in northern Europe, tanks no longer were needed at all. Yet as a Dutch analyst, Colonel Peter van den Aker, has pointed out, in peace support operations, such as Kandahar and Uruzgan “Due to their ability to cooperate around the clock in all weather conditions, their excellent sensors and the small numbers of men necessary to operate them, [tanks] may even be more efficient than the light, personnel heavy

¹⁶¹ Kim Richard Nossal, “No Exit: Canada and the ‘War without End,’ in Afghanistan,” in H-G. Ehrhart and Charles C. Pentland, eds., *The Afghanistan Challenge: Hard Realities and Strategic Choices* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, Queen’s Policy Studies Series, 2009), 162.

units supported by helicopters. At the same time, having tanks makes a force less dependent on other scarce resources, such as [combat] helicopters and fighter jets.”¹⁶² This is the kind of analysis the Dutch government decided to ignore permanently. No Dutch Leopards were deployed to Uruzgan, and Canada was able to acquire 120 of them from the Dutch military. The Hague would later go on to dispose of all Dutch tanks.

“The tank appears to be the victim of Dutch ‘political correctness’ of needing to speak about reconstruction missions in place of combat missions,” concluded Kees Homan, the senior military analyst at Clingendael.¹⁶³ The Leopard looked too much like an offensive weapon. As usual with political correctness, only some items were ruled out. F-16s apparently were politically correct. In fact, since Srebrenica, it had been a *sine qua non* of Dutch peace support operations that the aircraft be deployed to provide indigenous air support. The Apache attack helicopters that the Dutch had in Uruzgan were politically correct, too. And so was the powerful PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzer that was deployed to support Dutch forces, used during Operation Medusa, and extensively used during the Battle of Chora. When Fraser handed over command of RC-South to Major-General Ton van Loon in November 2006, at the ceremony he gave his successor a framed photo of a Leopard. The major Dutch newspaper paper of record, still caught up in the “Dutch approach” narrative, took it to mean that Fraser was calling the Dutch army in Afghanistan wimpy.¹⁶⁴ But it really meant: “You should have tanks here, too”—an assessment plenty of Dutch soldiers would agree with, although General Van Loon not among them.

When the Manley panel had turned in its report to the problems with Canada’s development efforts, it largely sided with the Canadian military and other critics of CIDA. It was at times blunt. Those efforts, it said “had been impeded not only by the dangerous security environment in Kandahar but by CIDA’s own administrative constraints.” CIDA had allocated regrettably “little for locally managed quick-action projects that bring immediate to everyday life for Afghans, or for ‘signature’ projects readily identifiable as supported by Canada.” Echoing Hillier’s frustration with the sequestration of the civilians, the panel said “It makes little sense to post brave and

¹⁶²Peter van den Aker, “Between Vigilance and Reconstruction: Dutch Military Operations in Afghanistan,” *NL Arms: Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies* (2009), 292.

¹⁶³Kees Homan, “De Nederlandse Krijgsmacht in Transformatie,” in Duco Hellema, Mathieu Segers, and Jan Rood, eds., *Bezinning op het Buitenland: Het Nederlands Buitenlands beleid in een Onzekere Wereld* (NIIB Clingendael, October 2011), 167.

¹⁶⁴“Nederlandse angsthazen onder vuur,” *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 November 2006.

talented professional staff to Kandahar only to restrict them from making regular contact with the people they are expected to help. Overall, there was an imbalance between the “heavy Canadian military commitment in Afghanistan and the comparatively lighter civilian commitment.” Moreover, the Manley panel put its finger on the two structural vacuums. In Kandahar, the PRT showed signs of “fragmentation” and “uncoordinated effort.” Therefore, “sooner than later” the PRT “should be placed under civilian leadership. Back in Ottawa, there was “inadequate coordination of Canadian activities.”¹⁶⁵

In the wake of these comments, and of some specific recommendations the Manley panel also made, the Harper government took a number of other steps in 2008 affecting the mission. The government filled the structural vacuums in both Kandahar and Ottawa. It created the position of the Representative of the Government of Canada in Kandahar (“the RoCK”) to oversee civilian activity and to work with the task force commander to see that Ottawa’s priorities were being implemented. Elissa Golberg, who had been the executive director of the Manley panel, was the first RoCK. The notion was that of a “partnership of equals” that would be “inevitably dependent to a certain extent on good will and the quality of the relationship between the two leaders, civilian and military.”¹⁶⁶ The RoCK was in addition to a civilian director of the PRT, who was to establish a similar partnership with the PRT commander. The government was not ready to put the PRT under civilian leadership. Back in Ottawa, the Harper government created an extraordinary machinery at the highest level in the form of a Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan Affairs, supported in the Privy Council Office (the cabinet office) by an Afghanistan Task Force headed by a deputy minister.

Also in reaction to Manley, the Harper government announced in June 2008 six priorities for the mission and three “signature” projects: restoration of the Dahla dam and irrigation system, the construction or renovation of 50 schools, and polio immunization. These projects were expected to be visible markers of commitment and progress to not only Afghans, but to Canadians, as well. In June the government also began to issue quarterly reports on how well the mission was doing.

There was a surge of Canadian civilians to Kandahar beginning in 2008, also prompted in good part by the Manley report. Leprince suggests why:

¹⁶⁵ Report of the Independent Panel.

¹⁶⁶ Buchan “Civil-military Coordination,” 107, 105.

“Having been criticized on all fronts, CIDA had no choice but to take action to ensure its organizational survival.”¹⁶⁷ CIDA personnel tripled in number, reaching 10, in addition to the PRT’s lead civilian, a position previously held by a diplomat. CIDA was also stung by the criticism that it was contributing too much aid through multilateral channels and that its budgetary decision making was too centralized. A budgetary pot of \$20 million was created for local Kandahar projects. Moreover, the agency arranged for its employees in Kandahar to receive the authority to initiate projects costing up to \$2 million; the diplomats in Kandahar had similar authority.

Despite the persistent kerfuffle over whether the Uruzgan commitment really was a reconstruction mission and whether the country had been misled as to its nature, the Dutch parliament approved renewal at the end of 2007, for a second two years ending in 2010 without the political dramatics attending the Canadian parliament’s renewal of the Kandahar commitment. There were two reasons for this. First, the Uruzgan mission did not appear to be in quite as bad shape as the one in Kandahar. Not only were Dutch casualties much lower, but the government was able to report some progress with the development projects in the small—though nonetheless, at the time shrinking—ink spot(s). This still did not mean the mission was popular. Koen Koch, writing in Clingendael’s scholarly journal, was struck in mid 2008 by how its continuing unpopularity had not led to any political protests or agitation. The reason, he suggested, was that much of the country was showing “pure indifference.” Its attitude was that “If you people in the government and parliament want to fight that war, go right ahead. But don’t bother us with it.” It made a big difference, he added, that the country now had a volunteer army that was doing the fighting and dying.¹⁶⁸

The other reason for a quieter renewal can be found in the Dutch political system. Unlike Ottawa, where the major party in favour of the Afghanistan mission wound up in power, machinating and fulminating against the skeptical second largest party, which reciprocated, in The Hague the Christian Democrats (CDA), the party most in favour of the mission, wound up sharing a cabinet with the skeptical Labour Party (PvdA). The Dutch work largely with multiparty majority coalitions. With many political parties in the *Tweede Kamer*, a single-party minority government, Canadian style, is unworkable and just about unthinkable. Yet multiparty minority

¹⁶⁷Leprince, “The Canadian-led Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team,” 368.

¹⁶⁸Koen Koch, “Afghanistan: Draagvlak Achter de Horizon,” *Internationale Spectator*, 62:6 (June 2008), 322.

governments are historical rarities in The Hague, too. As a result of the November 2006 national elections the Balkenende III majority centre-right government was replaced in February 2007 by a majority centre-left government with Balkenende still in the prime ministership and a fellow Christian Democrat as foreign minister, the other seats going to Labour and the small Christian Union. The new cabinet partners were able to reach an agreement on renewal, that also obtained the parliamentary support of the right-wing VVD, now in opposition.

While handled more quietly, the Dutch renewal was based on the same compromise as the Canadian renewal, except what went unspoken in Ottawa went both written and spoken in The Hague. The cabinet's article 100 letter to parliament proposing the renewal said in woolly bureaucratic language it would be the last renewal.¹⁶⁹ A statement was elicited from De Hoop Scheffer, the NATO secretary-general, affirming that the alliance had been apprised of the pullout that would occur in 2010 and that it was aware that would need to find replacement forces. The prime minister was clear. Drawing a contrast with the original commitment in 2006, Balkenende told the press that "Then we did not say we would be leaving; this time we are."¹⁷⁰ So did the Labour party's parliamentary spokesman for foreign affairs who wanted there to be no absolutely mistake as to why, despite its misgivings, the party had agreed to vote for the renewal: "The Netherlands is doing this one more time, but is limiting its deployment to 2010 and will then pull its troops out of Uruzgan."¹⁷¹

Like the Canadian renewal in the wake of the Manley report, the Dutch renewal at the end of 2007 entailed a promise by the government, formally included in the article 100 letter, to enhance its development efforts in southern Afghanistan. As the caustic Von der Dunk put it, the Balkenende IV government was saying, "From now on, it really, *really*, is going to be a more of a reconstruction mission than before."¹⁷² This was not unrealistic promise to make though, with respect to the Uruzgan ink spot(s) where the Dutch since beginning 2008 were maintaining a significant level of security.

Similar to the Canadian surge, the principal Dutch tool at the renewal was civilianization. The number of Dutch civilian officials in Uruzgan was

¹⁶⁹Brief van de ministers van buitenlandse zaken, van defensie, en voor ontwikkelings-samenwerking, 30 November 2007, TK 2007-2008, 27 925, no. 279.

¹⁷⁰Quoted in Klep, *Uruzgan*, 52.

¹⁷¹Martijn van Dam, quoted in Wilco Boom, *De Val van Balkenende: Wat Ging er Fout?* (Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers, 2010), 41.

¹⁷²Von der Dunk, "Nederland in Uruzgan," 165.

increased from the original “skeleton crew” of three, to twelve by the end of the mission. In early 2009 the role of civilians in the mission was visibly enhanced. The PRT was placed under the command of the civilian representative, a diplomat, who was also double-hatted as the co-commander of the Task Force Uruzgan. The Netherlands was the only country in southern Afghanistan to place its task force, under civilian co-headship. Still, Michel Rentenaar, who was civil representative from 2009-2010 later joked that he seldom had been “more jealous of someone’s job title” than that of his Canadian counterpart, the RoCK, whose authority on paper was not as great as his over both the task force and PRT.¹⁷³

Dutch politicians continued to have problems with the c-word. As in 2005, the 2007 article 100 letter did not use the word “counterinsurgency” even once. The Dutch military lost its reticence. In late 2007, Major-General Ton Van Loon, who had been commander of RC-South, said to a public forum in the Netherlands (as paraphrased) “the Dutch body politic as a whole missed an opportunity when they failed to adopt the term that embraces the military, policing and administrative, as well as the developmental aspect of the operation: counterinsurgency.”¹⁷⁴ General Berlijn threw in the towel during a farewell interview, just before stepping down as commandant of the armed forces in early 2008. He agreed that the Netherlands was engaged in a “counterinsurgency.” Moreover, he said that “*contraguerrilla*” also would be “a good word,” to describe the mission, an ironic admission given the excision of the warning in the 2005 report by the military intelligence service that the Netherlands could face a “*guerrilla*.”¹⁷⁵

Meanwhile, as a look at the articles and symposium announcements in the professional journals of the Dutch military for 2007-2008 instantly shows, much of the officer corps had grown interested in the history and theory of counterinsurgency, looking for tools and concepts that could be put to use in and around the Uruzgan ink spot(s). They put them to use in the 2008 adapted mission statement, promulgated after the *Tweede Kamer* had agreed to the two-year extension. The mission of Task Force Uruzgan, said the classified document that had largely been drafted by the task force staff, was “to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations resulting in the

¹⁷³Michel Rentenaar, preface to Rostek and Gizewski, eds., *Comprehensive Approach*, x

¹⁷⁴Van Loon paraphrased in George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf, “The Dutch COIN Approach: Three Years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 21:3 (September 2010), 433.

¹⁷⁵Quoted in “We wisten niet dat we zo vaak moesten knokken,” *NRC Handelsblad*, 12 April 2008.

expansion of the Afghan Development Zones (Focal Areas) of Tarin Kowt, Chora and Deh Rawod in order to neutralise insurgency influence.”¹⁷⁶ The plan is noteworthy not only because of its embrace of counterinsurgency, but also because it recognized the stalemate, abandoning the optimism found within the 2006 plan for a fairly rapid spread of the ink spot across the province.

The combination of more civilians, and a clearer campaign direction provided by counterinsurgency theory seems to have worked for the lucky—and now more experienced—Dutch in still comparatively tranquil Uruzgan. The Clingendael study concludes of the period after the 2008 renewal that “Uruzgan became an exceptional province in southern Afghanistan. While other provinces saw increasing levels of violence, Uruzgan saw a stabilization or even decline in the number of violent incidents. In addition, reconstruction and development made great progress, and the Afghan government was increasing its governance.”¹⁷⁷ A good marker of conditions may be the number of NGOs in the province, which saw a dramatic increase from five in 2006 to over 50 in 2009. The Dutch were even able to modestly expand the ink spots. Nonetheless, those spots still remained much smaller than had been hoped for when the Dutch first arrived in 2006. Moreover, security was still far from ideal. As the government admitted when looking back at 2008, “The relative calm in Uruzgan did not mean that the influence the insurgents could exercise over the population had entirely decreased. Using intimidation and violence they put pressure on the local populace and government.”¹⁷⁸ In 2009 the army’s special forces, the commandos, were sent back to Afghanistan, to operate outside of the ink spots(s). “The basic idea was to let the army’s own special forces disrupt insurgent activity, so that its regular forces would be free, in and around the population centres, to devote themselves to improving security, governance, education, and the economy.”¹⁷⁹

Brewster briefly caught what he called a “whiff of optimism” in 2008: “The words ‘peaceful’ and ‘Kandahar’ don’t usually belong in the same sentence, but there definitely was a new vibe on the street in the spring of 2008.”¹⁸⁰ It did not last long. There was an increase in violence. Forsberg

¹⁷⁶“Focal Paper, Task Force Uruzgan 2008, quoted in Rietjens, “Between Expectations and Reality,” 13.

¹⁷⁷Van der Lijn, “3D: ‘The Next Generation,’” 37.

¹⁷⁸Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008, September 2009, 12.

¹⁷⁹Ten Cate and Van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 284.

¹⁸⁰Brewster, *Savage War*, 213.

goes so far as to call it a “collapse of security” in the province during 2008-2009.¹⁸¹ The opening moves in a renewed offensive in the province by the Quetta Shura Taliban were the spectacular June 2008 break of the Sarposa Prison on the outskirts of Kandahar City and an attack on the Arghandab district. During the Sarposa break 400 Taliban prisoners and hundreds of other escaped—and the confidence of the local population in the Karzai government and ISAF was damaged. A campaign followed of IED attacks, suicide bombings, and assassinations of local officials, and attacks on police.

The hard-pressed Canadians decided in the spring of 2009 to concentrate on a smaller geographical area around the city and to fully secure the Dand district on the city’s south, with a counterinsurgency campaign; the Canadians later added eastern Panjwai. Strategically Dand was important, located on Taliban lines of communication. Because the district is home to the Karzai family, it was already in government hands, and its police force had shown itself able to repel Taliban attacks, it also was a logical area in which the Canadians could implement their renewed whole of government arrangements in the wake of the Manley report. This entailed the establishment of a “model village” in Dand’s administrative centre, Deh-e-Bagh.

Golberg says that the effectiveness of Canada’s post-Manley approach was evident as early as the Sarposa Prison break. Canadian military and civilian officials worked together with Afghan swiftly to develop plans to improve security at the prison. The RoCK—Golberg herself—came up with the money for emergency reconstruction to begin within a week, while CIDA provided supported for local businesses that had been affected by the break. As Golberg concluded, “The response by Canada to what had been a devastating insurgent strategic communications success was targeted, and effective, restoring confidence among the Kandaharis.”¹⁸² Forsberg was impressed with the Canadian efforts the next year: “The success of the Canadian battalion in Dand District and Eastern Panjwai demonstrates that properly applied and resourced counterinsurgency tactics can succeed in the areas surrounding Kandahar City.”¹⁸³ Like the Dutch, the Canadian military had embraced counterinsurgency theory and practice. The Canadian Forces first COIN manual, in preparation since 2005, was formally released in 2009. Shortly thereafter, when the *Royal 22e Régiment* deployed to Kandahar, it “took the innovative step of placing a fore at the heart of

¹⁸¹ Forsberg, “Counterinsurgency in Kandahar,” 41.

¹⁸² Golberg and Kaduck, “Where is Headquarters?” 135.

¹⁸³ Forsberg, “Counterinsurgency in Kandahar,” 53.

the insurgency that is aimed solely in accordance with the COIN doctrine” that it called the “Advance Counter-insurgency Team” (ACT).¹⁸⁴

The larger problem had not gone away, though. The Canadians were still far too few in number to respond to the threat, even after the augmentation by the American “Manley” battalion. That started to change in 2009 as the US deployed more forces to Kandahar, beginning with a Stryker brigade that summer. In December President Obama authorized a “surge” of forces to Afghanistan, a good portion of which would also be committed to that province.

By mid-2010 there were twenty thousand Americans troops, or twelve battalions in Kandahar, a province where two years earlier just several thousand Canadians were struggling to provide security. Grumped a Canadian army historian about this new situation, “as the saying goes, be careful what you ask as you will surely get it... Canada, simply put, no longer has saliency in Kandahar province.”¹⁸⁵ With the massive American surge, the area of responsibility for the Canadian Task Force Kandahar was shrunk to just the districts of Dand and Panjwai. At first glance, this looks like it left the Canadians in a situation much closer to that of the Dutch, in that they were working there with a limited, relatively secure ink spot. Reflecting the growth in security, the Canadian government finally took in April 2010 the step recommended by the Manley commission of placing the PRT under civilian leadership, namely that of the RoCK, a step like the one the Dutch with their PRT had taken the year before. However, Canadians were not just working in Dand and Panjwai. Unlike the task force, the PRT still had responsibility for the whole of Kandahar province and was becoming a Canadian-American entity, in the wake of the American surge. The Canadians and Americans seem to have worked well within it. Because the task force and the PRT no longer were responsible for the same geography, the PRT was disassociated from the task force and at first placed directly under RC-South, until the Americans took it over entirely upon the Canadian departure in 2011. The Canadians involved later concluded that the binational PRT had been an “excellent way” to handle the transition from Canadian to American leadership.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴Major C. Bolduc and Captain J. Vachon, “Making Strides at the Heart of the Insurgency,” *The Canadian Army Journal* 13:2 (2010), 45

¹⁸⁵Sean M. Maloney, “Afghanistan: Not the War It Was,” *Policy Options*, November 2010, 42.

¹⁸⁶Task Force Kandahar, KPRT, “Kandahar Lessons Learned Workshop,” 24 February 2011.

While the final Canadian renewal of the mission in southern Afghanistan in 2008 had seen political drama and the Dutch one in 2007 had gone comparatively quietly, the reverse was true as each government reacted to the approaching deadlines resulting from those renewals. Since the March 2008 Dion-Harper compromise resolution there had been suspicions, or hopes, that the prime minister at some point would angle for another renewal. Yet in September, at the start of a federal election campaign the prime minister firmly stated that not only would Canadian forces be withdrawn from Kandahar in 2011, they would leave Afghanistan entirely.¹⁸⁷ Harper was not swayed by the election in November 2008 of the new US president, who had placed considerable emphasis on a renewed waging of the war in Afghanistan and who had the considerable political advantage in Canada of not being George W. Bush. Nor did entreaties from NATO and the British work. The prime minister told CNN in March 2009 “Frankly we are not going to ever defeat the insurgency,” and that the “success had been modest.”¹⁸⁸ The remarks, which were on page one of the newspapers in Canada (and elsewhere) were a far cry from his 2006 “Canadians are not quitters” address, as the opposition parties were swift to point out.

Only if and when Harper writes his memoirs will there be a much clearer idea of precisely when, and precisely why, he decided to pull the plug on the Kandahar mission. Presumably, weak public support played a role. After Harper would not sit for an interview with him, Brewster tried to find out by interviewing staffers in the Prime Minister’s Office. From those interviews he came up with a list of the kind of things you would expect to have frustrated Harper: the NATO allies were not matching Canada’s commitment, the war had turned opened-ended, and it had become far too costly and far more than originally expected in both lives and money; it was exhausting Canada’s small military; and the Karzai government, upon which much depended, was corrupt and generally undependable.¹⁸⁹ In November 2010 Harper backed down a bit from the 2008 pledge to pull all troops out of Afghanistan. Canadian military trainers and support personnel would be sent to a police training facility in Kabul and satellite locations. The Liberals under their new leader, Michael Ignatieff, supported the step; the NDP was opposed.

¹⁸⁷“Harper pledges Afghan pullout by 2011,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 2008.

¹⁸⁸“Canada, allies will never defeat Taliban, PM says,” *Globe and Mail*, 2 March 2009.

¹⁸⁹Brewster, *Savage War*, 309–310.

The political kerfuffle over the mission in southern Afghanistan this time was in The Hague, not Ottawa. The Christian Democrats, especially Maxime Verhagen, the foreign minister in the Balkenende IV cabinet, were open to the appeals from the popular Obama and from NATO. They were willing to go back on the cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die pledges given at the time of the renewal and so were prepared to support some kind of continuing non-combat military presence in Uruzgan, a PRT or a training mission. As Verhagen put it in late 2009, “Aren’t you allowed to think things over? Do you have to say, everything we said two years has to stay the same?”¹⁹⁰ Verhagen took the initiative of writing the NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen to inquire exactly what kind of Dutch effort might be welcome. As Verhagen undoubtedly had expected, Rasmussen replied in January 2009, asking the Dutch to stay on for a year, with a training mission. Unlike the battered Canadian military, the Dutch military leadership also wanted to stay on.

Under the best of circumstances it would have been difficult for Labour, still the Christian Democrats’ coalition partner in the cabinet, to go back on its 2008 pledges. But Labour especially felt manipulated by Verhagen’s démarche to Brussels. And for reasons unrelated to Uruzgan, relations between the two major governing parties had grown badly strained. Moreover, the disagreement between them over the mission had spilled out onto the floor of the *Tweede Kamer* and into the media, making it hard to contain. Matters came to a head at a February 2010 cabinet meeting. When Balkenende put Verhagen’s proposal to stay in Uruzgan to a vote, the “ayes” had it. But Labour immediately withdrew its support of the government, precipitating its fall, the dissolution of parliament, and new elections—as well the end of the attempt to extend the Uruzgan mission, which came to an end in August 2010.

There was a sort of after-the-credits sequel to the final Uruzgan political drama in The Hague. In January 2011 the *Tweede Kamer* approved a Dutch police training mission, not unlike the Canadian one, to be located in Kunduz and Kabul. Two aspects deserve brief mention. First, the new mission was supported by an unusual parliamentary majority consisting of the VVD and Christian Democrats who after the 2010 elections had formed a centre-right minority government, and three centre-left opposition parties—not among them Labour, that was sticking to its out-of-Afghanistan

¹⁹⁰Quoted in Wilco Boom, *De Val van Balkenende*, 70.

pledge. Second, Dutch F-16 aircraft remained in Afghanistan to provide emergency tactical air support to the police training mission and, under circumscribed conditions, to ISAF allies. In other words, unlike Canada, the Netherlands continued to maintain a conventional combat capability in Afghanistan.

Conclusion: “How Did We Wind Up Here?”

It is easy to imagine some Canadian officers around the time of Op Medusa in 2006 or some Dutch officers around the time of Chora in 2007 trying to come to grips with the fact that they had far too few troops to respond to the revived Taliban insurgency, especially to undertake a proper counterinsurgency campaign in their respective provinces, and muttering, “How did we wind up here? Why didn’t they realize we wouldn’t have enough troops to meet the threat?”—but only to themselves. Meanwhile, being soldiers, they just got on with their missions in Kandahar and Uruzgan, adjusting their plans to reflect the unexpectedly dangerous circumstances, more so in Kandahar than Uruzgan.

The Canadians, finding themselves in an epicentre of the insurgency in Kandahar, were pretty much obliged to just hunker down, while they disrupted and held off the insurgents. “We did not lose” was how General Vance also later summarized the 2006-2009 period, adding though that “we significantly hurt the insurgency.”¹⁹¹ Then, the Americans began to arrive in numbers. At that point, the Canadians could turn to counterinsurgency in earnest, albeit in a much smaller area and with a PRT that became a Canadian-American partnership.

The Dutch also wound up working in a much smaller area than anticipated. At the end of the Uruzgan mission, the Dutch government could report in its final evaluation some significant progress with development in the ink spot(s) that never grew as much as had been expected at the start. Nonetheless, with admirable candidness the government also reported that

¹⁹¹ Vance, “Foreword,” in Horn and Spencer, eds., *No Easy Task*, 9.

four years spent in Uruzgan were not long enough to leave behind a local government that could provide for security and good governance, and the achievements of those four years were “not irreversible.”¹⁹² An NGO, The Liaison Office (TLO) also did an assessment and found that “As their four year engagement concluded, the Dutch military can leave confident that their mission contributed to both security and development in Uruzgan. In fact, over time Dutch efforts in the province came to be considered a model of successful civil/military intervention within the context of the counter-insurgency in Afghanistan.” Still, the TLO warned, trying to determine the extent of that Dutch contribution was difficult because “there are very few ‘hard facts’ in Afghanistan in general and in Uruzgan in particular.” Moreover, “many statistics, especially those linked to government resources, are manipulated.”¹⁹³

The first question of those imaginary officers—“How did we wind up here?”—is the easier one to answer. The Canadians and the Dutch went into southern Afghanistan because they could, they wanted to, and they thought they were going to be good at it. Not every country had a professional, combat-capable, expeditionary armed force—especially smaller countries like Canada and the Netherlands. It was indeed, as De Wijk put it, a select club, one in which during the 1990s the Canadians decided to remain and which the Dutch consciously decided to join, once they shed their conscripted army that had been devoted to homeland defence. Such expeditionary forces fit into the strikingly similar, and still difficult to explain, Canadian and Dutch aspirations to remain significant international players.

While the Americans made no bones about the fact that they hoped the Canadians and Dutch would undertake various missions in Afghanistan, up to and concluding the major ones in the south, Ottawa and The Hague weren’t pushed into accepting the mission in southern Afghanistan; they jumped. Both saw it as serving their broader interests to do so. To be sure, maintaining good relations with Washington was a motivation behind accepting the missions. But the two countries also would have earned brownie points in Washington with missions elsewhere in Afghanistan. Hillier’s notion of Canada’s taking control of the Kandahar airport and painting a maple leaf on the runway would have been that sort of thing. The other European allies provided plenty of examples of other options.

¹⁹²Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006-2020, 23 September 2011, 100.

¹⁹³The Liaison Office, “The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010: A TLO Socio-Political Assessment,” August 2010.

The accounts in Stein and Lang of the Canadian bureaucracy believing in 2005 that Canada-US relations needed to be fixed in the wake of Iraq and the missile defence decisions remain very odd. Surely senior Canadian officials should have realized that Canada-US relations just do not work that way. Washington largely cannot punish Canada, because of the blowback on American interests from any punitive steps it would take, and usually is not interested in doing so anyway. These Stein and Lang stories make Martin seem especially wise about the nature of the Canada-US relationship; maybe that was their intention.

NATO was the other pillar of the two countries security policies, a result of their mirror-image trans-Atlanticism. Going to southern Afghanistan meant not only shoring up the Canadian and Dutch roles within the alliance, but also shoring up the alliance itself as it undertook a very challenging operation far from the North Atlantic Treaty area. The Dutch foreign ministry was also interested in using Afghanistan as a joint project that would help the alliance put the differences over Iraq behind it. In a broader sense, accepting a major commitment in Afghanistan also made the two countries players in other international forums in one of the most important issues of the day and could only enhance their overall international standing—a continuing preoccupation in both capitals.

It is clear that the Dutch military leadership in 2005-06, up to and including General Berlijn, especially wanted a mission in the south, seeing the experience potentially as—to borrow a term from General Hillier—transformational. Within the Dutch bureaucracy, the ministry of defence pushed fairly hard to go. As for Hillier himself, while the dispute cannot now be resolved over whether he pushed for the Kandahar mission originally, he obviously welcomed its potentially transformative impact on the Canadian military and its image in Canada once the mission had been decided upon and was underway.

A fascinating difference between the two military chiefs is that while Berlijn sought going into Uruzgan to soften the image of the Dutch military with his embrace of the “Dutch approach” and his jibes at the Americans, Hillier used Kandahar to toughen up the image of the Canadian military as a fighting force. Yet it is Graham who deserves most of the credit for informing the Canadian public the nature of the impending mission in Kandahar, including its dangers for the troops. This largely occurred during his 2005 “body bags” tour. His blunt refusal to choose between a combat mission and a peacekeeping mission in categorizing it stands out sharply against the Dutch government’s retreat from its comprehensive, fairly

balanced (although very wordy) description of the Uruzgan mission in its article 100 letter to its overemphasis on “reconstruction” and on a far too sharply-drawn distinction between ISAF and OEF operations.

The Canadians and Dutch also wanted to go because, as Martin emphasized, it was the right thing to do, not just for international security generally but also for the Afghans. The Dutch and the Canadians have made it hard not to be cynical and skeptical about such motivation. This is especially the case with the Dutch government and military with their over use of the term “reconstruction mission” and self-congratulatory “Dutch approach” talk. There was a whiff of this in Canada, too, whenever politicians started to talk about sending Afghan girls to school. It all sounded so calculated and self-congratulatory. Yet it was not for nothing that Dutch and Canadian politicians talked this way. They were responding to a fairly deep streak of international voluntarism that exists in their two countries, and that sometimes turns into moralism. It is that streak of voluntarism that, in part, also propelled Canada and the Netherlands on a series on post-Cold War peace keeping and peace enforcement missions that ultimately included those in Afghanistan. As a group of scholars at Dalhousie University have put it, “Most Canadians understood the origins and purposes of the Afghan mission as part of a continuum of late 20th century peacekeeping operations.”¹⁹⁴

In the wake of those previous missions, including the earlier ones in Afghanistan (the first Kandahar mission and then Kabul for the Canadians, Kabul and Baghlan for the Dutch) both capitals were manifestly confident about mounting 3D or whole of government operations in southern Afghanistan. Uruzgan and Kandahar were to be the next steps, not just in Afghanistan but in the overall evolution of Canadian and Dutch peace enforcement capabilities. You can see this optimism not only in the white papers both governments issued in 2005, but in their statements outlining the two new missions. Canada and the Netherlands were not alone here, of course. Since the end of the Cold War there had been an increasingly professed international interest in humanitarian intervention in failed and failing states, up to and including the UN’s “Responsibility to Protect” initiative that was adopted just as Canada and the Netherlands were going into southern Afghanistan in 2005. As Stairs also noted in his remarkable 2004 address, when it came to 3D and the like “we are far from alone.”

¹⁹⁴Lee Windsor, David Charters and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada's Afghan Mission* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada, 2008), xxii.

He pointed to the UN, NATO, the British, and even the Americans. He added, though, “But in Canada it has become something of a mantra...”¹⁹⁵ Shortly more than a year later, “reconstruction mission” would become a Dutch mantra.

Then both countries ran into difficulties not just with the unexpected resurgence of the Taliban but also with reconciling the approaches of the development officials and the military. There were several such difficulties. The first was with CIDA and the Netherlands Development Cooperation Department simply sending too few personnel at the start of the mission. That is not surprising, though, and should not be necessarily taken as an anti-military approach or a generally uncooperative stance on the part of two of the development agencies. Sending operatives out in the field was not how they worked. They funded and managed development programs back in The Hague and in Ottawa, and Dutch and Canadian embassies in local capitals, relying on NGO's and host countries to undertake the projects. As the missions continued, more civilians showed up, a process that was retarded at the start in the Canadian case by the more dangerous environment, made evident by the death of Berry.

Yet even if the development folks did not show up in numbers at the start, it made a big difference whether or not they sent money for the military to spend. They did from the start in the Dutch case, and not the Canadian. The earlier Dutch experience with another PRT in Afghanistan, which the Canadians did not have, made a big difference. Baghlan set a budgetary precedent for Uruzgan. But it looks like this may have happened only because a determined POLAD lobbied the development minister in her car when she was visiting Baghlan. The Dutch also had learned about the military's role in development during their mission in Al Muthanna, Iraq, another experience the Canadians had not had.

The Dutch also suffered less than the Canadians from two other problems affecting the relationship between two “Ds,” development and defence. The military wanted quick reaction projects, while the development people concentrated on longer-range ones. This was overcome largely by the infusion of political pressure. Such pressure came much earlier and could be applied more steadily in the Dutch case. From the start Dutch officials in Uruzgan, both military and civilian, were under enormous pressure from the politicians back home to deliver on the “reconstruction” mission that had been announced. The Hague wanted to see development. In the Canadian case,

¹⁹⁵Stairs, “Menace of General Ideas.”

it came in the form of the big bang of the Manley commission, especially its insistence on signature projects.

The other problem was with interdepartmental coordination, especially back in Ottawa. After Manley, to make “whole of government” really work in Kandahar the Canadians put into place extraordinary structures at the cabinet level to manage the Afghanistan mission. The Dutch never felt the need to do this, apparently because the interdepartmental structures for defense and foreign policy were working to satisfaction, oiled by what the Dutch call their *overlegcultuur*, or “consultative culture.” A good thesis could be written comparing the cabinet and interdepartmental mechanisms in the two systems, perhaps with special emphasis on how they dealt with the challenges posed by the missions in southern Afghanistan.

At the start, there was a lot more tension between the civilians and the soldiers in Kandahar than between these two groups in Uruzgan. This is not surprising, given the greater danger, the sequestration of the civilians, and the mismatch on budgets and priorities between CIDA and the military. Yet the Canadian accounts stress, just like the Dutch ones, that personal ties within the task force often mattered and that they were working differences out. Both governments eventually increased not just the number of civilians but their authority and visibility. The Dutch went so far at the end to place the PRT under civilian leadership and the entire task force until joint military-civilian authority. Ottawa did not go so far. While the PRT was placed under the RoCK, the task force was not.

It is hard to escape the impression that the establishment of both positions, the RoCK and the enhanced civilian representative in Uruzgan was intended not only to improve coordination but to show the folks back in Canada and the Netherlands that progress was being made. This seems to be especially the case with the Dutch mission, where there had been fewer complaints about lack of coordination in the field and which remained under intense political pressure to show there was reconstruction going on. Dutch officials have emphasized with obvious pride the uniqueness of the bicephalous TFU after March 2009, the self-praise sounding like a faint echo of the earlier “Dutch approach.” But there still is no evidence indicating that the Dutch task force operated significantly different manner than it had before when its military commander was provided advice by his senior diplomatic advisor. The Canadian experience with the Strategic Advisory Team in Kabul several years before also suggests that diplomats may not necessarily bring essential skills to such situations that senior military officers do not have.

Buchan makes a convincing case that the Kandahar PRT was hampered at the start by an inadequate grant of authority by CIDA and DFAIT to their employees in the field. After Manley just as important, if not more so, than the appointment of the highly-visible RoCK, were that delegation of budgetary authority, the change in budgetary priorities, and the arrival of more civilians to take over development responsibilities from the Canadian military that had its hands full with “kinetic” activity.

The second question muttered by those imaginary Canadian and Dutch officers—“Why didn’t they realize we would not have enough troops to meet the threat?”—is much tougher to answer. It is tempting to give at least some of the blame to the major players outside Canada and the Netherlands. A real (not imaginary) senior Canadian officer who was heavily involved with ISAF says “It is entirely possible that senior American and NATO officials publicly underplayed the threat to ease and facilitate NATO’s involvement so that America could turn its attention elsewhere. But that strategy led to an under-resourced NATO mission... Denial of the threat also extended to the US Embassy in Kabul, which equally underplayed the menace.”¹⁹⁶ But it was not just the Americans and NATO officials whose thinking was compatible with the deployment of limited forces. As a study done by the International Institute for Strategic Studies points out, Lakdar Brahimi, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2004, pursued a policy of what he called a “light footprint” for the international community: “Brahimi argued that a greater international presence in the country was ‘not necessary and not possible.’ It was thought that a large foreign military presence would trigger a popular revolt. This assumption coincided with the Bush administration’s deep suspicion of ‘nation building and an extended US commitment to Afghanistan.”¹⁹⁷

Regardless what conclusions the American, NATO, and the UN may have reached, the Canadian and Dutch governments also had the responsibility to make their own strategic decisions before sending off their soldiers and civilians on the most challenging military undertaking in decades. Ultimately this was a cabinet-level decision, with the prime minister having a decisive say in the Canadian case. It can look like the two missions started off as counterinsurgency operations, and badly under-resourced ones at

¹⁹⁶Colonel George Petrolekas, “It Didn’t Have to be this Way,” *On Track* 14:1 (Spring 2009), 20.

¹⁹⁷Tony Dodge and Nicholas Redman, eds., *Afghanistan: To 2015 and Beyond*, Adelphi Paper 425-26, London: Routledge/International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011, 77.

that. But that impression is misleading. It only looks that way because scattered terms and concepts from counterinsurgency theory were beginning to be tossed about in the alliance in 2005 and because the two missions later became counterinsurgency operations (and badly under-resourced at that), and maybe felt as if they always had been. Both the Canadians and Dutch governments were planning in 2005-06 for missions along the lines of what Graham called “peacekeeping heavy.”

Both governments approached the prospective missions at the political-strategic level with the same fairly narrow focus. They, too viewed the missions as part of a continuum. They saw them in terms of the peace enforcement operations to which they had become accustomed in Afghanistan and elsewhere, especially the Balkans. Canadian and Dutch officials certainly knew southern Afghanistan would be more dangerous and also would involve new 3D or “whole of government” challenges that they thought they were up to. The Dutch appear to have been more aware of the dangers than the Canadians and thanks to their additional experience in Iraq and Baghlan had learned more about the role of the military in development in a failed state. The Dutch also began to think earlier about counterinsurgency, especially at the operational level. Nonetheless, at the start neither the Canadian nor the Dutch approach was based on trying to determine what overall force package was necessary to meet what overall threat, and relying on what particular strategy to achieve the overall policy ends--which might have led them to realize that only a properly resourced counterinsurgency force would do. The starting point was considering whether to deploy, for a limited time, a variation on what had become the Canadian and Dutch standard force package for contributing to major multilateral peace enforcement operations, which was a reinforced battalion. This time, it would be part of a 3D or whole of government mission.

Viewed from Ottawa and The Hague in 2005-2006, this was not a war with critical, much less existential, interests at stake; this was an important, yet still voluntary peace enforcement contribution. For a variety of reasons, the Canadian and Dutch governments were both leaning markedly towards making that contribution if they could. The focus turned how to make it possible, while limiting the risks. That it was to be a NATO operation was already seen as by the two governments as an important risk limitation, especially after their experiences with UN peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. Moreover, they further sought to limit their risks by setting deadlines to the commitments; if things did not go well their forces could be pulled out when the deadlines expired. Here, too it was reassuring that

ISAF was a NATO effort. The two governments knew that when they pulled out their troops, they still would have taken their turn and have done their share in the broader NATO effort, much more than their fair share, in fact, when compared to most other NATO allies. As Noah Richler has put it, “Military work, in today’s world, has come down largely to a matter of shifts, and in Afghanistan, it can be argued, Canada’s time card has been punched.”¹⁹⁸ In short, winning a war wasn’t the focal point. Being there (while reaping the credit in Washington and Brussels and elsewhere) and contributing what they could while their “shift” was underway—which they saw as a reinforced battalion coupled to a new “whole of government” effort—to security and development in downtrodden Afghanistan, was.

To be sure, the Dutch government was warned in the summer of 2005 by its own military intelligence service, the MIVD, of the potential dangers facing it in Uruzgan. One of its reactions was far from edifying, namely leaning on the intelligence service to “take the sharp edges off” its report. The reaction of the defence minister, Henk Kamp, to the MIVD report and the advice of General Berlijn is illustrative of how the Dutch government approached the prospective mission. The most important of the sixteen conditions Kamp set for going ahead with the mission in the wake of the warnings from intelligence involved making sure there were going to be sufficient allied forces, primarily American, in and around Uruzgan. Yet this did not mean sufficient forces and civilian personal to blunt the overall threat in southern Afghanistan, much less sufficient forces to mount a proper counterinsurgency campaign. It meant a sufficient American presence to limit the dangers the Dutch task force itself would face in Uruzgan.

The government’s 2005 article 100 letter also is illustrative of this approach, and richly so. It assured the *Tweede Kamer* that “Much attention will be paid to assuring the protection of our own troops” and then goes into considerable detail as to how such attention already had been paid. While, ever mindful of the lessons of Srebrenica, the Dutch detachment would bring along some of its own protection, not the least of which would be the Apaches and the F-16s, the allies would be standing by, of that there could be no doubt: General Berlijn had received a guarantee from SACEUR that NATO would reinforce the Dutch in Uruzgan if needed. Separately, the Americans had given the government guarantee that they would provide

¹⁹⁸Richler, *What We Talk About*, 343.

emergency support. And just to make extra sure, the NATO foreign ministers recently had “explicitly” confirmed these guarantees.¹⁹⁹

M.L. Roi and Gregory Solyneec have addressed how Ottawa approached the proposed Kandahar mission narrowly. As, they put it, “the problem arose because the commitment had not been linked to a Canadian strategic or even a coherent set of policy goals to be achieved. Canada made a commitment to Kandahar in the absence of any clear strategy. Few questioned whether the limited military means—large as it was relative to Canada’s recent history of military intervention—were commensurate with the policy ends of a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghan state.” Roi and Smolyneec locate the cause of the problem in the interaction over Afghanistan between Martin and Hillier, and more broadly in the nature of Canadian civil-military relations. Hillier deferred to Martin on the major decision of whether to go to Kandahar. And Martin sought reassurances from Hillier. But they were not about the mission itself, especially the strategy and resourcing. They were about whether Canada still would have forces available for other peace enforcement operations. The prime minister was thinking about Darfur and Haiti. Hillier assured him they would and Martin eventually approved the mission. The prime minister and the chief of the defence staff thus “essentially sidestepped the crucial discussion of whether Canada possessed the necessary military means to achieve the policy ends sought.”²⁰⁰

In short, neither Ottawa nor The Hague thought strategically about the overall mission going into it—unless it can be said that the mission essentially was just to make to the allied effort in southern Afghanistan a noticeable contribution whose extent and short duration would be fixed in advance. Klep points out “Sometimes it seemed more important that the Netherlands just be present in southern Afghanistan compared to *what* was to happen there. But this was exactly the hard lesson of missions like Srebrenica that had gone wrong: determine ends and means before getting into a mission with big intentions!”²⁰¹ If the mission was just “being there,” it might then also be said that the Dutch had put a lot of strategic thought into how to protect their forces should a grave danger to them materialize. This leads to a jarring picture of, on the one hand, a naïve optimism about

¹⁹⁹Brief van de ministers, 22 December 2005

²⁰⁰M.L. Roi and Gregory Smolyneec, “Canadian Civil-Military Relations: International Leadership, Military Capacity and Overreach,” *International Journal* 65:3 (Summer 2010), 710, 714.

²⁰¹Klep, *Uruzgan*, 191.

affecting change in Uruzgan through 3D, and on the other, a realistically clearheaded focus on the protection of Dutch forces.

That it does not think strategically is a very old complaint about the Canadian defence establishment. Ottawa, it has long been said, needed to think on its own and not just rely on the Americans, and before them, the British. This obviously is not the place to go into the debate about all that in the more distant past. Yet it can be said that the problem this time for Canada—and for the Netherlands—was not just that Ottawa and The Hague were not thinking things through strategically with respect to Afghanistan. For a long time no one else was, either. As the IISS report also puts it “under Bush an incoherent and under-resourced war in Afghanistan drifted for several years. The US was joined in this drift by the NATO allies and for much of that time Afghanistan was argued about as a test of alliance solidarity without any clear or common understanding of what the Alliance was trying to achieve there, or whether it was achievable.”²⁰²

The discovery of counterinsurgency theory by Canada and the Netherlands, along with the other allies, allowed for a more strategically coherent approach to the missions. But it also could only confront them with how insufficient their commitments were. Effective counterinsurgency demands a lot of troops, as well as a lot of civilians. That problem began to be addressed in 2008-2009 by the United States which, especially under the influence of General David Petraeus, itself had rediscovered counterinsurgency. Yet, despite the political charms of President Obama, neither Canada nor the Netherlands was prepared to stick around for long in southern Afghanistan, even after he unleashed a “surge” that brought force levels up.

The war had at that point weak to tepid support of the publics in both countries. There is a new and rapidly growing scholarly literature on “strategic narratives,” especially with respect to the war in Afghanistan. It points to the conclusion that neither the Canadian government, nor the Dutch government was able to establish a dominant strategic narrative that would win public support for the war. And it was largely the Canadian and Dutch politicians’ own fault. After conducting an exhaustive analysis of the statements made about the war by Canadian ministers from 2001-2008 Jean-Christophe Boucher concludes that “the Canadian government’s message on Afghanistan has been chaotic for most of the past seven years” and as a result, Ottawa “has not succeeded in clearly communicating the logic

²⁰²Dodge & Redman, *Afghanistan*, 58.

behind Canada's intervention and actions in Afghanistan."²⁰³ Commenting on Boucher's piece, Nossal agrees, adding "the government's justifications, advanced scattershot in what appears to be the vague hope that some of the justifications advanced would find some resonance somewhere in the population were indeed totally incoherent."²⁰⁴ In the Netherlands, the government reaped what it had sown in 2006 with its overemphasis on a "reconstruction" mission. As George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf have pointed out, that led to a situation where there was no "winning" narrative, but rather, an endless debate between two: "reconstruction mission" or "combat mission." Several ministers in the Balkenende governments tried to break through and end the polarized simplification of the debate by (re)explaining the mission along the lines Graham had used in his 2005 Vancouver speech. But it was to no avail. "As a result the complexities were overshadowed and public opinion was not properly prepared for a lengthy effort and for the fact that concrete results were not easily measured."²⁰⁵ A 2011 study comparing "strategic narratives" of the war shows how in Britain and Denmark, unlike Canada and the Netherlands, the government was able to shore up public support.²⁰⁶

Whatever the rhetorical skills of the government spokespersons, the Dutch and Canadian publics nonetheless could see not only that the missions were more violent than expected, but they were not working all that well with respect to the promised development. As Dan Middlemiss noted in a retrospective piece on the war, "Put simply, publics will accept military intervention and even substantial casualties provided that there is evidence that the intervention is succeeding in attaining the goals. In that context, and given the parlous state of 'progress' in rebuilding Afghanistan, it may now be slowly dawning on Canadians and their governments that the business of 'fixing' fragile and failing states takes a lot more time, resources, and sheer staying power than they once had rather naively believed."²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Jean-Christophe Boucher, "Selling Afghanistan: A Discourse Analysis of Canada's Military Intervention, 2001-08," *International Journal* 64:3 (Summer 2009), 718.

²⁰⁴ Nossal, "Making Sense of Afghanistan," 13.

²⁰⁵ George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf, "De Missie in Uruzgan als Strategisch Narratief," *Atlantisch Perspectief* 8 (2011), 9.

²⁰⁶ Jens Ringsmose and Berit Kaja Børgesen, "Shaping Public Attitudes towards the Deployment of Military Power: NATO, Afghanistan and the Use of Strategic Narratives," *European Security* 20:4 (December 2011), 505-28.

²⁰⁷ Dan Middlemiss, "Roles Abroad After Afghanistan," in Ann L. Griffiths, ed., *Is There Life Abroad After Afghanistan: The Future of Canadian Expeditionary Operations*

Middlemiss's addition of "and their governments" is telling. It is hard to escape the conclusion that not only was public support weak at the end, but that senior political decision-makers themselves in Ottawa and The Hague had given up on the war, and not only because they could not find public support for it and feared the polls. This is especially the case in Canada. Harper said as much in his 2009 "we are never going to defeat the insurgency" comments on CNN. The same cannot be said, of course for the Christian Democrats in the Balkenende IV government who, with Verhagen in the lead, were prepared to stay longer in Afghanistan. But it appears to be the case with Labour. True, it worried about losing votes to a further left-wing party that was opposed to the war. But Labour had never been enthusiastic about the Uruzgan mission in the first place and although it had gone along with its coalition partners twice, it had done so reluctantly and had very clearly signaled its skepticism in 2008. In 2010 its patience with the war was up.

Another real officer, but a Dutch one in this case, Colonel F. Matser, wrote, "How did we wind up getting so screwed as a military? That's probably been asked by a lot of soldiers these past few months."²⁰⁸ Matser was not at all reflecting back on an insufficient force package or any other problems during the in Uruzgan mission, but rather looking ahead at the future of the Netherlands armed forces. No sooner were they back from Uruzgan then they were met by budget cuts, imposed by the Rutte I government as part of an overall austerity measure, precipitated by the enduring economic crisis in Europe. There was a strong sense of shock and indignation within the Dutch military. This is what they got after twenty years of building a modern, professional military, culminating in Uruzgan, where the Netherlands was among the major players! The most dramatic decisions announced in the April 2011 package of cuts were to dispose of all the Leopard tanks, to cut the F-16s back by a squadron, from 87 to 68, and to significantly reduce overall personnel. But the decision also raised the question of to what extent—if at all—the Netherlands will want to maintain a combat-capable expeditionary military force. Kees Homan, the senior military analyst at Clingendael, wrote of the cuts: "If the Netherlands want to remain in the future internationally militarily active on a large scale, then the currently

(Halifax: Dalhousie University Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2011), 28.

²⁰⁸Kolonel F. Matser, "Een onaangename waarheid," *Militaire Spectator* 180:10 (2011), 464.

planned defense expenditures are definitely inadequate.”²⁰⁹ After the 2012 elections the Advisory Council on International Affairs sent a special letter to the *Tweede Kamer* warning that any further cuts to the defence budget would have a “disastrous impact.”²¹⁰

In the Dutch political world, it often was as if Uruzgan never had happened. The cuts were not a reaction to the mission and in the very limited discussion of them that followed there was little attempt to test them against any “lessons of Uruzgan” negative or positive. Rather, when push came to shove in a budgetary crisis, the politicians and the public simply attached less immediate importance to the armed forces than to other priorities. As the mission in Uruzgan was winding down, the Defence Department had sponsored a major interdepartmental study looking out at strategic trends 2020-2030 and the implication for the armed forces. Given all the international uncertainties (A peaceful rise of China? U.S. disengagement from Europe? A real European defence capability?) it is not at all surprising that the study had pointed towards a multipurpose combat capable expeditionary force as remaining the best bet for a country with the Netherlands’ internationalist ambitions. In announcing the 2011 cuts, J.S.J. Hillen, the defence minister, said that while the government still endorsed the thinking in the study it was no longer financially feasible, although he announced no new long-term plan for the armed forces. This left the Dutch military to wonder just what its future would be and when the other shoe was going to drop. In the short term, Hillen also said—with the kind of admirable bluntness it is hard to imagine a Canadian defence minister ever using under such circumstances—“The armed forces will have to pay a price in combat capability, qualitative and quantitative, and its deployability will decline.”²¹¹

The Canadian defence budget was also tightened painfully after Kandahar, although certainly without the dramatic and immediate shedding of capabilities as in the Dutch case and also without the future capabilities of the armed forces coming immediately into question. The Canadian military has in one sense the same vulnerability as the Dutch: for both countries an overseas expeditionary armed force is optional. On the other hand, the Canadian military has a sort of baseline budgetary protection.

²⁰⁹Homan, “De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in transformatie,” 151.

²¹⁰Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken, Briefadvies, Kabinetsformatie 2012, “Krijgsmacht in de knel,” 22 September 2012.

²¹¹“Defensie na de kredietcrisis: een kleinere krijgsmacht in een onrustige wereld” 8 April 2011.

Projecting force overseas is not just a recurring theme in Canadian history, but as mentioned Section One, a powerful element in the current Canadian national identity. No Canadian government would dare sacrifice it entirely to budgetary exigencies. The current government has no such interest.

Nonetheless, the combat capabilities of the Canadian military have been permanently vulnerable to cuts, because in recent years Canadians have tended to see peacekeeping, and certainly not counterinsurgency or warfighting, as what the Canadian military does in the world and what they want it to do. Kandahar may play a role in changing that, and not by coincidence. Especially under General Hillier, the Canadian military sought to shed its peacekeeping image. This was similar to the Dutch military's new emphasis on its own combat capabilities, once it had put the "Dutch approach" period beyond it. The attempts at image changing in Canada went beyond just that of the military, though; at stake was a chunk of the Canadian identity itself. Two groups sought to alter it. The first was the Harper government which has tried to promote, gradually and patiently, a more conservative Canadian nationalism, involving such symbols as the monarchy and the military, and even managing to combine them with the restoration of the names of the Royal Canadian Air Force and Royal Canadian Navy. Meanwhile, several Canadian historians, among them most notably Granatstein and Bercuson, sought to discredit the Canadian peacekeeping myth, drawing a direct line between Canada's efforts in the first and second world wars and Korea, and Afghanistan. Canada is as much a warfighting country as a peacekeeping one, was the message. Afghanistan proved that once again. "And yet," wrote Richler in his book that was intended as a response to such efforts, "is it really possible that, over the course of one decade the Canadian worldview changed so dramatically?"²¹² For now, Canadian public opinion polls still point to a "no." Peacekeeping is still popular. No similar debate broke out post-Uruzgan in the Netherlands. As Klinkert observed, the military just is not a significant part of the national identity.

As the two missions in southern Afghanistan were over, and then ending, there briefly was talk in both countries of institutionalizing within the government arrangements for being able to mount future 3D, or "whole of government," operations. Little came of this aside from scattered efforts across the two bureaucracies and new military doctrine. A 3D "centre of excellence" was briefly discussed in Ottawa. General van Loon made the comprehensive approach a focal point of the joint Dutch-German

²¹²Richler, *What We Talk About*, 43.

headquarters in Munster he recently has commanded. It is not clear how long this will last after he moves on. Both countries are now largely dependent on short-term institutional memory within each separate department. If either government ever again attempts counterinsurgency or, as is more likely, a robust peacekeeping mission with development, (a real “reconstruction mission,” in other words) it will in good part have to figure out how to do 3D effectively all over again.

Boom may still be right that there will be future combat operations for the Dutch military. An economic turnaround in Europe would change the budgetary picture for the military and the country will want to remain a player in world affairs. There is less doubt about this in the Canadian case; the Canadian military is bound to be deployed overseas again at some point in robust missions. It seems very unlikely, though, that Canada and the Netherlands will any time soon be in another counterinsurgency operation. At the same moment that the Canadian and Dutch military were discovering counterinsurgency theory in southern Afghanistan they were being brutally taught one of its most important principles, namely that it requires a lot of troops and civilian personnel for a long time. If this is what Bland meant when he said that Canada would never again fight in a war “even suggestive” of Afghanistan then he is almost certainly right, too and that goes for the Netherlands, as well. Unless, perhaps, they are part of an extremely robust effort of the kind that could only be led by the United States—and of the kind that was not undertaken in Afghanistan except partially towards the end—neither probably will want to do counterinsurgency again. Moreover, the military and foreign policy establishments now will tend to look skeptically at any future proposals to intervene in failed and failing states through a counterinsurgency lens and not just with the naively optimistic outlook that they brought with them to Kandahar and Uruzgan.

Timeline

CANADA

2001

(Chrétien majority Liberal government)

- Oct. Canada pledges military and naval support to U.S. anti-terrorism campaign, followed by deployment of naval forces to U.S. CENTCOM area
- Dec. Deployment of 40 JTF-2 special forces operatives to Afghanistan (not revealed at time)

2002

- Feb. PPCLI battle group of 750 in Kandahar (to August)

THE NETHERLANDS

2001

(Kok II "purple" (left-right) cabinet, PvdA-VVD-D'66)

- Nov. Cabinet approves military support for U.S. in form of warships, transport and maritime patrol aircraft and F-16s for reconnaissance; naval deployments follow
- Dec. Two Orion P-3Cs fly reconnaissance over Afghanistan out of base in UAE (to June 2003)

2002

- Jan. Air mobile company of about 200 reinforced by special forces commandos to ISAF Kabul (to Aug. 2003)
- Apr. One C-130H Hercules, tactical air transport between Afghanistan, Uzbekistan & Kyrgyzstan

(July. Balkenende I centre-right-populist cabinet, CDA-VVD-LPF)

- Oct. Six F-16s, based in UAE provide close air support in Afghanistan (to Oct. 2003)
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CANADA	THE NETHERLANDS
<p>2003</p> <p>– Aug. Battle group of 2000 joins ISAF Kabul multinational brigade, also commanded by Canada (to 2005)</p> <p><i>(Dec. Paul Martin becomes PM)</i></p>	<p>2003</p> <p>– Feb. Germany and Netherlands command ISAF Kabul; 400 additional Dutch military personnel (to Aug.)</p> <p><i>(May. Balkenende II centre-right cabinet, CDA-VVD-D66)</i></p>
<p>2004</p> <p><i>(June. Elections: Liberal minority government)</i></p>	<p>2004</p> <p>– March. Six Apache helicopters, reconnaissance & escort duties for ISAF Kabul (to March 2005)</p> <p>– Sept. F-16s (originally 6, later 8) first to Kyrgyzstan, later based in Afghanistan (ongoing)</p> <p>– Oct. The Netherlands leads PRT in Baghlan province, approx, 220 personnel (to Oct. 2006)</p>
<p>2005</p> <p>– May. Cabinet approves PRT and battle group in Kandahar, as well as Canadian command of RC-South</p> <p>– Summer: Canadians begin to deploy to Kandahar</p> <p>– Sept. Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan (STRAT-A) (to 2008)</p>	<p>2005</p> <p>– Apr. Special forces task force of approximately 250 personnel in southern Kandahar (to April 2006)</p> <p>– Aug. Marine battalion group of approx.750 personnel in northern Afghanistan, part of ISAF Election Support Force</p>

CANADA	THE NETHERLANDS
<p>2006</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Jan. Diplomat Glynn Berry killed <i>(Jan. Elections: Conservative minority, Stephan Harper PM)</i> – Feb. BGen Fraser commands RC-S (to Nov.) – May House of Commons narrowly adopts government motion supporting 2-year extension to (2009) – Sept. Operation Medusa 	<p>2006</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Feb. Parliamentary approval of Uruzgan mission. – Apr. Dutch forces begin deployment to Uruzgan. <i>(Jul. Balkende III cabinet, centre-right CDA-VVD)</i> – Aug. Begin Uruzgan mission – Sept. Dutch support of Canadian Forces during Op Medusa
<p>2007</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Apr. House of Commons defeats opposition Liberal motion to set 2009 as firm withdrawal date – Oct. Creation of Manley panel 	<p>2007</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>(Feb. Balkenende IV centre-left cabinet CDA-PvdA-CU)</i> – June. Battle of Chora – Dec. Parliamentary approval for renewal of Uruzgan mission until 2010
<p>2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Jan. Manley report – Mar. House of Commons supports government motion to extend the mission for two years, with December 2011 as firm pullout date – Sept. Harper pledges pullout from Afghanistan in 2011 <i>(Oct. Elections: second Harper Conservative minority)</i> 	<p>2008</p>
<p>2009</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – March. Harper “cannot defeat insurgency” remarks 	<p>2009</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Apr. Special forces task group in southern Afghanistan supporting ISAF operations (to Aug 2010)

CANADA	THE NETHERLANDS
<p>2010</p> <p>– November. Announcement of Kabul-centred non-combat role, focussing on police training</p>	<p>2010</p> <p>– Feb. Cabinet falls; attempts abandoned to secure further renewal of Uruzgan mission</p> <p>– Aug. Uruzgan mission ends</p> <p><i>(Oct. Rutte I centre right minority cabinet VVD-CDA)</i></p>
<p>2011</p> <p><i>(May. Elections. Harper Conservative majority government)</i></p> <p>– July-December 2011. Canadian withdrawal from Kandahar, begin police training in Kabul and satellite locations.</p>	<p>2011</p> <p>– Jan. Parliamentary approval of police training mission in Kabul & Konduz, with F-16 support</p>

About the Author

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