

1 Introduction: The Script and Its Cast

Introduction

Imagine an afternoon at military headquarters in the United Kingdom. Two generals are smoking a cigar during a short meeting break. They are discussing a possible deployment of their armed forces, anticipating an upcoming request of NATO to its member states to contribute military forces for an expansion of the Alliance's presence in Afghanistan. Whilst talking, the first contours of a plan to deploy their forces into south Afghanistan see the day of light.

What appears to be a collegial talk between two military senior officers sharing their thoughts on a potential deployment of their forces is actually not as futile as one might think. In fact, these generals are the directors of operations of their respective militaries. One is from the United Kingdom and the other is from the Netherlands. Their initial ideas came to fruition in a series of actions and decisions that, ultimately, led to the deployment of British and Dutch armed forces into southern Afghanistan.

The deployment of military forces for international military interventions raises fundamental questions such as *why* these interventions are undertaken in the first place but also *how* these decisions were taken. The use of military means is often treated as a neutral, an 'all-in-one toolkit', to be utilised when other methods for achieving a particular political goal fail. By learning about *why* and *how* foreign policy decisions on the deployment of military forces are made, we gain information about the intentions and strategies of governments and, respectively, how definitions of the problems at hand are translated into action.¹ Put differently: "Who becomes involved in a decision, *how*, and *why* is essential to an explanation of why decision-makers decided the way that they did".²

The particular focus of this study is the role of the military in foreign policy decision-making on the deployment of military forces. Hence, investigating the 'how' of their role in foreign policy decision-making is as important as investigating the 'why' of their involvement.³ The outcome of this study will inform various academic fields and policymakers since direct military involvement in foreign policy decision-making has long been anathema in both academic and practitioner circles. The notion of the existence of informal military action channels and their effect on the initiation and shaping of decision paths on the deployment of military forces deserves greater attention in the field of security studies, foreign policy analysis and civil-military relations.

This study closely examines the history of the decision paths of senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom all the way back to the initial idea that caused a certain decision path to materialise. During the examination several questions will be asked such as: whether the primacy of politics, as text books would prescribe, guide the actions of senior civil and military decision-makers; how this decision group interpreted and made sense of the task at hand; whether there was a strategy and a subsequent narrative articulating the purpose of the use of the military means.

The findings of the case studies illustrate the emergence of a powerful, hardly contested idea that engendered a path-dependent reasoning in which senior civil and military decision-makers joined forces. Furthermore, the reconstruction of their decision paths brings to light the emergence of agency at a level which is believed to be unlikely. A trilateral military initiative was foundational to the initial decision-making on the deployment of forces to southern Afghanistan.

The book presents both empirical and theoretical findings. A detailed account of how the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom came to the decision to deploy their militaries respectively to Uruzgan and Helmand and how they, subsequently, drafted their strategies for the stabilisation of southern Afghanistan is put forward. The systematic reconstruction and comparison of the activities of these decision-makers allowed us to reach a sound judgement about why and how the decision to commit military troops was made.

The theoretical contribution of this book is its claim to further advance the research agenda of strategic studies and civil-military relations. Several assumptions and dominant beliefs within these fields

are challenged by the findings of this study. The analysis, as presented in this study, gives rise to a more rudimentary approach to practices in the field. These practices go beyond an invented theoretical world in which the dynamics of the logics at play in the minds of agents are often downplayed, ignored, or denied. We ought to focus more on the entrapments and path dependency that seems to occur between the senior civil and military decision-makers whilst discussing a deployment of military forces. Assuming prescriptive theory on roles and rules to prevent path-dependent reasoning and entrapment would be naïve. Instead, let us focus on fostering a structural dialogue between civil and military decision-makers, a dialogue that is to inform strategic thought and practice.

The book calls for a more profound use of contingency-based logic of decision-making analysis within strategic studies. This approach facilitates a dynamic investigation of sequential decision-making over time and allows for incorporating the influence of agency.⁴ The study emphasises the importance of the senior civil and military decision-makers' agency and scrutinises the ways in which they made up their minds and acted accordingly. In the process of figuring out what to do, the political agency of actors surfaces in case they are able to put their capacity into use. Whether the actors fail or succeed to influence political decisions defines the result of their actions.⁵

Hence, this study challenges the dominantly held belief, within strategic studies, on rational actor linear decision-making. The main argument is that using frameworks, codes and regulations that are designed to facilitate rational linear decision-making do not result in objective, coherent, qualified or transparent decision-making. It also downplays the notion of human creativity in reasoning and decision-making.

Another important aspect of this study is the notion of Western-centrism. This approach, more often than not, fails to take into consideration the perspectives of the states subject to military intervention. The findings of this research illustrate that when it comes to military interventions, Western states habitually ask preconceived questions, which often leads to biased analysis and, typically, results in a collective focus on *how* the intervention should be carried out before sufficiently addressing the reasons *why* intervention is necessary.

The senior civil and military decision-makers in this book are conceptualised as a 'decision unit'. The concept of a decision unit allows a

focus on how a group of actors acquires agency, its primary feature being the ability to commit government resources. The work of Hermann, Hermann and Hagan on decision units expands on an extant body of research on foreign policy decision-making that has traditionally focused on bureaucratic politics, group dynamics and presidential advisory systems.⁶

Furthermore, it takes into account the ways in which those involved in policymaking can shape events instead of focusing on constraints that limit what decision units can do. By shaping events, decision units can become active participants in the making of foreign policy. Lastly, the decision-unit model facilitates research on foreign policy decisions that go beyond current models, which focus largely on the American political system. This allows for a more inclusive and comparative study of how decisions are made in and between different political systems.⁷

Most importantly, the model provides for a systematic analysis of sequential decisions whereby the decision unit members potentially change and/or revert back to their initial configuration. This is often dependent on the type of decision within space and time. The contingency-based logic of the model facilitates a dynamic analysis of the series of decisions that are made.⁸ Furthermore, this level of analysis bridges the individual and organisational level, facilitating switching between these levels.⁹

The added value of closing in on the particular group of civil and military actors highlights an informal decision-making process that conditions, shapes, and even predetermines the ultimate decision. The application of the framework to the sequential decision-making of the deployment of military forces, exhibits the viability of the dynamics at play. Hence, by focusing on the series of choices that follow multiple occasions for decision, one can capture the emerging decision path in great detail and it enables the unravelling of informal action channels.

This book will provide insights into the decision-making process over time through reconstructing *how* results from one occasion for decision influence and/or intertwine with information from the national and international environment and consequently shape the nature of the next occasion for decision. The interdisciplinary approach of this study is supposed to advance to a more thorough understanding of how decisions to deploy military forces at large are made and the difficulties of strategy making.¹⁰ As indicated by Lawrence Freedman, many important academic divides cut across these boundaries. Consequently, practical problems,

such as deciding on the use of the military for interventions, can rarely be encapsulated in terms of a single discipline. In fact, every so often, an interdisciplinary approach facilitates innovation and influences new thinking.¹¹

The book will also reveal how these civil-military strategically-engaged agents made inferences about their counterparts in order to best suit the achievement of their goal. The reconstruction of their actions illustrates how the commitments and beliefs of these agents informed the basis on which they were prepared to act.¹² As Alexander Macleod points out, black-boxing senior decision-makers would be perfidious since their communication is usually the outcome of a collective process, involving power struggles, policy disagreements and partisan infighting.¹³ As such, the selection of this group of actors as the primary unit of analysis will best serve the possibility of reconstructing the events and activities that led to the deployment of military forces to Helmand and Uruzgan.

The Method

A contextualised approach is employed for this study stemming from the belief that a social phenomenon cannot be adjudicated separately from the context in which the phenomenon occurs. Therefore, to unravel the mechanisms at play, the method of structured focused comparison is used, allowing an in-depth analysis of the cases at hand. The structure is provided through 'semi-structured' interviews in which the theoretical focus resonates but it also allows for the interviewees to provide information on matters unique to their experience and matters they themselves view to be important.¹⁴

Particularly, in political science, process-tracing frequently involves the analysis of developments at the highest level of government.¹⁵ The method reduces randomness as much as possible. The most important actors need to be identified and approached directly.¹⁶ The framework of the decision unit is particularly suited for process-tracing purposes since it facilitates isolating and examining the sequence of decisions by breaking the sequence down into its parts. In the reconstruction of the flow of decisions and who was involved in which decision with what consequences to the decision process, actual choice comes to light.¹⁷

In-depth (semi-structured) interviews with the focus group of senior civil and military decision-makers were carried out as elite interviews.

These kinds of interviews shed light on decisions and actions that lay behind an event or series of events, through direct and focused questioning. The opinions of the interviewees are not only an important source for reconstructing the process, but their experiences and beliefs about how and why military means were used for the stabilisation effort in southern Afghanistan are crucial to this research as well. Their actions are purportedly based on their ideas of what would be acceptable to the constituents. These acceptable ideas are grounded on orientations such as internationalism and/or pacifism relating to public notions of national roles. These build upon the structuring of the public's views and their underlying core values.¹⁸

The Cases

The primary criterion for the case selection was its relevance to the research objective of the study.¹⁹ Consequently, the least-likely case selection was applied. This decision was founded in the author's preliminary knowledge of the cases at hand, thereby allowing a stronger research design.²⁰ However, a sense of pragmatism was also attributed to the case selection decision due to funding and possibilities to access data.

The two case studies present the decision paths of the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom on the deployment of their respective military forces to southern Afghanistan.²¹ These selected countries are NATO members and two important Western European states when it comes to providing troops for stabilisation missions but differ to one another to a great extent as well.²² The main differences lie in their political systems and their security posture within the international arena. While the United Kingdom is often criticised or applauded for their 'warrior proneness', the Netherlands are often criticised or applauded for their 'soft' and 'a-military' appearance. International views on the use of military force by these two countries vary. Generally put, one can distinguish a difference between Atlantic and European views about the purpose of the military, especially with regard to their role in foreign policy. The principal realist assumption that states use armed force to advance their security interests seems to appeal more to major and medium military powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom.²³ Small states like Denmark, the

Netherlands and Sweden tend to doubt whether armed force is a useful means for achieving security.²⁴

The major difference between these countries, that could potentially affect decision-making on the use of military means, lies in their political systems. The Netherlands has a multi-party system, which is often ruled by a coalition government. Coalition governments by definition need to work on building consensus within their cabinet, parliament and senate in order to be effective. The Prime Minister is *primus interparis* (first among equals) and the role of government and the use of military means are laid down in the constitution.²⁵ The United Kingdom has a majority system, also known as the Westminster model. It is named after the palace of Westminster in London, which is the location of the British parliament. The main characteristic of the model is that the Queen, the head of state, is the nominal or *de jure* source of executive power while the *de facto* head of the executive is the Prime Minister. He exercises executive authority on behalf of the head of state. This system of government originated with parliamentary convention, practices and precedents and has never been formally laid out in a written constitution.²⁶

An aspect closely related to the different political systems of these states is the set of procedures underpinning the deployment of their troops. These differences are founded in the dissimilarities in their political systems. In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister possesses great powers to employ military means, whereas in the Netherlands, Parliament has acquired itself a prominent role in the endorsement of deploying military means.²⁷

Moreover, in the Netherlands, the use of the military is a sensitive and often debated issue in the Dutch parliament, especially after the events in Srebrenica.²⁸ As a result, an assessment framework and consequently a parliamentary procedure was developed and implemented. The framework, as will be explained in chapter four, consists of a series of political and military criteria that are used to consider the desirability and feasibility of contributing military resources to an international military operation.²⁹ When applied, the Dutch government prepares an Article 100 Letter. On the basis of this letter, parliament can debate the issues related to the deployment. In order for the government to deploy its military forces, the majority of parliamentary members must endorse the proposal. Without a majority in parliament, the government could decide to deploy its forces anyway but this is not viewed as desirable.³⁰ The United Kingdom does not have such a thorough and formal set of

procedures when it comes to deploying their troops, which adds to the comparative advantage of the two cases.

An additional difference between the two states is the fact that the United Kingdom institutionalised a comprehensive approach to operations in its Post Conflict and Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) (now referred to as Stabilisation Unit). The interdepartmental unit jointly serves the Department for International Development (DFID), Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). PCRU plans missions to fragile states, according to a single British aim and strategic framework. Consequently, they deploy civilian experts as well as military forces. The Netherlands has not institutionalised its interdepartmental cooperation, but coordinates the planning and execution of its military missions through the Steering Group Military Operations (SMO).

An important benefit of a comparative research strategy is its ability to study events in depth.³¹ The case studies are structured in the following way: first of all, the context in which the senior civil and military decision-makers chose to engage their armed forces to stabilise southern Afghanistan is presented. Secondly, the actions and events featuring the complex political and military interplay of launching a military operation and the articulation of its purpose will be outlined. The cases are concluded once political approval for the operations was granted and the plans for the operations were delivered. As such, the timeframe of the case studies is limited to the duration of the military and political decision-making process that started in 2004 and ended in the first quarter of 2006.

The analysis of the cases employs both a deductive and an inductive method since existing theories on human action, decision-making, civil-military relations, and strategy are guiding the propositions formulated for the collection of the data. However, possible explanations, as to what accounts for current developments in the translation of political goals into a military operation, follows an inductive logic. This is informed by combining theoretical insights with empirical findings.

This study contains some limitations. First of all, access to classified data has been allowed for the Dutch case but could not be arranged for the British case. Archive material was important for the triangulation of the gathered data through interviews. However, many studies and reports regarding the decision-making process on the deployment to Helmand

have appeared in the United Kingdom and public hearings have been conducted. As such, much secondary data could be collected, allowing triangulation for the British case as well.

Secondly, this study relies heavily on elite interviews and, as such, on the memories of the interviewees. In retrospect, their memory of events might not be accurate or might even have been manipulated for self-serving purposes. The data from these interviewees was cross-checked with data from other actors who were interviewed. Subsequently, this data was triangulated using archive material and other secondary data. Therefore, the data collected from these interviews was carefully selected before being presented. Although there is a certain level of subjectivity in the facts recollected from these interviews, the comments are validated through triangulation with other sources, as mentioned earlier.

Thirdly, it is the essence of interpretive research to study the acts of social agents. Ultimately, observation is interpretation: social reality constitutes meanings and these meanings cannot be studied in any 'objective' manner. This could be viewed as a limitation to this study. However, the impossibility of objective observation should by no means justify not trying to pragmatically interpret social reality with as much detachment as possible. Hence, 'to know if social reality is really real makes no analytical difference: the whole point is to observe whether agents take it to be real and to draw the social and political implications that result'.³²

Lastly, the author is an active duty officer, which comes with both advantages and disadvantages. The principal advantage is her field experience and her privileged access to various (classified) operational documents and reports. This also constitutes the disadvantages of her position, namely, she is 'part' of the instrument under study and much of the data to which she has access is classified. By being aware that she already has some preconceived ideas based on her experience, she tried to keep distance and she received feedback from a team of reviewers when necessary. The classified information about the planning and execution of the mission and the operational debriefs that she gained access to formulated the questions for the semi-structured interview lists, which were designed for the structured and focused comparison. The information has been triangulated with other information gathered through interviews and has served as a reliability test of the gathered qualitative data.

Book Outline

The book is divided into three parts. Part One deals with the conceptual and theoretical framework that guides the careful dissection of the decision paths of the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Chapter Two introduces the main concepts and their status quaestionis. First of all, the context of contemporary military interventions will be set out, with a particular focus on the concept of stabilisation operations. The use of stabilisation operations was the dominant concept at the time when the decisions that lie at the centre of attention for this study were made. Subsequently, the senior civil and military decision-makers and the nature of their relations will be attended to, followed by a theoretical description of their core process, the delivery of strategy. Chapter Three sets out the analytical framework foundational to the reconstruction of the decision paths of the group of senior civil and military decision-makers. It commences with sketching the institutional context and its conditioning mechanisms, thereby providing the setting in which the senior civil and military decision-makers are to come to a decision. Henceforth, the concept of decision units is introduced as a vehicle to reconstruct the series of events and decisions that ultimately led to the deployment of military forces. The concept also allows us to operationalise the civil and military decision-makers.

Part Two of the book commences by providing a short overview of the genesis of the Western intervention in Afghanistan up to the time the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decided to deploy their military means for the stabilisation of southern Afghanistan (Chapter Four). This chapter serves merely to set out the developments in Afghanistan since the intervention of the 'coalition of the willing', a formation of Western military powers led by the United States that invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 until NATO's expansion into southern Afghanistan in the summer of 2006. The chapter is designed to provide an understanding of the environment in which the Netherlands and the United Kingdom felt they needed to engage by contributing to NATO's expansion in this country.

Successively, Chapter Five discusses the case of the Netherlands. The chapter embarks by outlining the foreign and security policy of the Netherlands and provides a description of its senior civil and military decision-makers and the procedures for deciding to use military means within their specific political context. Subsequently, the actions

and decisions of the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands are carefully reconstructed. Chapter Six presents the case of the United Kingdom and commences by presenting the foreign and security policy and provides a description of its senior civil and military decision-makers and the procedures of deciding to use military means within their specific political context. Subsequently, the actions and decisions of the senior civil and military decision-makers in the United Kingdom are carefully reconstructed.

Subsequently, in Chapter Seven, a cross-case comparison is conducted. The workings of the actions undertaken and the decisions made by the senior civil and military decision-makers in both nations will be compared in this chapter.

Part Three, commences with the concluding chapter (Chapter Eight) in which questions that instigated and guided this research will be answered: firstly, why the senior civil and military decision-makers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom decided to provide military means for the stabilisation of southern Afghanistan and, secondly, how this political ambition was converted into a military operation. Lastly, the final chapter (Chapter Nine) of this book confronts the most salient findings of this study with prominent matters in the field of strategic studies and civil and military relations in need of reappraisal.