

Engaging with tribal structures in military operations

The Royal Netherlands Army in Iraq and Afghanistan



Master Thesis

Conflict, Territories, and Identities

Radboud University Nijmegen

January 2020

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Image: Royal Netherlands Army

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author or of individuals interviewed for the purpose of this research. Therefore, they do not reflect the official position of the Dutch Ministry of Defence nor of the Royal Netherlands Army.

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Acknowledgements

In September 2018, I entered a world that was completely foreign to me; one that I never had any contact with. 363 days later, my internship had come to an end. I met many great people, learned a lot, and had the opportunity to write this thesis. Without my internship at the section Cultural Affairs and Information (CAI), I would have never been able to collect as much information as I have now. But the best this internship gave me, is a direction in which field I want to work.

First and foremost, a special thanks to Edwin Maes, Boris Wijmer, Niels Noordstar, Bas de Haan, Tatjana Stuckelschwaiger, Lesley van Dijk, and Bo Tammer. Also, my colleagues at 1CMICO, the ‘School voor Vredesmissies’ (SVV), and all the military personnel that provided me with stories and valuable information.

Thanks to all my interviewees: M. Kitzen, W. Vogelsang, Colonel van Harskamp, Lieutenant-General (Ret) van Griensven, Major-General Matthijssen, Brigadier-General Rietdijk, Lieutenant-Colonel Schröder, and the two anonymous interviewees.

I hope you all enjoy reading this thesis.

Executive summary

For over fifteen years, parts of the Middle-East and Central-Asia have not only witnessed conflict, but also complex western-led military operations. In Iraq and Afghanistan, coalition partners have come across social structures that are unlike our own, structures that influence, shape and dominate the local context. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, tribes are important modes of organization. In Iraq, the U.S. Army tried to cooperate with tribes, in order to expel Al-Qaida from the country. As this strategy appeared successful, the idea to cooperate with tribes in other countries as well soon spread across Defence Ministries worldwide. This thesis explores how the Royal Netherlands Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on and engaged with tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan to influence their military operations. Through secondary analysis based on academic literature, policy reports, and Army documents, this thesis first zeroes in on tribal structures in theory and practice. Within the context of the Iraqi province of Al-Muthanna and the Afghan province of Uruzgan, I analyse tribal structures, focussing on their collective action, political action and violent action, hereby connecting tribes to politics and conflict. By interviewing military researchers, intelligence officers, and military commanders, this thesis secondly zeroes in on how the Dutch Army developed knowledge of and engaged with tribal structures. Where the level of knowledge about tribal structures in Uruzgan was relatively good, the level of knowledge about tribal structures in Iraq was limited. However, during both the SFIR and ISAF missions, the Dutch Army lacked true understanding of tribal structures. Also, the Dutch Army's efforts to develop theoretical and practical knowledge on and engage with tribes only had limited effect. The successes of engaging with tribes were only marginal and lasted no longer than the duration of the Dutch missions. This research thus identifies the limitations and effects of the Dutch Army's efforts to engage with tribes in Iraq and Afghanistan. It opens possibilities for future learning and identifies some practical recommendations for the Dutch Army's future operations in tribal environments.

Glossary of terms

AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
BSB	Brigade Speciale Beveiliging (Special unit within the Dutch Military Police)
CIMIC	Civil-Military Interaction
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CULTAD	Cultural advisor
EF	Enduring Freedom
HTS	Human Terrain System
HTT	Human Terrain Team
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KCT	Korps Commando Troepen (Dutch Special Forces within the land forces)
MIVD	Militaire Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst (Dutch military intelligence and security service)
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
POLAD	Political advisor
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SFIR	Stabilization Force Iraq
TFU	Task Force Uruzgan
TLO	The Tribal Liaison Office
TRIBAD	Tribal advisor

After its emergence and rapid spread over Iraq, Al-Qaeda established a stronghold in the southern province of Al-Anbar. In 2002, the Iraqi sub-organization Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was born. At first, local tribal leaders supported AQI and provided them with logistic support and recruits.¹ But the Al-Anbar tribes increasingly grew resentful of AQI's violence and repression and started to fight them on a small scale.² The first wider initiatives of tribal mobilization against AQI took place in late 2005. In September 2006, tribes from in and around the city of Ramadi formed an official alliance, the *Al-Anbar Salvation Council*, to fight AQI.³ U.S. troops sought collaboration with the newly formed alliance and with their help the idea of tribal mobilization spread through the rest of Al-Anbar. Around 80.000 to 100.000 individuals joined what became known as the *Al-Anbar Awakening*.⁴ By the summer of 2007, AQI was expelled from most of Al-Anbar province.⁵

Soon after the Awakening had proven its success, the United States Army discussed the possibility of seeking tribal engagement in other countries as well. The Al-Anbar Awakening became the U.S. showpiece of non-kinetic operations and new counterinsurgency strategies, where emphasis is placed on cultivating local allies.⁶ The idea rose to 'export' the Awakening to Afghanistan.⁷ Afghan tribes are also of great political and social importance;⁸ Afghanistan and Iraq seem to bear some resemblance. Numerous researchers and experts have however argued that the exportation of the Awakening to Afghanistan is problematic and fraught with problems. Malkasian and Mayerle identify three main differences between the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts and contexts. First, the current conflicts are both caused by different problems; sectarian divide in Iraq and misrule in Afghanistan.⁹ Although these are not the only problems both countries face, they are of large influence to the tribal dynamics in both countries. Second, "Afghanistan has a unique history of warlordism" which never existed in Iraq. And third, both the nature of tribes and the tribal structures in society are different.¹⁰ This third factor is the biggest limitation for a successful exportation of the Awakening. Therefore, tribal engagement in Afghanistan will probably "not produce the kind of broad tribal movement witnessed in Al Anbar".¹¹

Critique on whether to relay on lessons learned from Iraq and the possibility to transfer these to the military operation in Afghanistan, sparked renewed interest in Afghan-specific tribal structures. In 2009,

¹ M. Benraad, "Iraq's Tribal 'Sahwa': Its Rise and Fall", *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 1 (2011): 121-131.

² B. Stancati, "Tribal Dynamics and the Iraq Surge", *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2010): 88-112.

³ Benraad, "Iraq's Tribal 'Sahwa' ", 122.

⁴ Stancati, "Tribal Dynamics".

⁵ Benraad, "Iraq's Tribal 'Sahwa' ".

⁶ P.R. Mansoor, *Surge. My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁷ M.L. Cottam & J.W. Huseby, *Confronting al Qaeda. The Sunni Awakening and American Strategy in al Anbar* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

⁸ R. Tapper, "Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan: an Update", *Études Rurales* 184 (2009): 33-46.

⁹ C. Malkasian & J. Meyerle, *How is Afghanistan Different from Al Anbar?* (Arlington: CAN, 2009).

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

major Gant published *A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan: One Tribe at a Time*,¹² “laying out a strategy that focused on empowering Afghanistan’s ancient tribal system”.¹³ The United States Army has been deployed in Afghanistan since 2001, the year that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission started. Other ISAF partners also acknowledged the importance and complexity of the tribal dimension. The Royal Netherlands Army,¹⁴ that joined the ISAF mission in January 2002, worked with tribal advisors (TRIBAD) in Afghanistan from 2002 till 2008. These advisors were important to both the preliminary research and the interpretation of tribal structures on the ground.¹⁵ Also, the Dutch Army requires “the commander, his staff, and subordinate commanders to understand tribal dynamics and the socio-cultural context”.¹⁶ Military strategies and guidelines go even further and also focus on influencing and controlling tribal dynamics. In Iraq and Afghanistan, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) were deployed to “influence tribal scenes of tension”.¹⁷

Developing theoretical and practical knowledge on and engaging with local tribal structures are important parts of the international military presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on the military emphasis placed on tribalism, we all too often assume that engaging with tribes and tribal structures has a positive effect on conflict, that is the de-escalating of conflict and establishment of conditions for peace. With tribal engagement as a “modicum of stability”,¹⁸ civil society can be strengthened; a stable and strong civil society in turn positively contributes to peace and democracy.¹⁹ Tribal structures are only one of the many social structures in society. These social- structures or networks form societies social capital.²⁰ Vervisch et. al. argue that social capital reduces conflict as it functions as a societal glue preventing social divides.²¹ More practically, traditional tribal norms and values have resulted in conflict resolution mechanisms that have, in some cases, proved to be effective in modern-day conflicts. For example, among the Beja tribe in eastern Sudan, intertribal conflict rarely escalates into violence because of prevention and resolution mechanisms.²²

Tribal engagement and knowledge of tribal structures have become glorified and are presented as a solution for conflict on itself. While we know that a one-on-one exportation of the Awakening is not

¹² J. Gant, *A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan: One Tribe at a Time* (Los Angeles: Nine Sisters Import, 2009), http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/5042~v~One_Tribe_at_a_Time___A_Strategy_for_Succes_s_in_Afghanistan.pdf.

¹³ N. Manchandra, “The Imperial Sociology of the ‘Tribe’ in Afghanistan”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017): 165-189, here 182.

¹⁴ The Royal Netherlands Army will be called ‘Dutch Army’ from this point on.

¹⁵ Royal Netherlands Army, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Inzet in Afghanistan”, *Joint Doctrine Bulletin* 2008/01, 1-37.

¹⁶ Royal Netherlands Army, ‘Command Support in Land Operations: Doctrine Publication’ (2014), 66.

¹⁷ P.J.E.J. Van den Aker, “Tussen waakzaamheid en wederopbouw: Nederlandse militaire operaties in Afghanistan”, *Research Paper of the Faculty of Military Science, Netherlands Defence Academy*, no. 93 (2009): 16.

¹⁸ M. Eisenstadt, “Tribal Engagement: Lessons Learned”, *Military Review* (September-October 2007): 16-31.

¹⁹ F. Fukuyama, “Social Capital and Civil Society”, *IMF Working Paper* (2002).

²⁰ P. Bourdieu, “The forms of Capital”. In *The Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J.G. Richardson (Westport: ABC-Clio, 1986), 248-249.

²¹ T. Vervisch, K. Titeca, K. Vlassenroot, and J. Braeckman, “Social-Capital and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Burundi: The Limits of Community-based Reconstruction”, *Development and Change* 44, no. 1 (2013): 147-174.

²² K.A. El Amin, “Eastern Sudan Indigenous Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution Mechanisms”, *Asian Security Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 7-22.

possible, there is not much information on the actual effect tribes have had on the conflict in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and whether engaging with tribes has positively contributed to the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, I try to answer the following question: *How has the Royal Netherlands Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on- and engaged with tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan to influence their military operation?*

The objective of this thesis is to offer a critical perspective on the success of cooperation with tribal structures in Dutch military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and from there offer a recommendation on how to engage with tribes in future military operations. Although the conclusions of this thesis are illustrative of Iraq and Afghanistan, they may be transferable beyond the Iraqi or Afghan context. Hence, this thesis provides a framework to explain how to perceive and cooperate with tribal structures during military operations. My findings show that the Dutch Army developed knowledge about the local social context, but lacked true understanding. During the SFIR mission, this knowledge was limited, while during the ISAF mission, the Dutch Army had thorough knowledge on local tribes. However, due to the general lack of understanding, the Dutch Army's efforts to engage with tribes only had limited effects.

1.1 Concepts

I have chosen a difficult and contested term for this thesis: tribe. The term is centuries old but still is relevant today, and will be in the future. Over time, the meaning and use of the term have changed. Therefore, I provide a clear definition of the term tribe in the following paragraph. The way I define and use this term is very much a construct in the context of my thesis subject: tribes in relation to conflict and military operations. The definition I use is thus not the only definition, nor is it all-encompassing. First, I provide a modern-day concept of the term tribe, one that is based on theory but practically oriented. Second, I connect the term tribe with the context of national conflict. Third, I briefly speak of tribes within the context of the Dutch Army.

1.1.1 Tribes

In the context of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, terms as 'tribal advisor', 'tribal engagement', and 'tribal leaders' are frequently used. However, these terms should be used with care, especially in military contexts. International military strategic documents often apply the term 'tribe' as reflecting Afghanistan's socio-political organisation in its entirety.²³ This is simply untrue. Social organisations in Iraq and Afghanistan come in many different forms; tribes are only one of many. Given the many different contexts and cases in which the term 'tribe' is used, I provide a clear definition below. The definition I give first is anthropological. However, the study of tribes and their influence on conflict requires more than an anthropological perspective. Tribes are not just a form of social organization, but a body that produces

²³ N. Manchandra, "The Imperial Sociology of the 'Tribe' in Afghanistan", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (2017).

collective action and engagement. Therefore, I define the term tribe in connection with the term ‘trust networks’.

With its origins in 17th and 18th centuries colonialism, the term ‘tribe’ is a contested term. Many now see the term as ideologically charged, since it has been used to describe ‘undeveloped’ and ‘backwards’ groups.²⁴ However, anthropologists and historians still use the term for referring to “certain local conceptions of collective socio-political identity, while agreeing that a precise general definition is almost impossible”.²⁵ Although some authors have urged for replacing the term ‘tribe’ with ‘community’,²⁶ I use the term ‘tribe’ for the following reasons. First, in Islam, “the term tribe and its local equivalents have never had a predominantly pejorative meaning. On the contrary, the term is usually associated with notions of pride and autonomy, of honour and of independence from colonial and local states”.²⁷ Second, the term is a historically-rooted concept and is important for social representation.²⁸

Gingrich defines a tribe as a medium-sized, centralized, or acephalous entity that displays a combination of basic characteristics. First, a tribe is usually associated with a territory, homeland, or tribal area, while using non-territorial criteria to distinguish between members and non-members. Second, ideologically and socially, tribal members usually share some dominant idiom of common origin, such as descent from a single ancestor, emphasizing group cohesion over outside interests and internal differentiation. Third, although part of the tribal population lives permanently in the tribal territory, a considerable portion may live in the world outside. Ritual and kinship ties and obligations are enacted to ensure and strengthen intimate networks among ‘home’ groups and ‘outside’ groups, serving as one among several inventories of group adherence within a wider world.²⁹

A tribe is a form of trust network.³⁰ Members of a trust network are connected by similar ties. In the case of Afghanistan and Iraq, these ties can be based on genealogy, culture, or a shared territory. The members can turn the network for attention or aid, based on the mere fact that they are part of the network. Also, members of a trust network “collectively carry on major long-term enterprises”.³¹ Some examples of trust networks are gangs, tribes, guilds, unions, religious groups, merchant groups, pirates, and military groups.³² Tilly identifies several requirements for relations among people in order to qualify the group as a trust network:

²⁴ A. Gingrich, “Tribe”. In Wright, J. D. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2nd edition, volume 24. Oxford: Elsevier, 2010.

²⁵ Ibid., 15906.

²⁶ L. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); I. Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen. Societal collapse and the new authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2011).

²⁷ Gingrich, “Tribe”, 15907.

²⁸ M. Brandt, *Tribes and politics in Yemen. A history of the Houthi conflict* (London: Hurst & Co., 2017).

²⁹ Gingrich, “Tribe”, 15906-15907.

³⁰ C. Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³¹ Ibid.

³² M. Hanagan & C. Tilly, “Cities, States, Trust, and Rule: New Departures from the Work of Charles Tilly”, *Theory and Society* 39, no. 3-4 (2010): 245-263; Tilly, *Trust and Rule*.

“We look for a relation among at least three persons such that: First, the relation has a name mutually known to its participants. Second, involvement in that relation gives all participants some minimum of shared rights and obligations. Third, participants have means of communicating and representing their shared membership. Fourth, participants mark and maintain boundaries separating all members from outsiders”.³³

Tilly argues that trust networks are a subset of social networks. In regular social networks, the strong element of ‘trust’ is absent. Also, trust networks are more durable than regular social networks because they do not rapidly change their character, strategy, or philosophy; they do not easily change their nature. The key difference between regular social networks and trust networks members is that the latter “place their major valued collective enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures by other members of the same trust network”.³⁴ Trust networks are a form of protection; by ‘grouping up’, individuals can protect themselves from, for example, outer violence. The protectionist function of trust networks also makes that the network will collectively respond to threats and violence. Anyone who commits an act of aggression against any of the members, can expect retaliation from all the members.³⁵

Gellner argues that grouping for protection often happens in an environment where there is no strong central government. Because of the absence of a strong government, groups have to take care of themselves. When these trust networks grow stronger, there is little room left for a strong government. Here, trust networks manifest themselves as strong self-policing, self-defending, politically participating groups, generally known as tribes. Tribes can thus constitute trust networks. And indeed, groups bound on the basis of kinship tend to be cohesive and members trust each other.³⁶ Tilly also argues that “kinship has no doubt provided the most frequent matrix for the formation of trust networks”.³⁷

Why identify tribes as trust networks? Gingrich defines a tribe as a solely anthropological concept, focused on culture, tradition, and ethos. Based on this perspective, the designation ‘tribe’ tells something general about a group of people and the bonds that form and hold them together. One might also link tribes to specific tribal ethos, rituals, or folklore. But tribes are much more. They can be political actors who oppose state power or insurgency groups;³⁸ tribal norms and values influence state and society.³⁹ As the Al-Anbar Awakening shows, tribes can play an important role in conflict. Since the study of conflict can be highly interdisciplinary and ontologically complex,⁴⁰ merely looking at anthropological or sociological perspectives to study the effect of tribes on conflict is not satisfying. Tribes need to be defined as more than a form of cultural or social organization. There is a need for seeing tribes in a light that explains their ability

³³ Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 44.

³⁴ Ibid., 5-6.

³⁵ E. Gellner, “Trust, Cohesion, and the Social Order”. In *Trust. Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, edited by D. Gambetta (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 45-46.

³⁸ P. Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion. Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

³⁹ P.S. Khoury & J. Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1990).

⁴⁰ S.N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of “Political Violence”: Action and Identity in Civil Wars”, *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (2003): 475-494; J. Galtung, “Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution: The Need for Transdisciplinarity”, *Transcultural Psychiatry* 47, no. 1 (2010): 20-32.

to generate collective action and engagement. Understanding their role in conflict becomes much easier if one conceives of tribes as trust networks. Trust networks interact with politics; they can be political actors. Tilly argues that without the involvement of trust networks in politics, democracy deteriorates.⁴¹ Social relations are productive as they enable “action of actors, whether persons or corporate actors, within the social structure”.⁴² Trust networks can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions.⁴³

In this thesis, I speak of ‘tribes’ and not of ‘trust networks’. However, the concept of trust networks is part of the definition of ‘tribe’ I use. Gingrich provides a practical, anthropological definition of the tribe, while Tilly’s concept of trust networks helps us understand the political and social role of tribes. Hereby I hope to tackle some of the problems that arise when using the term tribe in academic literature. Combining the two definitions allows me to not only study what tribes are but what they, as trust networks, can politically and socially help produce: democracy, peace, conflict, and instability. This makes ‘tribe’ not merely a structural concept, but an acting social and political unit. However, the way I define tribes does not encompass all perspectives on the definition of tribes. For example, I do not discuss tribes as forms of legal or economic networks.⁴⁴ My approach is also specific to the tribes of Iraq and Afghanistan. It might not reflect all tribes.

1.1.2 Tribes and Conflict

The academic study of tribes is a diverse field; anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and political scientists have all looked at tribes from their own disciplinary perspective.⁴⁵ These disciplines all constructed different images of tribes.⁴⁶ The anthropological perspective has dominated the study of tribes until the end of the 1960s.⁴⁷ However, in the last two decades, the focus has been on the political perspective. In *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, Khoury and Kostiner explain state formation and (regional) politics from the perspective of tribal confederations or ‘chieftains’. The academic attention on tribe-state relations has proven important, especially in light of recent events in the Middle East. The Arab Spring, the battle against the so-called Islamic State and the current conflict in Yemen showed how relevant the study of tribal structures is.

Where there is a substantial body of literature on the relation between tribes and state politics, research on the relation between tribes and conflict is limited. Some articles on the relation between tribe

⁴¹ Tilly, *Trust and Rule*.

⁴² J.S. Coleman, “Social capital in the creation of human capital”, *The American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): 98.

⁴³ R.D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: civic traditions in modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ D.J. Walsh, “Us Against the World: Tribalism in Contemporary Iraq” (Master’s thesis, Science Po, 2015-2016), 7. Retrieved on February 2, 2019:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308763872_Us_Against_the_World_Tribalism_in_Contemporary_Iraq

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ R. Tapper, “Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople on Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East”. In *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, edited by Khoury, P. & Kostiner, J. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1990).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

and state politics focussed on countries that had recently experienced conflict or still do, such as Yemen, Syria, Somalia, and Sudan. Authors writing of these countries make similar arguments about tribe-conflict relations. Researching the political power of tribal networks in Yemen, Jones argues that the conflict deepened hostilities between different tribes. One of the reasons for tribal actors to get involved in conflict are pre-conflict inter-tribal grievances. Studies on inter-tribal conflicts in India found the same tendency.⁴⁸ In Yemen, tribal “vendettas created a self-perpetuating dynamic of violence” that worsened inter-tribal relations even more.⁴⁹ Existing inter-tribal grievances also formed a motivation for Iraqi tribes to take part in the Al-Anbar Awakening.⁵⁰ Here too, actively participating in the conflict with Al-Qaeda caused deep divisions among tribes at the local level.⁵¹ Tensions between tribes form a possible threat to newly established peace. The threat becomes even more dangerous if one considers the amount of fighting experience and access to weapons tribes are left with after participating in conflict.⁵²

Scholars also make similar arguments of the effect conflict on traditional tribal structures. Musa argues that conflict and disputes are often contained because of tribal customs and tribal dispute resolution mechanisms.⁵³ These conflict and dispute-resolution mechanisms have traditionally been in the hands of tribal leaders.⁵⁴ Hence, on the one hand, tribes seem to be able to contain conflict and prevent escalation. On the other hand, tribes can contribute to the escalation or renewal of conflict. Musa argues that “the tribe will impede the process of building a strong or coherent civil society and a stable national state”.⁵⁵ Myers had shown that tribal structures pose challenges to democracy and national identity, and cause corruption.⁵⁶ Weak states, corruption, and a divided society are all drivers of conflict.⁵⁷ Ssereo even argues that “tribal alliances, clan differences, and exclusive cultural identity cause conflict”.⁵⁸

In 1980, Dillon wrote that many researchers “relied upon unduly simplistic models of the relationship between violence and social structure”.⁵⁹ Tribal structures remain misunderstood and oversimplified today.⁶⁰ The term tribalism is “often carelessly used and misapplied to situations where it is

⁴⁸ M. Amarjeet Singh, “Revisiting the Naga conflict: what can India do to resolve this conflict?”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 5 (2013): 795-812.

⁴⁹ C. Jones, “The Tribes that Bind: Yemen and the Paradox of Political Violence”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 12 (2011): 908.

⁵⁰ Benraad, “Iraq’s Tribal ‘Sahwa’ ”.

⁵¹ R. Zeidel, “Tribes in Iraq. A Negligible Factor in State Formation”. In *Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East*, edited by U. Rabi (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 182-183.

⁵² Benraad, “Iraq’s Tribal ‘Sahwa’ ”.

⁵³ A.M. Musa, “The Tribal Impact on Political Stability in Sudan”, *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 11 (2018): 163-184.

⁵⁴ H. Dukhan, *State and Tribes in Syria. Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁵⁵ Musa, “The Tribal Impact”, 179.

⁵⁶ C.N. Myers, “Tribalism and Democratic Transition in Libya: Lessons from Iraq”, *Global Tides* 7, no. 1 (2013). Retrieved on February 6, 2019: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/globaltides/vol7/iss1/5/>

⁵⁷ P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion. Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ F. Ssereo, “Clanpolitics, Clan-democracy and Conflict Regulation in Africa: The Experience of Somalia”, *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 2, no. 3-4 (2003): 25.

⁵⁹ R.G. Dillon, “Violent Conflict in Meta’ Society”, *American Ethnologist* 7, no. 4 (1980): 658.

⁶⁰ D. Corstange, “Tribes and the rule of law in Yemen”, *Publication unknown* (2008). Retrieved on February 1, 2019: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.554.568&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

not applicable”.⁶¹ The quotation from Lewis below, perfectly summarized the importance of understanding the effect of tribes on conflict and of understand how to develop theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal culture. Coming from a non-tribal society, Western scientists, military staff, and policy officers misunderstand and misinterpreted tribes and tribal structures.

“Narratives that chart the recurrence and dominance of violence, for example, typically configure divisive clan alliances (..) as the central causes of Somalia’s internecine conflicts. This attitude prevails in the analysis of other conflicts in which clans and tribes, as classifications beyond the understanding of Western observers, have been blamed for regional insecurity or underdevelopment. (..) They are actively discouraged by modernising development narratives and their potential peace-building impacts are rarely, if ever, acknowledged”.⁶²

1.1.3 Tribes in Military Context

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have marked a new chapter in the history of warfare. Not only are these two wars part of the ‘War on terror’, they have also led to new insights on the importance of local culture in military operations. Cultural knowledge became instrumental for successful military strategy, not just rhetorical or doctrinal.⁶³ With the cultural turn, sociocultural cells, cultural awareness training, and cross-cultural understanding became important elements in the military organization worldwide.⁶⁴ On a strategic level, cultural knowledge is translated into “a comprehensive understanding of social structures, ideologies, and narratives insurgents use to organize their networks and mobilize segments of the population”.⁶⁵ A lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of culture can have drastic consequences; on a tactical level it can endanger the lives of both troops and civilians.⁶⁶ In recent years, the interaction between tribal structures and the military has been visible in many ways—e.g. the human terrain system (HTS), civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), provincial reconstruction teams (PRT), and tribal and cultural advisors (TRIBADs and CULTADs).

The most well-known legacy of the cultural turn is the HTS founded in 2005-2006. HTS norms prescribed the presence of a five-person human terrain team (HTT) in every brigade.⁶⁷ The HTTs gave

⁶¹ R. Holt, “Beyond the Tribe: Patron-Client Relations, Neopatrimonialism in Afghanistan”, *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (2012).

⁶² A. Lewis, *Security, Clans, and Tribes. Unstable governance in Somaliland, Yemen and the Gulf of Aden* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 16.

⁶³ H. Gusterson, “The Cultural Turn in the War on Terror”. In *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, edited by J.D. Kelly, et. al. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ A.J.D. Gavriel, “Incorporating Cultural Intelligence into Joint Intelligence: Cultural Intelligence and Ethnographic Intelligence Theory”. In *Culture, Conflict, and Counterinsurgency*, edited by T.H. Johnson & B.S. Zellen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 22.

⁶⁶ M. McFate, “The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture”, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 28 (2005): 42-48.

⁶⁷ R.J. González, “Indirect Rule and Embedded Anthropology”. In *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, edited by J.D. Kelly et al. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

cultural advice and provided area-specific research to military staff while deployed.⁶⁸ The work and ideology of HTS has not been without controversy. Where McFate, one of the founding fathers of the HTS, argues that HTTs have “reduced casualties in Iraq”⁶⁹, González argues that “there is no verifiable evidence that HTTs have saved a single life”.⁷⁰ Also, the American Anthropologist Association disapproved the HTS for its ethical impropriety.⁷¹

The establishment of the HTS happened in the context of the Al-Anbar Awakening. Part of the strategic outline of the HTS was founded on initial and limited knowledge of how to engage with tribes. Later, scientists and military experts have argued that by “balancing competing groups”, American strategy in Al-Anbar has “likely aggravated the civil war between and among Sunni and Shia groups”.⁷² In 2006 and 2007, the American military had a simplistic and unrealistic understanding of tribes and their interplay with social and religious structures in society at large. Baczko made a similar critique about the American strategy in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2013, where the U.S. Army lacked “serious understanding of societal dynamics”.⁷³ Operationalizing the concepts of tribe has been difficult and sometimes even problematic.⁷⁴ Tribal structures are complex and often coexist with other networks of social organizations.⁷⁵ Hence, the understanding of social structures and mobilization is crucial for military operations in tribal societies.⁷⁶

Where the HTS and the HTTs have been deployed by the United States Army, the Dutch Army has mainly engaged with tribes based on the idea of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). CIMIC originated after the Second World War. Civil-military interaction had to boost stabilization, public order, political reform and eventually reconstruction by connecting with civilian agents.⁷⁷ Where CIMIC strategy would originally be used in peace operations, it is now more and more integrated in counter-insurgency operations. In these operations, CIMIC aims at supporting and substituting civil power, as civil structures are crucial in building sustainable peace.⁷⁸ As coherent civil-military interaction improves operational effectiveness,⁷⁹

⁶⁸ J.D. Kelly et al., Introduction to *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, edited by J.D. Kelly et al. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); M.B. Griffin, “An Anthropologist Among the Soldiers: Notes from the Field”. In *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, J.D. Kelly et al. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁶⁹ M. McFate, “Culture”. In *Understanding Counterinsurgency. Doctrine, Operations, and Challenges*, edited by T. Rid & T. Keaney (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 195.

⁷⁰ González, “Indirect Rule”, 131.

⁷¹ Ibid., 132.

⁷² Ibid., 141-142.

⁷³ A. Baczko, “Legal Rule and Tribal Politics: The US Army and the Taliban in Afghanistan (2001-2003)”, *Development and Change* 47, no. 6 (2016): 1421.

⁷⁴ Holt, “Beyond the Tribe”.

⁷⁵ B. Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”. In *Concept of Tribal Society*, edited by G. Pfeffer & D.K. Behera (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002).

⁷⁶ S. Merten, “Employing Data Fusion in Cultural Analysis and COIN in Tribal Social Systems”. In *Culture, Conflict, and Counterinsurgency*, edited by T.H. Johnson & B.S. Zellen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁷⁷ T.W. Brocades Zaalberg, “The Historical Origins of Civil-Military Cooperation”. In *Managing Civil-Military Cooperation: A 24/7 Joint Effort for Stability*, edited by S.J.H. Rietjes & M.T.I.B. Bollen (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ C. De Coning, “Civil-Military Interaction: Rationale, Possibilities and Limitations”. In *Effective Civil-Military Interaction in Peace Operations*, edited by G. Lucius & S. Rietjes (n.p.: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

CIMIC provides a concept on how to cooperate with local agents. Among these local agents are tribal elders and other tribal leaders, who are important local power holders.⁸⁰

Another example of the interaction between tribal structures and the military is the deployment of PRTs. These were filled with international staff (both civil and military) that had followed a comprehensive education and training program to implement the CIMIC strategy. CIMIC qualified staff needs to complete a comprehensive education and training program. Next to knowledge of what Civil-Military interaction entails, CIMIC staff also received training in English language, negotiation, working with interpreters, gender and cultural knowledge, media awareness, etc.⁸¹ The CIMIC principles, strategy, education, and training requirements are prescribed by the Allied Joint Publication 3.4.9. All NATO countries work with Civil-Military Interaction, however, the exact execution of this NATO doctrine differs per country. For example, the U.S. department equivalent of CIMIC is called Civil Affairs.⁸²

The concept of PRT has been developed and first implemented by the United States Army during the Afghanistan mission in 2001. The Dutch Army has adopted the PRT strategy during their own deployment in Afghanistan, starting in 2002.⁸³ By trying to win the trust of local people, building relations, and supporting local development projects, PRT members tried to create a safe environment and strengthen the authority of the central government.⁸⁴ In eliminating causes for regional and local instability, it is possible to create opportunities for peacebuilding.⁸⁵ Careful manoeuvring around and influencing of tribal tensions was crucial for the success of Dutch PRTs in Afghanistan.⁸⁶

‘Engaging with’ tribes is a two-way street: where international military partners used tribal structures to their own benefit and the benefit of the mission, the reverse is also true. Tribes also used their cooperation and contact with military partners for their own benefit. For example, Afghan tribes who were in close contact with Dutch forces have pointed at a rival tribe and told Dutch soldiers that the tribe supported the Taliban. Although this rival tribe had nothing to do with the Taliban, they suddenly were under close investigation and suspicion of Dutch forces. Also, in a meeting with U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, local tribal leaders had requested someone to translate English for them. However, some of these leaders were able to speak a little English and could thus understand what American soldiers said to each other. They deliberately tried to obtain information from U.S. soldiers by acting like they did not understand English at all.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ M. Kitzen & W. Vogelsang, “Obtaining Population Centric Intelligence: Experiences of the Netherlands Military Presence in South Afghanistan”. In *Effective Civil-Military Interaction in Peace Operations*, edited by G. Lucius & S. Rietjens (n.p.: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

⁸¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation”, edition A, version 1 (February 2013): <https://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/AJP-3.4.9-EDA-V1-E1.pdf>

⁸² A.A. Raza & J.A. Lynn, “The Future of Civil Affairs: Creating Regimental Order from Chaos”, *Small Wars Journal* (March 5, 2019): <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/future-civil-affairs-creating-regimental-order-chaos>

⁸³ Royal Netherlands Army, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Inzet in Afghanistan”, *Joint Doctrine Bulletin* 2008/01, 1-37.

⁸⁴ J. Seppen & G. Lucius, “Civilians in Military Operations: Blue on Blue?” In *Effective Civil-Military Interaction in Peace Operations*, edited by G. Lucius & S. Rietjens (n.p.: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

⁸⁵ Van den Aker, “Tussen waakzaamheid en wederopbouw”.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ This information was given to me by E. Maes, head of section CAI. I verified this information with an anonymous source within the 1CMI command, who confirmed the stories.

The phenomenon in where tribes use or their relation with military partners for their own benefit—or hence exploiting military partners—is embedded in a broader literature on ‘clients’ instrumentalizing patrons for their own benefit or the benefit of their select group. These neo-patrimonial systems emerge in countries where the government tries to replace traditional patronage politics in order to create a modern state organization.⁸⁸ These states often seem to be modern, democratic, and tailored to western standards, but are in fact paralleled by stronger, non-official ways to govern—based on “long tradition of decentralized, collective/communal decision-making”⁸⁹—often led by kinship ties.⁹⁰ Real power and real decision-making lie outside formal institutions and reside in the hands of ‘big men’ “who are linked by informal (private and personal, patronage and clientelist) networks”.⁹¹

Neo-patrimonialism is important to keep in mind, especially for international military partners. Tribal leaders are not just the leader of a tribe, but often they are influential political leaders that are part of an even larger political hierarchy. Hence, their cooperation with military partners is based on political, individual, and group interests. Also, in patrimonial systems, corruption is rampant because funds—whether made available by the state, international donors or western intervening militaries—are co-mingled by the people in power. At the local level, tribal leaders often are the ones who ran politics and society, and therefore the ones to do business with. However, western organizations, governments, and armies rarely understand how ‘things were done’ locally and are highly susceptible of the manipulation and misuse of these local leaders and elites.⁹²

1.2 Methodology

I would like to elaborate on the ontological and epistemological approach this study of tribes departs from. As aforementioned, I identify a tribe as a social network, which is a form of social structure, a social entity formed by a group of individuals. However, the character of a tribe is not defined by the actions of individual members, but by the actions of all members. In defining tribes I hold a structure-based approach, I focus on the power of structures.⁹³ Hence, the individual tribal member is an actor in a larger whole, and it is their “position in this larger whole that makes them who they are, not their individual agency or consciousness”.⁹⁴ The aim of this thesis is to understand tribal structures and their influence on conflict and hereby contributing to the understanding of how to engage with local tribes during military operations. In line with

⁸⁸ D. Beekers & B. van Gool, “From patronage to neopatrimonialism. Postcolonial governance in Sub-Sahara Africa and beyond”, *African Study Centre Working Paper*, no. 101 (2012).

⁸⁹ S. Schmeidl, “The Contradictions of Democracy in Afghanistan: elites, elections and ‘people’s rule’ post-2001”, *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 6 (2016): 576.

⁹⁰ J.F. Bayart, *The State in Africa. The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993); J.F. Médard, “Corruption in the neo-patrimonial states of Sub-Saharan Africa”. In *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts*, edited by A.J. Heidenheimer & M. Johnston (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

⁹¹ D. Cammack, “The Logic of African Neopatrimonialism: What Role for Donors?”, *Development Policy Review* 25, no. 5 (2007): 600.

⁹² M. Martin, *An Intimate War. An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, 1978-2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹³ J. Demmers, “Introduction”. In *Theories of Violent Conflict: An Introduction*, edited by J. Demmers (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

a structuralist/interpretative approach, I provide an interpretation of tribal structures and an interpretation of how military operations have engaged with tribal structures.

This research is also practice-oriented. It is “meant to provide knowledge and information that can contribute to a successful intervention in order to change an existing situation”.⁹⁵ It aims to provide knowledge about tribes that can contribute to military operations in tribal countries. The lack of understanding how to engage with tribes form the puzzle of this thesis. Finding an answer to this puzzle requires an understanding of group processes. Practice-oriented research is especially relevant if the objects of research are (group)processes, which are in this case both tribal and military processes.⁹⁶

This thesis is based on academic literature, military policy documents, and data from interviews. For many reasons, I was not able to conduct fieldwork in either Iraq or Afghanistan. However, my internship position at the Ministry of Defence provided me with other unique opportunities to collect information: I had access to information that would have otherwise been near impossible to get hold on; I could connect with and talk to experts on tribes and culture in military contexts; I could speak to people who served in Iraq or Afghanistan multiple times; and I was given unique insight into the Dutch defence organization. This thesis consists of two parts, for which two different research strategies are used. Hence, I use multiple methodologies and sources of information to answer the main research question. In the following sections I discuss the research methods used in each specific part of this thesis.

From this thesis, I used two different research strategies. First, I used secondary analysis—which serves as theoretical grounding and allowed me to answer the first three sub-questions: To what extent do tribes generate collective action? Why and how do tribes engage in conflict? What tribal structures can we identify in both Iraq and Afghanistan? I relied on existing literature and material gathered by others (academic articles, policy documents, and research reports, NGO assessments, Dutch Army documents, etc.).⁹⁷ The secondary analysis has a more cross-cultural character. By collecting information on tribes in general and specifically on tribes in Iraq and Afghanistan, I was able to conduct a cross-cultural analysis, which is especially helpful for answering the first and second sub-questions, not specifically about tribes in Iraq and Afghanistan but more on tribal structures in general.

Second, I used semi-structured interviews. Through these interviewees, I answer the second two sub-questions: In what way and with what results has the Dutch Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan? In what way and with what results has the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan? I chose to conduct interviews because there is very little to no information at all on how the Dutch Army has engaged with tribes during their ISAF and SFIR mission. Individual knowledge and expertise are rarely put on paper, especially not by experienced military officers, commanders, PRT members, or cultural- and tribal advisors. I chose to conduct semi-

⁹⁵ P. Verschuren & H. Doorewaard, *Designing a Research Project* (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2010), 45-46.

⁹⁶ P. Verschuren, ‘Why a methodology for practice-oriented research is a necessary heresy’, Farewell essay by prof. Piet J.M. Verschuren, 4th of September 2009. Radboud University Nijmegen.

⁹⁷ A. Byman, *Social Research Methods. Fourth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

structured interviews because these types of interviews give a more natural and open conversation.⁹⁸ Asking someone about their experiences in Iraq or Afghanistan can be a sensitive or hard question. Therefore, it is important to leave room for someone else's story. Semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into important matters.⁹⁹

The semi-structured interviews not only shed light on the experiences, personal memories, lessons, and observations of the interviewees. Even more, they focus on the knowledge, actions, policy, experience, and lessons of the Dutch Army as a whole, as an organization. Combining these two focal points is possible and provides a more in-depth image of how the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Several of the interviewees hold high positions at the top of the Dutch Army. They speak on behalf of their position and the organization they work for. However, they also reflect on the SFIR and ISAF missions on a more personal account. These personal reflections are often created by their later experience within the Dutch Army, but also by the time that has passed since the SFIR and ISAF missions ended. During these years, the Dutch Army and commanding individuals together evaluated Dutch policy and actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Military research, lessons learned, and insights from other missions have formed new reflections. Personal reflections are, to a large extent, instrumental for the Dutch Army as a whole and vice versa.

The interviewees were carefully selected based on their experience, knowledge, and military, scientific or diplomatic background. I interviewed three SFIR or ISAF commanders, one PRT commander, one intel officer, one special forces staff officer, and one CIMIC commander. I also interviewed experts on tribes in Afghanistan, one of which is a former tribal/cultural advisor and the other is an assistant professor in war studies at the *Nederlandse Defensie Academie* (NLDA). Most of the interviewees come from my own circle of friends, colleagues, and contacts within the Dutch Army. Some of them were referred to me by colleagues or are contacted by me based on tips. In short, I used a snowball approach to get in contact with more potential interviewees.¹⁰⁰

Third, I conducted a comparative study between the information on tribes and military operations in Iraq and tribes in military operations in Afghanistan. Hereby answering the last two sub-questions: What differences can be identified between how the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures in Iraq and in Afghanistan? What differences can be identified between how the Dutch Army and international military partners have engaged with tribes in Iraq and Afghanistan? A comparative analysis is especially useful in a cross-cultural research. It enabled me to reflect on contrasting or similar findings.¹⁰¹ The comparative analysis is not only based on the information gathered through the interviews, but also incorporates information gathered from the secondary analysis.

⁹⁸ R. Longhurst, "Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups". In *Key Methods in Geography*: Third Edition, edited by N. Clifford, et al. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2016).

⁹⁹ M. Hammersley, *What is Qualitative Research?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Longhurst, "Semi-structured interviews".

¹⁰¹ Byman, *Social Research Methods*.

1.3 The Dutch Army as research subject and environment

The military is a rather non-transparent and seclusive organization. Hence, research projects within or with the Dutch Army as research subject come with specific challenges and limitations. The Dutch Army sometimes is unable or unwilling to share information, specifically, around subjects such as intelligence, special operations, and the use of force—subjects that this thesis touches upon. Also, several of those who were interviewed for this thesis work in highly volatile environments. To protect them and the Dutch Army and Ministry of Defence in general, I refrain from using first and last names if requested by the interviewees.

Only two requested confidentiality and anonymity. The other seven interviewees were comfortable speaking openly and gave me permission to state their names and quote them. I chose not to refrain from stating their names. As chapter 4, 5, and 6 show, information and quotes given by these interviewees are easily connected to them as individuals. For example, I interviewed several commanders. One of which spoke about his experience during the Battle of Chora in Afghanistan. It is only a matter of entering this information in google and the name of this specific commander is easily found. Therefore, and with their permissions, I state the names of interviewees number three to number nine. Furthermore, I clearly stated that the information I gathered is only used for my master thesis. Also, I asked permission to voice record the interviews and refrained from recording when specifically requested. In addition to these nine recorded interviews, I also spoke to other individuals. These talks were often brief and confidential. These are referred to in a footnote that states ‘information provided to me by an anonymous source within the Dutch Army’. Where possible, I triangulated the given information.

This thesis is divided in seven chapters. In chapter 2, I connect tribes to collective action, both political action and violent action. In chapter 3, I shed light on the tribal structures in specifically Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan. In chapters 4, I analyse how the Dutch Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on tribes through intelligence, PRTs, and outside experts. I also briefly touch upon Dutch military operations in both countries. In chapter 5, I argue that the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures in several soft and hard manners. In chapter 6, I analyse the Dutch knowledge of tribal structures and argue that they lacked true understanding of local tribal dynamics. I then analyse the effectiveness of the Dutch Army’s engagement with tribal structures. Also, as the Dutch SFIR and ISAF missions ended in respectively 2005 and 2010, new developments around and insights in engagement with the tribal structures have emerged. I will discuss these in chapter 6. In chapter 7, I provide a conclusion in which I argue that the Dutch Army developed knowledge about the local social context, but lacked true understanding. Because of this lack of understanding, the Dutch Army’s efforts to engage with tribes only had limited effect. In the conclusion, I also provide several recommendations on how to engage with tribes in future military operations.

Chapter 2 Tribes in theory - collective organization and action

“For each individual, the collectivity - tribe, culture, state, or village as the case may be – is, in varying degrees, a symbolic extension of the self”.¹⁰²

The notion of tribalism is centuries old. Writings of Ibn Khaldun, the 14th century Arabic philosopher and sociologist, offer the oldest known description of tribal belonging.¹⁰³ His concepts of ‘*asabiya*’ and ‘*nasab*’, meaning respectively ‘solidarity’ and ‘origin’, together describe tribal structures. “Nasab defines the cohesion of groups that share not only genealogy but also ‘solidarity’ (‘*asabiya*’)”.¹⁰⁴ For Ibn Khaldun, sentiments of group solidarity are based on kinship ties, blood bond and common descent.¹⁰⁵ ‘Asabiya is strongest among people who share a blood bond but it also exists among people who are not related to each other by blood but by “long and close contact as member of a group”.¹⁰⁶ Tribes and tribal defence are almost intrinsically intertwined with blood bond and family lineage:

“Their defence and protection are successful only if they are a close-knit group of common descent. This strengthens stamina and makes them feared, since everybody's affection for his family and his group is more important than anything else. Compassion and affection for one's blood relations and relatives exist in human nature as something God put into the hearts of men. It makes for mutual support and aid, and increases the fear felt by the enemy”.¹⁰⁷

However, as explained in the previous chapter, current day tribes highly differ in the level of the genealogically relatedness of their members. The imagined group feeling—fictive blood ties—is crucial in understanding tribal collective and political action. In current day tribes, the traditional mode of organization, kinship, has become reconstituted.¹⁰⁸ Weir warns that we need “to be alert for other organizing principles” in looking at tribes.¹⁰⁹ In this chapter, I delve further into the organizational structure of tribes: how they collectively organize and act, and how they participate in (local) politics and conflict.

2.1 Tribes and collective action

¹⁰² T. Carver & S.A. Chambers, *Michael J. Shapiro: Discourse, Culture and Violence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 160.

¹⁰³ I.M. Lapidus, “Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History”. In *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, edited by P. Khoury & J. Kostiner (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ P. Bonte, “Ibn Khaldun and Contemporary Anthropology: Cycles and Factional Alliances of Tribe and State in the Maghreb”. In *Tribes and Power. Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by F.A. Jabar & H. Dawod (London: Saqi, 2003).

¹⁰⁵ Lapidus, “Tribes and State formation”.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 851.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 170.

¹⁰⁸ P. James, *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism. Bringing Theory back in* (London: Sage Publications, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ S. Weir, *A Tribal Order. Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 2.

Collective action occurs “when a number of people work together to achieve some common objective”.¹¹⁰ The congregation of people and formation of groups to achieve common goals or objectives are ubiquitous and a fundamental part of human behaviour.¹¹¹ Group affiliation and collective action have long been ascribed to more traditional societies, where the “social expression of interests was mainly through cast or class groups, age groups, kin groups, and neighbourhood groups”.¹¹² Although societies have developed and now know many forms of social organization, social organization on the basis of kinship still exists and still produces collective action. Olson argues that kinship groups are best suited to perform certain functions—that is, satisfy a demand, further an interest, or meet a need—even in today’s modern societies.¹¹³

Kinship seems to be an efficient basis for collective action in traditional societies. Kinship ties are durable and of a more unconditional character than other binding principles. The members of kinship groups are “relatively homogenous and already bound together in a system of reciprocal rights and duties by virtue of the insurance function of the kinship group”.¹¹⁴ Collective rights and duties are especially important in societies where there is no strong central authority that provides its citizens with safety, protection, means of living, and other social services. In these societies, “the institution most likely to satisfy these requirements for a satisfactory informal mutual insurance company is the family”.¹¹⁵ In kinship groups, members behave altruistically towards others simply because they are kin; even when the kinship “is so tenuous as to be only nominal”.¹¹⁶ The ethic altruism so crucial to kinship groups is an important driver of collective action. However, it is not voluntary based on individual free-will. It is socially imposed and motivated by social pressure and a moral sense of duty.¹¹⁷

In defining tribes, I have previously mentioned ‘fictive’ or ‘imagined’ blood-ties. Middle Eastern tribes especially are not exclusively based on genealogy but also “on cultural, religious, ethnic or political divides, or on the leadership of a single personage and their family”.¹¹⁸ The genealogical or fictive relatedness of people is of importance with regards to collective action. The common assumption is that individual members of a tribe are more willing to help someone who is genealogically related than someone who is only related by ‘fictive’ or imagined’ blood-ties. However, Radcliffe-Brown argues that altruism is not only a function of genealogy, but also a function of group-solidarity and existing norms and values within a group.¹¹⁹ Psychological research on group favouritism shows similar results. Favouritism is strongly rooted

¹¹⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Collective action problem”, by Keith Dowding, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/collective-action-problem-1917157>

¹¹¹ M. Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 20. In this chapter, I speak of kinship groups, of which tribes are a subset, because most literature on collective action focusses on kinship groups and not on tribes specifically.

¹¹⁴ R.A. Posner, “A Theory of Primitive Society, with Special Reverence to Law”, *The Journal of Law and Economics* 23, no. 1 (1980): 44.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁶ D. Jones, “Group Nepotism and Human Kinship”, *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 5 (2000): 788.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 788.

¹¹⁸ Lewis, *Security, Clans, and Tribes*, 18.

¹¹⁹ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*. (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952).

in Arab societies and is also part of the function of informal affiliations such as tribes and clans.¹²⁰ According to Billig, it is “group membership per se that motivates favouritism: merely convincing one subject that another is especially similar to him or her is not enough to motivate significant favouritism unless this similarity is used as a basis for assigning group membership”.¹²¹ Even when people are divided into groups on the basis of trivial differences or no differences at all, “they are inclined to favour in-group members in apportioning resources, even when no effort is made to encourage loyalty to the in-group or hostility to the out-group and even when subjects have no face-to-face interaction with in-group or out-group members”.¹²² The results of these psychological experiments apply to all forms of social organization, including kinship groups and tribes.¹²³

The collective behaviour of tribes has often been discussed in relation to the distribution of scarce resources and protection against economic difficulties, hereby zeroing in on kinship groups as “domain of sharing” and their ‘caring’ features.¹²⁴ Kinship groups are important participants in the informal economy as private gains are distributed among kinship members.¹²⁵ Providing basic needs and distributing resources literally keep the community alive, but collective behaviour of tribes is however not only focused on the needs of the poor. Collective behaviour that serves as a mechanism for security and self-governance is even more important, especially in the absence of a functioning state. Lewis argues that “clans and tribes provide functions that are necessary for survival in contexts where government institutions are weak or absent”.¹²⁶ A functioning administration and system of ‘law and order’ is an essential element for self-governance and a stable community. The Afghan *Pashtunwali*, the Somali *Xeer*, and the Yemini *Qabyala* function as a legal system. All are informal ethical codes of norms and rules.¹²⁷

Collective action in the form of defence systems, distribution of goods, and ethical codes provide tribal communities with an essential safety net. This sense of solidarity and mutual help is part of the basic principles of tribalism and is upheld by informal tribal codes. Tribalism thus breathes a strong sense of collectivity, but it also creates obligations towards the tribe and its members.¹²⁸ Tribal collective action also encompasses political action and violent action. As Weir argues: “In the absence of effective leaders, order and the balance of power are maintained by collective action”.¹²⁹ Tribal political and violent action are vital elements for tribal stability and survival, and the reasons tribes still exist today.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ J.E. Strakes, “Arab and Non-Arab Tribes as State-Like Entities: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns in the Historic and Contemporary Middle East”, *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, no. 2 (2011).

¹²¹ M. Billig, *Social Psychology and Intergroup Relation* (London: Academic Press, 1976), 340-341.

¹²² Jones, “Group Nepotism”, 792.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ D. Bell, “Wealth Transfers Occasioned by Marriage: a Comparative Reconsideration”. In *Kinship, Networks, and Exchange*, edited by M. Granovetter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 188.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Lewis, *Security, Clans, and Tribes*, 34.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ H. Dawod, *The Sunni Tribes in Iraq: Between Local Power, the International Coalition and the Islamic State* (n.p.: NOREF, 2015).

¹²⁹ Weir, *A Tribal Order*, 4.

¹³⁰ Dawod, *The Sunni Tribes in Iraq*.

2.2 Tribes as political actors

Tribal leaders govern a community: the tribe. In the Middle East, tribal confederations, tribes, and clans are governed by *sheikhs*.¹³¹ In some tribes, this position is passed on to the next male descendant. However, the sheikh is more often elected,¹³² or the position is handed to the eldest, and thus the wisest person.¹³³ Sheikhs usually come from families from which previous sheikhs have also come. Personal characteristics play a role in determining which son would step in his father's shoes.¹³⁴ The position is not one of absolute authority. The sheikh's decisions are made in consultation with the rest of the tribe and he works closely with a group of tribal elders.¹³⁵ In the Middle East, sheikhs are said to be 'the first among equals'.¹³⁶ The sheikh is head of the tribe and its underlying forms of social organisation:

"The tribe is usually the larger unit, whose affiliated clans claim to have a common lineage or descent. As these clans live apart, the unity of the tribe is very loose and informal in military and political term. The clan is the second level of organisation. It has unity of purpose, thanks to the unifying role played by the sheikh (of his house) and to the territorial proximity of the various sub-clans of which it is composed. The sub-clans are the third level, the basic unit in productive terms: they organise pastures, own sources of water and have a strong sense of territoriality. The sub-clan is formed, in turn, from smaller patrilineal groups: extended families, which lead a real common life and constitute the real kinship group. Each extended family is again divided into small households".¹³⁷

Multiple tribes may unite and form a 'confederacy', often for political reasons. The confederacy usually has a central leadership, also in the form of a sheikh.¹³⁸ The hierarchies of sheikhs correspond with the tribal structure; the sheikh of the confederation is the most powerful, followed by the sheikh of a tribe, and the sheikh of a clan. A clan consists of several houses or extended families; several clans unite and become part of a tribe.¹³⁹ The sheikh of a tribe or a clan is more important for executing policy as he stays in close contact with local communities; he is better known to and respected by the community.¹⁴⁰ Members can easily turn to their local sheikh, the sheikh of their clan, who has the contacts to take issues higher up the chain and influence policy.¹⁴¹ A sheikh "claims to control relations among tribe members, and represents the tribal

¹³¹ K.B. Carroll, "Tribal Law and Reconciliation in the New Iraq", *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 1 (2011).

¹³² E. Gellner, "Tribalism and the State in the Middle East". In *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, edited by Khoury, P. & Kostiner, J. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1990).

¹³³ R.M. Glassman, *The Origins of Democracy in Tribes, City-States and Nation-States* (n.p.: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

¹³⁴ L.L. Layne, *Home and Homeland. The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹³⁵ Stancati, "Tribal Dynamics".

¹³⁶ Layne, *Home and Homeland*.

¹³⁷ F.A. Jabar, "Sheikhs and Ideologies: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968-1998". In *Tribes and Power. Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, edited by F.A. Jabar & H. Dawod (London: Saqi, 2003), 74.

¹³⁸ Tapper, "Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople".

¹³⁹ Hussein D. Hassan, *Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities* (Washington: CRS Report for Congress, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ Carroll, "Tribal law and Reconciliation".

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

entity and its interests not only to other tribal groups, but also to the central (tribal) authority or any military, political or even economic foreign or international power”.¹⁴² The element of outside political representation of the tribe is important and part of the sheikhs’ responsibilities; territorial and political unity are commonly combined under a sheikh.¹⁴³

The tribal organizational structure, as described above, is an ideal. It reflects the tribe as a highly organized and neatly hierarchical unit. In practice, this is less common. In certain areas, tribes are rather highly fragmented. Where Arab tribes are more ordered and hierarchical, Afghan Pashtun tribes are just the opposite.¹⁴⁴ Afghan tribes “might unify against external threats, however, the normal pattern of life is dominated by a continuous rivalry between different kin-groups within the tribe, which are all competing for local resources”.¹⁴⁵ The leader of a tribe “depends on the decisions and actions of his tribesmen, for without them he is little more than a figure-head, an empty symbol”.¹⁴⁶ Hence, there is much debate on the organisational structure of a tribe:

“Some scholars argue that tribes are naturally segmentary and egalitarian and that all central authority is an imposition by, or a reaction to, outside forces. For others, the potential for chiefship exists as a tendency that may be activated or suppressed by an external power. Still others argue that some (if not all) tribal systems are intrinsically centralized”.¹⁴⁷

Apart from internal politics organization, tribes also participate in external politics and become a political actor. Looking at political participation, we can identify two sorts of interaction between political actors and the state: contentious and non-contentious politics. Tilly argued that non-contentious politics makes up “the bulk of all political interaction, since it includes tax collection, census taking, military service, diffusion of political information, processing of government-mediated benefits, and internal organizational activity of constituted political actors”.¹⁴⁸ Trust networks get involved in noncontentious politics regularly and, to a lesser extent, in contentious politics.

Tribal groups and ‘asabiya have played an essential role in state formation in the Islamic world, both historically and in contemporary Middle Eastern states.¹⁴⁹ Hüsken argues that tribal political experience is historically rooted.¹⁵⁰ For many centuries, rulers have influenced tribal divisions and organizations for

¹⁴² H. Dawod, “Iraqi Tribes in the Land of Jihad”. In *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, edited by V. Collombier & O. Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 18.

¹⁴³ Tapper, “Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan”.

¹⁴⁴ D. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla. Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ M. Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option. Co-option of local power-holders as a tool for obtaining control over the population in counterinsurgency campaigns in weblike societies” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 69.

¹⁴⁶ P.C. Salzman, “Why Tribes have Chiefs: a Case from Baluchistan”. In *The Conflict of Tribes and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, edited by R. Tapper (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 272-273.

¹⁴⁷ Tapper, “Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople”, 66.

¹⁴⁸ Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ K.N. Al-Naqeeb, *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula. A Different Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁵⁰ T. Hüsken, *Tribal Politics in the Borderland of Egypt and Lybia* (n.p.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

political and administrative purposes.¹⁵¹ States have, for example, financially supported specific tribes to broaden their bases of social support. Tribal leaders and other tribal elites have long been key to government stability.¹⁵² Kostiner even writes about a state-tribe symbiosis in countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. In these Gulf countries, “families, clans, and tribal groups are legitimate for boosting and befriending”.¹⁵³ Indeed, appointing tribal sheikhs to high-placed political and administrative positions is a widespread phenomenon in the Gulf and wider Middle East.¹⁵⁴ In many countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan, tribes are political actors that operate on different levels of government. The drives behind tribal political action and participation vary—for example, when their existence is under threat, when the government cannot provide in basic needs, or when the government is just too weak.¹⁵⁵ Under these circumstances trust networks integrate into politics, both directly and indirectly: directly when trust networks “extend into government itself”; and indirectly when trust networks “extend into politically engaged actors”.¹⁵⁶

Some tribes “organized themselves explicitly as political local groups with a common leadership; in these terms, they are proto- or ministates within larger, empire-like states”.¹⁵⁷ These tribes not only pose themselves as political groups, but are often seen as such and can effectively influence policy. Under Afghan president Hamid Karzai (2002-2014), the Popalzai tribe grew in political importance. Karzai, himself from a prominent Popalzai family, appointed Popalzais as provincial governors and other political and administrative positions.¹⁵⁸ In this example, tribal elites are directly incorporated in politics. The involvement can also be more indirect. In some Middle Eastern countries, decisions made in a tribal *shura*—a council in which tribal members enjoy the rights of political participation—can reach far into central government affairs. In Oman, decisions made by tribal shuras are a central feature of state legitimacy.¹⁵⁹ State-tribe relations in Saudi Arabia are again different. Abdul Aziz (1932-1953), the founder of the modern Saudi Arabian state, denied political autonomy to the tribes. He neatly “encapsulated” them into the National Guard, hereby “taming tribalism” and preventing tribal political opposition against the regime.¹⁶⁰

Hüsken argues that, due to tribal political experience and their historical rootedness in state politics, political practices are often “based on tribal organisation and shaped by local tribal politicians”.¹⁶¹ The tribe-state relation works two ways: states have used and influenced tribes for their own purposes, but tribes have

¹⁵¹ Tapper, “Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople”.

¹⁵² Bacsko, “Legal Rule and Tribal Politics”; D.W. Brinkerhoff & R.W. Johnson, “Decentralized Local Governance in Fragile States: Learning from Iraq”, *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 75, no. 4 (2009).

¹⁵³ J. Kostiner, “The Nation in Tribal Societies. Reflections on K.H. Al-Naqib’s studies on the Gulf”. In *Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East*, edited by U. Rabi (London: Hurst & Co., 2016), 224.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Tilly, *Trust and Rule*.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁷ Tapper, “Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan”, 37.

¹⁵⁸ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*.

¹⁵⁹ S. Al-Farsi, *Democracy and Youth in the Middle East. Islam, Tribalism, and the Rentier State in Oman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

¹⁶⁰ S. Andreotti, “The Ikhwan Movement and Its Role in Saudi-Arabia State-Building”. In *State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by K. Christie & M. Masad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 105.

¹⁶¹ Hüsken, *Tribal Politics*, 67.

also influenced the political climate and political process. In some countries, the tribal influence on state politics has been stronger than the influence of state politics on tribes. In societies with weak state institutions, informal forms of governance can influence formal institutions.¹⁶²

Tribes have never been completely isolated from state power.¹⁶³ However, there is no general model of how tribes interact with politics or the government. These relationships are fluid and vary over time, especially in the Middle East. Factors such as the strength of the state, the attitude of both tribe and state, the remoteness of a tribe, the level of outside threat to a tribe, and the military power of a tribe all contribute to the relationship.¹⁶⁴ Not all tribes are equally absorbed into state and society. And even if they are, they do not all interact with state and society the same way.¹⁶⁵

Despite the great variety in the organizational and political character of tribes, they are more and more seen as important political actors. The recognition of tribal leaders as important political players has partially been the result of studies conducted within the context of military intervention, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁶⁶ In this line of thought, involving local politicians into peace and statebuilding operations is common practice today. Tribes and tribal leaders are important actors in conflict. For example, recent developments in Libya have shown the political and military power of tribes. Although tribal structures and tribal political action have always been important in Libya, in the first stages of the civil war “tribal power acquired even greater significance for conflict dynamics and initiatives for conflict resolution”.¹⁶⁷ During the civil war of 2011 and the transitional period that ended in August 2012, rifts between tribes deepened and conflict along tribal lines erupted.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, political power was no longer in the hands of the state, but moved to the periphery. In Libya, tribes became the centre of political and military organization.

2.3 Tribes and violent action

Non-contentious politics is one of the two sorts of interaction between political actors and the state. The other is contentious politics. Contentious politics “includes all discontinuous, collective making of claims among constituted political actors, including governmental agents and rulers”.¹⁶⁹ It happens when “collective actors join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents around their claims or the claims of those they claim to represent”.¹⁷⁰ Trust networks are critical parties in political processes that

¹⁶² D. Corstange, “Tribes and the rule of law in Yemen”.

¹⁶³ S.C. Caton, “Anthropological Theories of Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East: Ideology and the Semitics of Power”. In *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, edited by P. Khoury & J. Kostiner (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1990).

¹⁶⁴ Tapper, “Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan”.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Hüsken, *Tribal Politics*.

¹⁶⁷ W. Lacher, “The Rise of Tribal Politics”. In *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi future*, edited by J. Pack (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 159.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, rev. 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

target the government.¹⁷¹ Kinship groups and tribes can act “as political opposition to state power and are potential sources of future insurgency”.¹⁷² Getting involved in contentious politics implies fading the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and thus puts the trust network at risk. When participating in contentious politics, trust networks may align with other groups, focussing on other elements that the in-group and its boundaries. As Tilly asks: “how do they maintain cohesion, control and, yes, trust when their members spread out into worlds rich with other opportunities and commitments?”.¹⁷³ This is one of the reasons why “over most of history trust networks and their members have avoided exposure to rulers and public politics as much as possible”.¹⁷⁴

Collective action is an important element in the study of conflict, whether it is in-group conflict, civil war, rebellion, or other kinds of conflict. However, the bases on which collective action occurs in war—for example kinship, religion, or political beliefs—vary greatly and are often overlooked or their importance underestimated.¹⁷⁵ Understanding the underlying structures of participation in conflict can be difficult but is crucial for understanding “how wars are fought, how wars end, and the politics that emerge after war”.¹⁷⁶ Tribal identity or kinship is just one of the many bases of collective action:

“Insurgent groups are built by prewar politicized social networks. These pre-existing social bases provide information, trust, and shared political meanings that organizers can use to create new armed groups. The initial organization of an insurgent group reflects the networks and institutions in which its leaders were embedded prior to violent mobilization. Kinship groups that acts as politicized opposition to state power are potential sources of future insurgency”.¹⁷⁷

In general, social bases—structures of collective action and social interaction in society—can be categorized along two dimensions: “The first is whether a social basis is politicized in potential opposition to state power (..) and the second is whether the organizers of a social base are actively preparing for violent conflict”.¹⁷⁸ Following Staniland, tribes can be categorized as ‘nonviolent politicized opposition network’; “these networks do not originate or persist for the purpose of future insurgency, but they are imbued with preferences that can lead to them opposing the state when conditions for civil war onset are present”.¹⁷⁹

Two main mechanisms generate group solidarity and make individual interests subordinate to group interests: first, “social influence mediated by strong personal relationships, through which people influence one another to act cooperatively”; and second, “the construction of interpretive frameworks, especially

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

S. Tarrow, “The French Revolution, War, and State-Building: Making one Tilly out three”. In *Contention and Trust in Cities and States*, edited by M. Hanagan & C. Tilly (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 84.

¹⁷² Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*, 9.

¹⁷³ Tilly, *Trust and Rule*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁵ Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

those involving collective identities, which enable people to see themselves as occupying similar social positions and sharing a common fate”.¹⁸⁰ Staniland argues that, to organize rebellion “it is necessary for a group to mobilize prior linkages of trust and commitment for the purposes of violence”.¹⁸¹ Kinship ties and the strong sense of solidarity that exists in tribes form these element of trust and commitment:

“Making solidarity explicit before violence occurs (in the hope that this will avert violence) commits group members to act collectively if the conflict does escalate. Group action before escalation, in short, reduces the likelihood of escalation at the price of intensified violence for those disputes that do escalate. And because collective contention highlights group-level reputations for solidarity—not just the aggregate of individual reputations for bravery—even non-disputants are implicated in such cases. Thus, family members who have not engaged in contention may nonetheless feel compelled to join in violence—or become targets because they are expected to join—if group action has preceded escalation. They will not always do so, but they do so more often when the solidarity of their kin group is explicitly at stake, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others”.¹⁸²

Gould identifies some general principles about groups, collective violence, and conflict. When groups that have a strong system of collectivity and solidarity get involved in conflict, it is more likely that their violent behaviour will be collectively organized. The collective violence will also be fiercer and involve more people than originally involved in the dispute. Also, collective violence occurs more frequently between groups that have a history of differences and contention.¹⁸³ Therefore, pre-existing tribal divisions are “good indicators of the lines along which group fractionalization is likely to happen”.¹⁸⁴

Tribes are not inherently violent. However, when considering the links between tribes and violent action, one might argue that tribes are intrinsically linked to violence, destabilization, and conflict. Due their ‘nature’, tribes are more prone to conflict than other social- or trust networks. Tribal codes prescribe revenge killings or other violent deed in case the member of a tribe is killed. Kilcullen argues that the nature of tribal warfare comes from “traditional norms, values, and perceptual lenses”.¹⁸⁵ These principles lead tribes to become “engaged (from their point of view) in ‘resistance’ rather than ‘insurgency’ and fights principally to be left alone”.¹⁸⁶ Tribal norms, values, and codes generate certain collective behaviour that might be viewed as violent by some, but tribespeople would certainly argue that their response is ‘something that needs to be done’ and has no violent or aggressive meaning. Also, in tribal societies, spirals of constant competition

¹⁸⁰ R.V. Gould, “Collective Violence and Group Solidarity: Evidence from a Feuding Society”, *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 3 (1999), 374.

¹⁸¹ Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*, 9.

¹⁸² Gould, “Collective Violence”, 375.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ F. Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 241.

¹⁸⁵ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, xiv.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., xiv.

maintain the balance of power and hence the peace. A tribe and their members know that “unjustified attacks will result in retribution and equivalent loss”.¹⁸⁷

Many researchers have indeed focused on tribes and their disruptive impact on modernity, democracy, and peace.¹⁸⁸ Al-Farsi, for example, argues that, in Oman, “tribalism’s anti-centralization predisposition hinders the political process because it prioritizes the tribal interest above all others – including that of the nation”.¹⁸⁹ However, tribalism can also contribute to de-escalation of conflict through peacemaking mechanisms that prevent violence from spreading. The Iraqi tribal customs and dispute resolution mechanisms permit offenders of a crime to seek sanctuary in order to prevent immediate bloodshed. After a three-day period, the offender must leave the community and go in exile. The only way to end an exile and return to the community is to resolve the dispute.¹⁹⁰ In case of a violent dispute between individuals from two different tribes, both tribes will inform the other about the actions that will be taken against the offender. For example, “to prevent retributive action, the family of the accused will immediately seek the help of local sheikhs, esteemed mediators, and other tribal notables. The tribe will send an emissary or a reconciliation commission to approach the aggrieved”.¹⁹¹ This is not unique to Iraq. In Afghanistan, mediation and dispute resolution mechanisms are also essential elements of tribal life.¹⁹²

Tribes do not only get involved in conflict because they voluntarily chose to do so or because their nature is inherently violent. Sometimes they just get involved in conflict because of their position in the (pre-)conflict society. Kilcullen argues that local traditional actors such as tribes, are often caught by the ‘accidental guerrilla syndrome’. During the first stages of conflict, local dynamics shift and tribes become just one of the players involved. When this happens and tribes suddenly find themselves in the middle of a conflict, they always form an alliance with the party that is closest to them. In comparison to outside, intervenors, even violent insurgency groups are more closely related and the easiest or most reliable to align with.¹⁹³ When a power vacuum emerges, tribes fight for power and survival. For example, during the Soviet-Afghan war (1978-1989), “power and survival, and not ideology and ethnicity, were the ultimate determinants of alliance decisions”.¹⁹⁴ Also, in the period after 2001, exclusion from power was one of the reasons for Afghan tribes to align with armed parties. Tribes that had been favoured by the government and suddenly saw their power diminish shifted alliances, choosing the strongest party to align with in order to survive inter-tribal rivalries.¹⁹⁵ The same can be said of tribes in the Al-Anbar province of Iraq, where tribes

¹⁸⁷ P. Asfura-Heim, “No Security Without Us”: *Tribes and Tribalism in Al-Anbar Province, Iraq* (n.p: CNA, 2014), 6.

¹⁸⁸ Lewis, *Security, Clans, and Tribes*, 34.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Farsi, *Democracy and Youth*, 55.

¹⁹⁰ Asfura-Heim, “No Security Without Us”, 12-13.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹² Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Christia, *Alliance Formation*, 119.

¹⁹⁵ T. Farrell & A. Giustozzi, “The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand Insurgency, 2004-2012”, *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013).

are “in constant competition”.¹⁹⁶ In Asfura-Heim’s words, “they challenge each other, form alliances, and break apart in order to improve their access to resources”.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Asfura-Heim, “*No Security Without Us*”, 6.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

We know now how tribes can organize and act collectively, and how they can participate in (local) politics and conflict. Yet, the way tribes organize, act, and participate is not set in stone. Tribes across the globe vary greatly. Even within a single country or region, different tribes may not share the same characteristics, norms, and values. Neither will all tribes respond the same way to instability, violence, and conflict. In this chapter, I elaborate on the tribal background of two of the Iraqi and Afghan provinces in which the Dutch Army operated, Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan, hereby applying the theoretical analysis of tribal organization, acting, and participation provided in chapter 2 to the actual situation on the ground. By analysing the differences between tribes in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan, I show that generalising tribal structures and action is problematic and practically unrealistic.

3.1 Iraq: Al-Muthanna

Al-Muthanna is the second largest province of Iraq. Located in the south, it encompasses 51.740 square kilometres. Before 1976, it was part of the Diwaniya province, until it was split in three separate provinces.¹⁹⁸ In 1997 approximately 437.000 people lived in Al-Muthanna and, by 2011, this number rose to 719.000.¹⁹⁹ In the 2003-2005 period, it must have been around half a million people.²⁰⁰ The population is centred in and around the city of As Samawa and two other smaller cities—Rumaytha and Kidhr.²⁰¹ The rest of the province is nearly uninhabited; only some small settlements survive in the southern Iraqi desert. Al-Muthanna is ethnically and religiously homogeneous, as the people are almost exclusively Shias from Arabic Iraqqiyun descent.²⁰² The province is home to several tribes, of which the Al-Hassani and the Al-Zayadi tribes are the most influential.²⁰³

3.1.1 Tribal background of Al-Muthanna

Zaalberg & ten Cate describe the population of Al-Muthanna as “tribally oriented”.²⁰⁴ This is quite a conservative observation. Stolzoff, an expert on Iraqi tribes and author of the most extensive analysis on tribal and sub-tribal lines, is much clearer. He writes that Iraq’s society is “always under the influence of its tribes to some degree, and it has been that way throughout the country’s history”.²⁰⁵ A majority of Iraqis belong to a tribe and tribal identification is the second most important mode of self-identification, next to

¹⁹⁸ “Al-Muthanna”, Wikipedia, accessed on August 19, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muthanna_Governorate

¹⁹⁹ “Iraq: Demography and Population Dynamics”, The Gulf/2000 Project, accessed on August 19, 2019, http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq_demog_Pop_Dynamic_lg.png

²⁰⁰ T.W. Brocades Zaalberg & A. ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation: Unravelling the Dutch Approach in Iraq, 2003-2005”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 1 (2012).

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² “Iraq: Ethnic Composition in 2000”, The Gulf/2000 Project, accessed on August 19, 2019, http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq_Ethnic_sm.png

²⁰³ “Snapshot of Al-Muthanna: Poor, Peaceful and Traditional”, Wikileaks, accessed on August 20, 2019, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BASRAH34_a.html

²⁰⁴ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation”, 121.

²⁰⁵ S.G. Stolzoff, *The Iraqi Tribal System. A Reference for Social Scientists, Analysts, and Tribal Engagement* (Minneapolis: Two Harbors Press, 2009), 7.

being an Iraqi. In regions where only few people pursue higher education—such as Al-Muthanna—people stay true to the authority and power of their tribal leader. Their tribal origin offers some degree of comfort and is a source of protection, pride, and honour.²⁰⁶

Most of the Iraqi tribes are organized on a hierarchical system that very much fits the model outlined in chapter 2. Iraqi tribes are also characterized by certain hierarchical stratifications among tribes, resulting in ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ tribes. Even though the numerical size, military and political power is of influence on a tribes’ hierarchical position, it mostly a tribes’ hierarchical position depends, for the most part, on its mode of subsistence—although its numerical size and military power are also of influence. Historically, camel-breeding tribes were higher up the hierarchical ladder than sheep-breeding or peasantry tribes.²⁰⁷ While these modes of stratification are less common today, the hierarchy still exists.

The elementary hierarchy among tribes translates into a modern-day rivalry between different tribes in an area. Prejudice and bias about ‘other’ tribes are common practice and influence social, political, and security balances.²⁰⁸ After the fall of Saddam Hussein, competition between different tribes sparked all over Iraq. In Al-Muthanna specifically, the inter-tribal competition is more severe than in other Iraqi provinces. In most regions, conflict erupted between groups of different ethnic and sectarian backgrounds; in ethnically and sectarian homogeneous areas such as Al-Muthanna, violence between different tribes is more common.²⁰⁹

3.1.2 Political power and collective violence

In Al-Muthanna, as in the rest of Iraq, several tribes may form a tribal confederation. Different tribes unify on the basis of lineage or a common descent.²¹⁰ However, the unification at this level is purely political.²¹¹ Confederations provide governance: they deal with issues ranging from water management to security, and from food distribution to internal conflict mediation.²¹² In the 20th and 21st centuries, these confederations have gradually lost their pivotal importance.²¹³ Even though inter-tribal political cooperation on district or provincial level almost disappeared, some local sheiks still have great influence. Zaalberg & ten Cate argue that, in Al-Muthanna, “the dominant sheiks managed to stay in control by keeping tribal power struggles in check and maintained the internal balance of power. They proved to be extremely well informed of all alien influences and able to contain what they considered a predominantly external threat”.²¹⁴

So, where some individual tribal leaders are able to maintain regional stability, tribes are also able to influence Iraqi governmental institutions and political parties by “tribal coalition building, competition,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Jabar, “Sheikhs and Ideologues”, 74.

²⁰⁸ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation”.

²⁰⁹ Sam Dagher, “Tribal Rivalries Persist as Iraqis seek Local Posts”, *New York Times*, January 19, 2009.

²¹⁰ Asfura-Heim, “No Security Without Us”.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Hassan, *Iraq: Tribal Structure*.

²¹³ J. Yaphé, “Tribalism in Iraq, the Old and the New”, *Middle East Policy* 7, no. 3 (2000).

²¹⁴ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation”, 131.

and possibly confederate tribal hegemony”.²¹⁵ On the one hand, provincial or national politics are driven by tribes and sub-tribes. Tribal ways of organizing at the local level take precedence over elections or democratic processes.²¹⁶ Therefore, politics should be interpreted in the context of tribal competition.²¹⁷ Stolzoff summarized the influence of tribal structures on politics as follows:

“Even though the surface of Iraqi politics has the trappings of democracy, the tribal nature of Iraqi society leaves government institutions and political parties vulnerable to becoming tools of tribal coalition building, competition, and possibly confederate tribal hegemony”.²¹⁸

On the other hand, tribes can also be influenced, used, and manipulated by national politics. This happened for example, in 2008. Just before that year’s provincial elections, senior government officials ran a vivid tribal outreach campaign. Prime minister Al-Maliki and his Dawa-party were accused of fuelling potential conflict. Researchers of the Institute for the Study of War argued that “Iraq’s tribal leaders would see a significant increase in their power” if they supported Al-Maliki. Tribal leaders, traditionally marginalized in the political process, were tempted by the idea of increasing their power.²¹⁹ However, the sudden power-growth of some tribes in an area could lead to inter-tribal tensions. Many feared that these tribal tensions would escalate in armed confrontation if pressure rose. Also, in Al-Muthanna, Maliki managed to bind tribal councils to his cause, hereby consolidating political support while creating an opportunity to use the military power of tribes for his own political and military aspirations.²²⁰

In Al-Muthanna, tribes are important violent actors who have a large influence on provincial security (or lack thereof). Zaalberg & ten Cate for example note that, in the 2003-2005 period, security and police forces in Al-Muthanna had little power and were inadequate for dealing with regional problems. They were unreliable, partly due to “their loyalty to tribal and political groups”.²²¹ Urban gangs, criminals, and tribes were the ones running the show. Smuggling, looting, and other forms of criminality were not uncommon. Many of these groups, including tribes, were armed. Zaalberg & ten Cate note that one of the tribes in the province “had a weapon arsenal that equalled that of a light infantry company”.²²² Several had access to heavy weapons like RPGs, machine guns, and mortars.²²³ Jabar has also underlined the fact that that violent power has always been an important aspect of tribes in Iraq.²²⁴ The violent activity and power of tribes taken on a militarized character when these tribes have access to heavy weapons. Although none of my interviewees recognized tribes as military actors, some tribes showed highly weaponized power

²¹⁵ Stolzoff, *The Iraqi Tribal System*, 7.

²¹⁶ Wikileaks, “Snapshot of Al-Muthanna”.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Stolzoff, *The Iraqi Tribal System*.

²¹⁹ “Maliki Makes a Play for the Southern Tribes”, Institute for the Study of War, accessed on August 20, 2019, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/maliki-makes-play-southern-tribes>

²²⁰ Institute for the Study of War, “Maliki Makes a Play for the Southern Tribes”.

²²¹ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation*, 58.

²²² Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation”, 124.

²²³ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation*.

²²⁴ Jabar, “Sheikhs and Ideologues”, 71.

equivalent of that of armed militias.²²⁵ During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980's and the Gulf War against Kuwait, Saddam Hussein heavily relied on the help of tribal militias from Al-Muthanna to fight Iranian forces.²²⁶ As a result of these wars in the 1980s and early 1990s, some tribes have gained significant military experience.

Tribal collective violence has been an important aspect of the continued existence of tribes, in Iraq's southern provinces of Al-Anbar and Al-Muthanna in particular. Compared to other Iraqi provinces, Al-Muthanna is a relatively poor and underpopulated region where government presence has traditionally been weak. Being far removed from Iraq's political centre, official government structures have less power there. In the absence of a strong central government able to provide a security balance, tribal groups often tried to establish their own security structure. While this was already the case under Saddam Hussein (1979-2003), Walsh argues that the mobilisation of military tribal groups even sparked in the post-invasion period: "in the absence of many other sources of structure and meaning, many people turned to the one remaining social institution that was able to give them physical security".²²⁷ Yet, the tribes' possession of weaponized power is not without risks, as some of the military powerful tribes in Al-Muthanna have strong connections with insurgent groups elsewhere in Iraq.²²⁸

3.2 Afghanistan: Uruzgan

The southern province of Uruzgan consists of approximately 28.500 square kilometres and, in the 2003-2005 period, had a population of between 312.000 and 375.000. The province was created in March 2004, when the former province of Uruzgan was split into two new provinces, Uruzgan and Daikundi, in an attempt to separate the two main ethnic groups of the former Uruzgan province, the Pashtuns and Hazaras respectively. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Hazaras were forcefully moved to the north of the province. At the time of the partition of the province in 2004, the north (now Daikundi) was almost exclusively Hazara and the south (now Uruzgan) Pashtun. The old Uruzgan province was thus divided along the geographical line that separated the two main ethnic groups.

The Pashtuns are therefore the largest ethnic group in the new Uruzgan province. The province is positioned in the so-called 'Pashtun tribal belt', "stretching from Herat in the West to Kandahar in the South, Kabul in the North and Peshawar in the East".²²⁹ Although the term 'Pashtun' refers to an ethnic-linguistic group, it is often used as an equivalent of Afghan tribes. Pashtuns are indeed highly tribally organized, but they are not the only tribally organized ethnic group in Afghanistan, nor in Uruzgan.²³⁰

3.2.1 Tribal background of Uruzgan

²²⁵ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

²²⁶ Stolzoff, *The Iraqi Tribal System*.

²²⁷ Walsh, "Us Against the World", 37.

²²⁸ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation*.

²²⁹ The Liaison Office, *A Survey of Uruzgan Province* (N.p.: TLO, 2006), 14.

²³⁰ The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis Uruzgan Province* (N.p.: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006).

Afghan Pashtuns—who make up for 90 percent of the population in Uruzgan—can be divided in three large tribal groups, or confederacies. The southern and southwestern tribes are part of the Durrani confederation and the eastern and southwestern tribes are part of the Ghilzai confederation. The other important confederation is the Panjpai confederation.²³¹ Around 40 to 45 percent of the Uruzgan population is part of a Durrani tribe, 30 percent of a Panjpai tribe, and 15 to 20 percent of a Ghilzai tribe.²³² Hazaras cover the remaining 10 percent.²³³ Hazaras are not tribally organized; they are not organized by kinship or present themselves as coherent entities.²³⁴ However, they are bound by solidarity mechanisms and can, based on these mechanisms, be divided into two main groups; the Sad-e Qabar and the Sad-e Sueka. These two solidarity groups are not formed on the basis of genealogy but by the geographical space; the two groups represent two different regions. Groups of different villages form the two solidary groups, socially organized at the clan-level—as set out in chapter 2. It is at this village level that solidarity is most dominant.²³⁵

All Pashtuns are descendants of one man: Qais Abdul Rashid. He had many sons and grandsons and each of them is seen as an ancestor by a specific tribe or sub-tribe.²³⁶ The element of genealogical relatedness is what binds all Pashtun people together. At the same time, the Pashtun society is “segmented by lines of descent from the common ancestor” and hereby divided in tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and extended families.²³⁷ Instead of the word ‘tribe’, people in Afghanistan use the word *qawm*. It encompasses several forms of self-identification such as ethnic group, people, or tribe and is best translated into ‘solidarity group’. Qawm represents the element that people from the same group have in common. This can be an ethnicity, a village, a warlord, a social class, or a tribe. If the commonality is kinship, qawm can refer to either the social organizational level of a tribe, sub-tribe, clan, or sub-clan.²³⁸

The Pashtun tribal system is not as rigid and hierarchical as the system described in chapter 2. Usually, tribal genealogical links are exclusively patrilineal. However, among Ghilzai tribes, matrilineal links also strengthen tribes’ local power. Glatzer argues that Pashtun tribal structures are open to convenient arrangements.²³⁹ The ease with which tribes form new alliances and arrangements also applies to individuals and their choice of tribal solidarity. Contrary to other Middle-Eastern tribal societies, it is possible for people in Uruzgan to realign with another tribal group.²⁴⁰ Besides, people are not necessarily born into a tribe:

²³¹ M. van Bijlert, “Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles. Taliban Networks in Uruzgan”. In *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, edited by A. Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

²³² Ibid.

²³³ For an overview of the Afghan tribal lines and their distribution over the Uruzgan province, see appendices D and E. The Liaison Office, *A Survey of Uruzgan*.

²³⁴ United States Army, *My Cousin’s Enemy is My friend: A Study of Pashtun “Tribes” in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth: Afghanistan Research Reachback Center White Paper, 2009).

²³⁵ The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis*.

²³⁶ Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”.

²³⁷ The Liaison Office, *A Survey of Uruzgan*, 7.

²³⁸ United States Army, *My Cousin’s Enemy*.

²³⁹ Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”.

²⁴⁰ United States Army, *My Cousin’s Enemy*.

“Through consensus of the tribe, outsiders may be allowed to take residence in their area. If such outsiders and their offspring honour the tribal code of behaviour and succeed to intermarry with the tribe they may be accepted as members after a generation or two”.²⁴¹

The tribal system in Uruzgan seems to be managed in a more flexible way that is usually seen in tribal societies. The flexibility that characterized Uruzgan’s Pashtun tribes is also seen in the absence of a strong tribal hierarchy. In Uruzgan, Pashtun tribal codes prescribe that all men are equal. In theory, tribes have an egalitarian organizing structure and do not identify clear leaders. The Pashtun code, ‘Pashtunwali’, regulates this egalitarian organization. However, this system is an ideal and very few tribes are truly egalitarian today. In practice, some figures within a tribe are more influential than others. People that are high up the tribal hierarchy are *spin giris*, *khans*, and *maliks*. Spin giris are tribal elders and are the most respected persons within a tribe. Their position is based on the support of the community and of the community’s khans and maliks. Spin giris usually take a seat in the decision-making bodies, the *jirgas*. Khans are influential persons within a community. They tend to have power, resources, and knowledge, are trusted by their community, and play an important role in solving and mediating disputes. Maliks are the designated head and outside representative of a village or community. They work closely with khans, but are less influential than them and in some way subordinate to them.²⁴²

3.2.2 Political power and collective violence

None of these individuals—spin giris, khans, and maliks—have executive power, as decisions are made in a *jirga*.²⁴³ This traditional tribal forum is called on an ad-hoc basis when certain problems or matters ask for a meeting. There is no leader or chairman and decisions are made after all arguments and parties are heard and a consensus is reached.²⁴⁴ Jirgas take place on each level of tribal organization, from sub-clan to tribe. Jirgas decide outside of religious authorities or laws such as sharia, but are rather based on Pashtunwali. Spin giris and khans are the most influential members of a jirga as they hold most knowledge of Pashtunwali and are supported by their community. Jirgas only discuss intra-tribal matters and do not take place on an inter-tribal level. However, tribal elites maintain contact with the government and sometimes matters between the government and the tribe are also discussed.²⁴⁵

Two other forms of tribal political institutions that go beyond the intra-tribal level are the *shura* and *loya jirga*. Here matters at the state-tribe and inter-tribal level are discussed. Loya jirgas are countrywide jirgas called by the king or central government. Representatives of all tribal groups attend these meetings, which

²⁴¹ Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”, 4.

²⁴² The Liaison Office, *A Survey of Uruzgan*. In practice, the tribal hierarchy is very complex and might differ from one tribe to another. See: W. Steal, *Pashtunwali: Ein Ehrenkodex und seine rechtliche Relevanz* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), L. Carter & K. Connor, *A preliminary Investigation of contemporary Afghan Councils* (Peshawar: ACBAR, 1989), J.A. Tainter & D.G. MacGregor, “Pashtun Social Structure: Cultural Perceptions and Segmentary Lineage Organization-Understanding and working within Pashtun Society” (August 3, 2011).

²⁴³ The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis*.

²⁴⁴ Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

are often about legitimating state rule and on the approval of new political focus. In 2003, the Afghan Interim Administration called a loya jirga to approve the new Afghan Constitution. Loya jirgas have proven their effectiveness and are instruments that can still be of use to modern political institutions. The same can be said of shuras. In these meetings, all tribes and ethnic groups within a certain geographical space are represented. A shura can be called at different levels: the village, district, and provincial level. It discusses inter-tribal matters or disputes that take place between different geographical spaces, and is often used as a mechanism for stabilization and reconstruction.²⁴⁶

Tribes participate in politics through traditional forums such as loya jirgas and shuras. In this way, they can influence decision making at the local, regional, and district level. Glatzer argues that their influence reaches even further: “The tribal system does or did not only reside in remote and backward areas but permeated and still permeates all levels of the society from the nomad camp up to the royal palace, from the remote mountain village up to the university and to the headquarters of the armed forces”.²⁴⁷ This is, however, not due to a strong tribal political power. On the contrary, tribes in Uruzgan rarely had the strong cohesion necessary to form political units or develop institutional political power.²⁴⁸ In the past, the Afghan government has severely weakened the political power of the tribal system by “dividing important tribal groups into different administrative units, so as to undermine their political power and leverage in the province”.²⁴⁹ Tribal elders, who traditionally had far-reaching influence, saw their power diminish.

From the 1980s on, the tribal system in Uruzgan has grown stronger again.²⁵⁰ However, the current strength of the tribal system is different than it was in the past. What we see now is that traditional elders are replaced by political ‘entrepreneurs’ who use tribal links as a basis for alliances and power accumulation.²⁵¹ During the mujahedeen period—when Mujahedeen fought against the Soviets in the years 1979 to 1989—and the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s, powerful individuals exploited the solidarity of their tribe to fight their own rivals. Uruzgan’s tribal system has become more and more interwoven with military and individual powerholders:

“The list of important tribal elders of the province is very similar to the list of Uruzgan’s key jihad commanders, underlining the fact that the shift of power between traditional elites and military / jihad leaders has gone far and has not been reversed since the Taliban’s collapse”.²⁵²

The militarization of individual tribal leaders and tribes has, also translated in fiercer and more violent inter-tribal conflict. For example, the longstanding Ghilzai-Durrani conflict—that dates back to the early 18th century—has been “exacerbated by jihadi commanders on both sides of the tribal divide to reinforce their

²⁴⁶ Ibid; The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis*.

²⁴⁷ Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”, 2.

²⁴⁸ The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis*.

²⁴⁹ Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System”, 19.

²⁵⁰ The Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, *Context Analysis*.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 6.

²⁵² Ibid., 25.

grasp over their respective constituencies”.²⁵³ In the first decade of the 2000s, the Gilzai-Durrani conflict was one of the main causes of violence in Uruzgan.²⁵⁴

3.3 Comparing tribal structures

Several articles and reports argued that ‘Iraqi and Afghan tribal structures are different’.²⁵⁵ This is quite a euphemism. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, there are many differences between the level of tribalism in each separate province. And tribalism is not an overall, countrywide social structure. It is highly context specific, as the differences between tribes in the provinces of Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan show. Even within both provinces there is flexibility in the system. I have provided a general overview of tribalism in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan. It is however possible that some tribes in these provinces do not follow the patterns or characteristics that I have outlined in this chapter. With all nuances and differentiation in mind, I have identified seven main differences between the tribal systems in Al-Muthanna and tribes in Uruzgan.

First, the Iraqi province of Al-Muthanna has the strongest tribal system of the country—together with the Al-Anbar province—, while in Uruzgan, tribalism is not as dominant as in other provinces in the East and Southeast of Afghanistan.²⁵⁶

Second, the word tribe is used differently in the Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan contexts. In Al-Muthanna, tribes are not connected to a specific ethnic background as Iraq is ethnically much more homogenous than Afghanistan. Also, regarding religious or sectarian divides, Iraqi tribes are not exclusively Sunni or Shia.²⁵⁷ When speaking or writing of tribes in Uruzgan, scholars and practitioners often specifically refer to Pashtun tribes. Most tribal communities in Afghanistan have a Pashtun ethnic background. Therefore, Pashtuns are sometimes referred to as the ‘world’s largest tribe’.

Third, tribes in Al-Muthanna are much more hierarchal than tribes in Uruzgan. Iraqi tribes are exclusively patrilineal and hierarchical.²⁵⁸ Pashtun people seem to form convenient alliances, even when it comes to tribal belonging. Pashtun tribes are not exclusively formed on the basis of patrilineal descent, but can also be formed along matrilineal lines. They are also more egalitarian in character, as all Pashtun within a tribe are seen as equal.

Fourth, where the political power of Iraqi tribes is historically rooted and institutionalized, tribes in Uruzgan have almost no political power.²⁵⁹ In Al-Muthanna, tribes are able to influence policy at all levels of society, ranging from the local to the national level. Because of their political power, tribes are also sensitive to political manipulation from the state, political parties, and political entrepreneurs. In Uruzgan, tribes are not incorporated within the Afghan state or political parties.

²⁵³ The Liaison Office, *A Survey of Uruzgan*, 25.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ United States Army, *Afghan Tribal Structure Versus Iraqi Tribal Structure* (Fort Leavenworth: Afghanistan Research Reachback Center White Paper, 2008); A. Philips, “The Anbar Awakening: Can it be Exported to Afghanistan?”, *Security Challenges* 5, no. 2 (2009).

²⁵⁶ Van Bijlert, “Unruly Commanders”.

²⁵⁷ Stolzoff, *The Iraqi Tribal System*.

²⁵⁸ United States Army, *Afghan Tribal Structure*.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Fifth, tribes in Al-Muthanna have relatively large armed or military power, and some tribes are connected to national insurgency groups. Tribes in Uruzgan have no military power of their own. However, since the mujahedeen period and the rise of the Taliban, tribes have increasingly been manipulated and used by political or military entrepreneurs. Sometimes tribal fractions act as small armed units, or have been incorporated into larger insurgent groups. Their military power is part of the power of the leader they follow or the insurgent group they align with.

Sixth, in Iraq, tribal identity is far more dominant and almost everyone identifies—in varying degree—as belonging to a certain tribe. In Uruzgan, tribal identity is just one of the several bases for solidarity. Solidarity groups can also be based on other mechanisms of self-identification.

Seventh, tribal decision-making forums in Al-Muthanna are less common than in Uruzgan. In Iraq, shuras have not traditionally been called and tribal confederacies have lost their power in the last century. In recent years, the Afghan government and western intervening countries have actively supported the organization of jirgas and shuras in Uruzgan.

There is one discrepancy found in comparing tribal structures in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan to the theoretical analysis on how tribes organize, act, and participate in politics. In chapter 2 I have spoken of collective violent action. However, in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan the collective violence of tribes goes even further. Iraq and Afghanistan have experienced conflict and instability for over 15 and 40 years respectively. In the midst of military action—by the state, insurgency groups and foreign intervening countries—it is not surprising that tribes have become more and more interwoven with armed conflict. According to a U.S. Army report, the classical anthropological definition of a tribe does not cover the current Afghan reality. Genealogically-based social structures have become immense complex webs that interact with individual patronage systems, warlords, and insurgency groups.²⁶⁰ In both Iraq and Afghanistan, some tribes have started to show armed power. Some even changed into armed militias, bounded by pre-war tribal solidarity.²⁶¹ Collective violent action turned, in some cases, into tribal military action.

²⁶⁰ U.S. Army, *My Cousin's Enemy*.

²⁶¹ I have spoken on this phenomenon, chapter 3.2. It is partially based on Kilcullen's *The Accidental Guerrilla*.

Chapter 4 Developing theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures during the Dutch ISAF and SFIR missions

*“A broad knowledge of the operational environment is a prerequisite for attaining and promoting the local population’s collaboration”.*²⁶²

Only if armies develop proper knowledge on the local context, can COIN campaigns be successful.²⁶³ Incorporating a focus on the local context grew importance in peace and conflict studies at the end of the 1990s. But at the military level the importance of truly understanding the local social context—and especially tribal structures—was still not completely acknowledged and incorporated in military operations by the early 2000s.²⁶⁴ When the Dutch Army left for Iraq in 2003, incorporating specific attention to the local context was still in its infancy, not just within the Dutch Army, but in defence organisations worldwide. Only in 2006 did the U.S. Army publish the ‘US Field Manual’ *FM 3-24*, an important doctrinal document on the population-centric COIN approach. After its publication, this document became the international standard for campaigns in Afghanistan.²⁶⁵ *FM 3-24* stresses the need for understanding the local environment:

“In most COIN operations in which U.S. forces participate, insurgents hold a distinct advantage in their level of local knowledge. They speak the language, move easily within the society, and are more likely to understand the population’s interests. Thus, effective COIN operations require a greater emphasis on certain skills, such as language and cultural understanding, than does conventional warfare. The interconnected, politico-military nature of insurgency and COIN requires immersion in the people and their lives to achieve victory”.²⁶⁶

Knowledge of the local context goes beyond the classical ways of understanding the operational environment through geographical terrain and weather analysis, and extensively zeroing in on human factors. *FM 3-24* identifies six that must be analysed: society, social structure, culture, language, power and authority, and interests.²⁶⁷ Tribal structures are recognized as an important element to be analysed and understood.

In the previous chapter, I explained the complexity of tribal structures in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan. In the following two sections, I briefly touch upon the Dutch approach during the SFIR and ISAF missions in these two provinces. From the first weeks in Al-Muthanna on, the Dutch Army tried to build a

²⁶² Kitzen & Vogelsang, “Obtaining Population Centric Intelligence”, 78.

²⁶³ Department of the Army, *FM 3-24*.

²⁶⁴ J.P. Lederach, *Preparing for Peace. Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995); D.H. Ucko, “Beyond Clear-Hold-Build: Rethinking Local Level Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 34, no. 3 (2013).

²⁶⁵ Department of the Army, *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2006).

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

stable relationship with the local population, of which tribes were an important means of social organization. The Dutch strategy developed in Iraq was transferred to the mission in Uruzgan a few years later. There too, the local social environment proved to be very important. This importance of the local context is quintessential in COIN operations such as SFIR and ISAF.²⁶⁸ After I describe Dutch SFIR and ISAF goals and strategy, I turn to an analysis of how the Dutch Army attained knowledge of tribal structures during these two missions—specifically through intelligence, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), and outside experts.

4.1 SFIR and the Dutch approach in Al-Muthanna

Shortly after the international coalition ended the Saddam Hussain regime (1979-2003), the Dutch cabinet decided to send troops to Iraq's southern province of Al-Muthanna. The Dutch contribution to the multilateral, U.S.- led mission ran from June 2003 until March 2005. Although a small contributor to the overall mission, the Dutch sent five rotations of 1200 men to Al-Muthanna.²⁶⁹ The SFIR mission was presented to both parliament and the general public as a peacekeeping mission. And indeed, the Dutch were given a relatively stable province, far removed from Baghdad and de-stabilizing factors such as the Al-Sadr front. But the situation was not as peaceful as hoped. The security situation gradually changed and became more instable.

The purpose of the mission was to support the establishment of a new civil government. The Dutch would help to stabilize Al-Muthanna in order for the Coalition Provincial Authority, and later the Iraqi government, to establish control.²⁷⁰ From the beginning, governmental policy orders deviated greatly from realities on the ground. For example, the Dutch government instructed the mission commander not to give the impression that the Dutch were participating in the American-led 'occupation'. Therefore, patrols and checkpoint had be kept to an absolute minimum and be located as far away from the population as possible. Also, visible military presence in cities had to be avoided.²⁷¹ This approach proved to be unworkable and SFIR commanders eventually chose not to follow it. When the situation in Al-Muthanna became critical, the task force had to balance and manoeuvre around the national mandate that was set for the SFIR mission. These contradictions show how the Dutch government struggled with the practical realization of a peacekeeping mission, which turned out not to be much about peacekeeping after all. For the first time in 50 years, the Dutch were confronted with a mission that brought together military and non-military elements—or kinetic and non-kinetic elements. Zaalberg & ten Cate argue that the SFIR mission in Iraq would today be categorized as a complex counterinsurgency operation; a mission in which local insurgents and the local population are important actors.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Kitzen & Vogelsang, "Obtaining Population Centric Intelligence".

²⁶⁹ T.W. Brocades Zaalberg & A. ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation: Dutch Military Operations in Iraq, 2003-2005* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2015).

²⁷⁰ T.W. Brocades Zaalberg, *Soldiers and Civil Power. Supporting or Substituting Civil Authorities in Modern Peace Operations*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

²⁷¹ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation*.

²⁷² Ibid.

A good cooperation between the Dutch military and the local population was crucial. By showing respect, the Dutch were able to get closer to the local populations, were respected and easy to communicate with.²⁷³ Their relation with locals provided them with useful intelligence and made their task of rebuilding the province easier. In the case of Iraq, this way of engagement was very crucial, for both the safety of the soldiers and staff, and for the purpose of the mission. In December 2003, a correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote of the ‘soft Dutch tactics’, which he called the ‘Softly Softly Approach’.²⁷⁴ “The Dutch ‘softly softly’ approach to security in Muthanna comes in marked contrast to the more robust anti-insurgency measures farther north”, he wrote.²⁷⁵ This narrative grew stronger when the *New York Times* published an article in which Battle Group commander Lieutenant Colonel Matthijssen wrote of ‘the Dutch Approach’ in Iraq.²⁷⁶ Zaalberg & ten Cate summarize the narrative of the Dutch Approach at that time:

“The 1,300-strong Dutch battle group reportedly operated as part neighbourhood police officers, part social workers. They seemed to have developed what they themselves called ‘the Dutch approach to patrolling’: close to the population, on foot and in open vehicles, wearing no helmets or sunglasses, pointing their weapons down, chatting with Iraqis. ‘Making soldiers accessible and vulnerable to their surroundings’, the Dutch claimed, ‘increases their security’ ”.²⁷⁷

In later years, critiques of the term rose.²⁷⁸ Zaalberg & ten Cate even argued that the term was nothing more than a well-staged myth.²⁷⁹ If the Dutch were indeed able to operate more ‘freely’ in Al-Muthanna then military partners in other, often unsafe, parts of Iraq, the bottom-up approach was not part of any official Dutch strategy, but simply a result of the circumstances on the ground.²⁸⁰ Regardless of whether the Dutch Approach really was Dutch or was even a planned strategy, it does represent a certain mentality, a mentality that respected the local population and their culture. This mentality was useful in Iraq and might be successful in the context of other missions as well—missions we would now label COIN operations. A year after the Dutch left Iraq, they took part in the multilateral ISAF coalition in Afghanistan, a mission with the same local and population-centric approach as the SFIR mission in Iraq.

4.2 ISAF and the Dutch approach in Uruzgan

When the U.S. started *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) in Afghanistan in October 2001, one of the goals was to remove the Taliban regime. With the overthrow of the Taliban happening quite quickly, the dynamics

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ “Dutch take a ‘slowly’ tact in Iraq”, *Christian Science Monitor*, accessed on July 25, 2019, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1219/p06s01-woiq.html>

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ N. Onoshi, “Dutch soldier find smiles protect as well as armor”, *The New York Times*, 24 October, 2004.

²⁷⁷ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation”, 877.

²⁷⁸ T.W. Brocades Zaalberg, “The Use and Abuse of the ‘Dutch Approach’ in Counter-Insurgency”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 6 (2013); R. Moelker, “The Genesis of the “Dutch Approach” to Asymmetric Conflicts: Operations in Uruzgan and the “Softly, Softly” Manner of Approaching the Taleban”, *Armed Forces & Society* 40, no. 1 (2014).

²⁷⁹ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, “A Gentle Occupation”.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

changed. Instead of kinetic operations against the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorist groups, the focus shifted towards non-kinetic operations to stabilize and rebuild the Afghan state. However, between 2003 and 2006, the Taliban regrouped and re-emerged as a widespread guerrilla movement. The need to form a broad international coalition rose.²⁸¹ In 2004, NATO launched its new plan to expand ISAF authority over the rest of Afghanistan. This same year, the Dutch started operating in Afghanistan. They ran a small mission in the northern province of Baghlan, where they took over the control of a PRT. Due to the relatively positive experience with the PRT in Baghlan, the Dutch government was sympathetic towards a new contribution to the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

In August 2006, the Dutch Army replaced U.S. forces as they took over the command of the mission in Uruzgan. The Dutch *Task Force Uruzgan* (TFU) operated in southern Afghanistan until August 2010 and was the largest Dutch mission since the decolonisation war in Indonesia in 1945-1949. As the third contributing country to the NATO-led ISAF mission, the Netherlands sent over 1100 men to Uruzgan every three months.²⁸² For the second time, after Iraq, the Dutch were—to certain extent—able to determine and apply their own approach; they had exclusive control in ‘their own province’. Uruzgan was relatively peaceful but had its own, complicated, dynamics. As a Pashtun heartland, the province had a traditional and conservative society, where tribal norms and values influence the local context.

The aim of Task Force Uruzgan was threefold: first, (re)constructing an Afghan administration; second, (re)building the security forces (the army and the police); and third, boosting socio-economic prosperity. By applying the same tactics that were used during the Iraq mission in 2003-2005—tactics that have been summarized as the ‘Dutch Approach’—the Dutch hoped to succeed in their threefold ambition.²⁸³ Instead of fighting militant forces, winning the hearts and minds of the local population became a central task.²⁸⁴ The task force was supposed to be ‘outside’ and moving amid the populations as much as possible.²⁸⁵ The approach was “as civil as possible, and as military as needed”.²⁸⁶ In 2006-2007, the Dutch Approach was replaced by the ‘3D Approach’, which stands for defence (security), diplomacy (governance), and development (reconstruction).²⁸⁷ The 3D approach was developed by U.S. and Canadian forces and later adopted by the Dutch, who used it as an equivalent of the Dutch Approach. Although different in name, the meaning and core elements of these approaches remained unchanged.

The Dutch- and 3D Approaches and the aims of TFU mainly seem to concentrate on the civic and administrative activities of the mission. Suggesting an absence of ‘fighting’ and portraying the mission as a

²⁸¹ M. Kitzen, *Oorlog onder de mensen. Militaire inzichten uit Atjeh en Uruzgan* (Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos, 2016).

²⁸² C. Klep, *Uruzgan. Nederlandse militairen op missie, 2005-2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011); “Het Nederlandse aandeel in International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)”, Ministerie van Defensie, accessed on July 9, 2019, <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/historische-missies/missie-overzicht/2002/international-security-assistance-force-isaf/nederlands-aandeel>

²⁸³ R. Moelker, “The Genesis of the “Dutch Approach” to Asymmetric Conflicts: Operations in Uruzgan and the “Softly, Softly” Manner of Approaching the Taliban”, *Armed Forces & Society* 40, no. 1 (2014).

²⁸⁴ Klep, *Uruzgan*.

²⁸⁵ A. Vogelaar & S. Dalenberg, “On your own in the desert. The dynamics of self-steering leadership”. In *Mission Uruzgan. Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, edited by R. Beerens, J. van der Meulen, J. Soeters & A. Vogelaar (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

²⁸⁶ Translated from Dutch: “Zo civiel als mogelijk en zo militair als nodig”. Klep, *Uruzgan*, 40.

²⁸⁷ Moelker, “The Genesis”.

purely reconstructive one. This narrative was built by politicians who refused to acknowledge that the mission was more than a reconstruction, stabilization, or peacekeeping mission. Dutch politicians considered the 3D Approach “to differ significantly from a Counterinsurgency strategy”.²⁸⁸ Although Dutch politicians and military leaders were too afraid to label it as such, the Dutch mission in Uruzgan was very much a COIN operation, which entails “comprehensive civilian and military efforts made to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances”.²⁸⁹ Contrary to the mere focus on reconstruction implied by Dutch politicians, fighting insurgents was an important task of TFU. Kitzen argues that, until 2007, “the emphasis of TFU daily business lay on ‘kinetic’ operations”.²⁹⁰ After the Battle of Chora in June 2007, TFU staff became more aware that understanding and securing the local population could contribute to COIN strategies. From there, TFU worked on the elimination of insurgents and on building a secure society. In the words of Dutch Major-General de Kruif, commander of RC-South from November 2008 until November 2009: “Yes, we shall kill evil-doers, but the centre of gravity [of our mission] lies in protecting the population”.²⁹¹ As the population needs a stable bases to further rebuild society, building the security situation centred around restoring the normal civil balance. The Dutch tactics that concentrated on winning the hearts and minds and the COIN approach go hand-in-hand.²⁹²

4.3 Dutch knowledge of tribal structures

How did the Dutch gain knowledge of tribal structures during their contribution to the SFIR and ISAF missions? I have identified three ways through which the Dutch developed knowledge of tribal structures: intelligence, PRTs, and outside experts. Intelligence, PRTs, and outside experts do not stand on their own; they are used simultaneously but also complement each other. These three elements are thus integrated. For example, PRT members provided information to intelligence units. Their information contributed to the overall situational awareness and intelligence units were able to link information provided by PRT members to other information. Sharing information and knowledge is a crucial part of developing theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures. It was precisely this integrated way that made intelligence, PRTs, and outside experts quite resourceful in Uruzgan.

4.3.1 Intelligence

The Dutch Army sees intelligence as “a product from the collection and processing of data on foreign powers, hostile or potentially hostile (elements of) regular armed forces, irregular armed parties, just as data

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 435.

²⁸⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Allied Joint Doctrine on Counter-Insurgency (COIN)”, edition A, version 1 (July 2016), 1-1.

²⁹⁰ M. Kitzen, “Close Encounters with the Tribal Kind: the Implementation of Co-Option as a Tool for De-escalation of Conflict – The Case of the Netherlands in Afghanistan’s Uruzgan province”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 5 (2012), 721.

²⁹¹ Quoted in Dimitriu & de Graaf, “The Dutch COIN Approach”, 436-437.

²⁹² Ibid.

on territories and condition in which the military operates or will operate in the future”.²⁹³ It is possible to differentiate levels of intelligence—strategic, operational, tactic—and differentiate intelligence based on the type of intelligence or its goals—for instance, intelligence zeroing in on a specific goal or on the current situation. One can also differentiate based on how intelligence is gathered: acoustic intelligence, imagery intelligence, open source intelligence, radar intelligence, human intelligence, etc. Intelligence gathering is thus a very complex process that focusses on creating awareness of the situation or environment.

How is the Dutch intelligence connected to tribal structures? Tribal structures are first looked at during the pre-mission or preliminary phase. Before the Dutch contribution to the missions in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan officially started, the Dutch Army sent inventory teams with intelligence officers ahead. These teams had to provide an overview of the local situation in the provinces, tribal structures included. When the inventory team went to Al-Muthanna in May and June of 2003,²⁹⁴ there was no PRT active in the province who could provide information on tribal structures.²⁹⁵ Because of the absence of PRTs in Iraq, intelligence on the local context was less specific and less detailed—especially when compared to the level of pre-mission knowledge on the local context in Uruzgan. Also, in the years 2003 to 2005, it was less common to share intelligence with international partners.²⁹⁶ Intelligence officers who were part of the Dutch inventory team had to collect their own information. In 2017, Dutch special forces conducted research in which they looked at the intelligence and situational awareness at the start of the Dutch contribution to the SFIR mission. They concluded that the Dutch view on the local Iraqi context needed nuances. The Dutch knowledge of Iraqi tribes was limited, sometimes inaccurate, and based upon our own western assumptions of social relations.²⁹⁷

In Uruzgan, the inventory teams liaised with U.S. intelligence units that led the ISAF operation in the province before the Dutch took over. They also received information from the U.S. PRT’s intelligence section, that had been active in the province since 2004.²⁹⁸ Another source of information was the U.S. political advisor (POLAD) who specialized in provincial government processes. The U.S. Army in fact provided most information. Yet, the Dutch military intelligence and security service, the *Militaire Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst* (MIVD) also provided important information. A report on the Uruzgan province published in August 2005 contained information about tribalism, tribal structures, and inter- and intra-tribal tensions.²⁹⁹ Kitzen identifies another MIVD report on tribal relations in Uruzgan that was published in July 2006.³⁰⁰ The two MIVD reports suggest that, at the start of TFU, in August 2006, the Dutch Army was

²⁹³ Translated from Dutch: “Inlichtingen zijn het product van het verzamelen en verwerken van gegevens over vreemde mogendheden, vijandelijke of potentieel vijandige (elementen van) reguliere strijdkrachten, irreguliere strijdende partijen, evenals van gegevens over gebieden en omstandigheden waarin militair wordt opgetreden of in de toekomst mogelijk worden opgetreden”. Koninklijke Landmacht, *LD 5, Leidraad Inlichtingen* (N.p.: Doctrinecommissie van de Koninklijke Landmacht, 2006), 10-11.

²⁹⁴ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation*, 37.

²⁹⁵ Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

²⁹⁶ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

²⁹⁷ Interview #2, July 4, 2019.

²⁹⁸ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

²⁹⁹ This information, which I cross-checked, was provided to me by an anonymous source within the Dutch Army.

³⁰⁰ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”, 382.

aware of the importance of tribal structures within the Uruzgan context and had started developing knowledge on them.

During the Dutch missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, where knowledge of the local context was crucial, most Dutch intelligence was gathered through ‘Human Intelligence’ (HUMINT),³⁰¹ that is “the collection of information by a trained human intelligence collector from people and their associated documents and media sources to identify elements, intentions, composition, strength, dispositions, tactics, equipment, personnel, and capabilities”.³⁰² Indeed, in today’s COIN, every person is a potential source of information; the local population, political figures, government officials, or your own military colleagues. HUMINT activities do not only focus on technical information, but also on more abstract information such as opinions, perceptions, feelings, or tensions among (groups of) people. Information is acquired through de-briefing, questioning, and contacts (liaisons).³⁰³

Human terrain analysts (HTAs) collected enormous amounts information throughout the SFIR and ISAF missions. Literally every tiny piece of information was processed and recorded. Most information was on ‘threat to the force’.³⁰⁴ But, while collecting information about potential hostile elements, actors, and events, HTAs also collected information about local tribes—often as by-product. Intelligence units work on a demand basis, which means that they only share information when specifically asked for—except for information that is provided to the mission commander as part of situation awareness briefings. When asked to deliver an analysis specifically on tribal structures, tribal tensions, or relations within a certain area, HTAs were able to pull very detailed and area specific information from their databases. Intelligence is indeed ‘command driven’, as the mission commander needs to give direction to the intelligence process. Intelligence codes and restrictions did not allow intelligence units to share the information or advise when a mission commander did not specifically ask for an analysis on, or information about, tribal structures.³⁰⁵ As a result, only SFIR and ISAF commanders that requested information about tribal structures were given access to intelligence about local tribes.³⁰⁶

This did not mean that they necessarily used or acted upon the information. It was actually the commander’s responsibility to interpretate intelligence within the context of his mission and orders.³⁰⁷ Developing theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures through intelligence requires an interest in tribal structures, and a sensibility (or ability) to incorporate information into operational thinking and action. If intelligence units harboured detailed information about tribal structures during the SFIR and ISAF missions,³⁰⁸ the extent to which the Dutch Army developed knowledge on tribal structures through intelligence was highly dependent on the mission’s commanders’ personal interests, focus, and capacities.

³⁰¹ Brocades Zaalberg & ten Cate, *A Gentle Occupation*.

³⁰² Department of the Army, *FM 3-24*, 82.

³⁰³ Koninklijke Landmacht, *LD 5, Leidraad Inlichtingen* (N.p.: Doctrinecommissie van de Koninklijke Landmacht, 2006).

³⁰⁴ Interview #2, July 4, 2019.

³⁰⁵ Ibid; Interview #9, August 28, 2019.

³⁰⁶ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

³⁰⁷ Department of the Army, *FM 3-24*.

³⁰⁸ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

Sometimes, valuable intelligence remained unshared and unexplored. Some commanders, such as van Griensven and van Harskamp, were more interested and dedicated to developing theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures than others.³⁰⁹ Their interest trickled a more hands-on approach in which they acted upon the intelligence about tribal structures.

4.3.2 Provincial reconstruction teams

Another important factor to the Dutch understanding of tribal structures in Afghanistan were PRTs. These teams were deployed in Afghanistan since the start of the Dutch contribution to ISAF in 2006. The first PRTs emerged in Afghanistan in 2002. There, the U.S. Army had created a relatively stable environment but lacked the capacity to boost sustainable development, the humanitarian situation, and start reconstruction projects. The idea rose to establish civil-military teams, combining military capacity and knowledge with departments and agencies outside the U.S. Army.³¹⁰ In later years, the idea spread to other missions and other international military partners as well. However, PRTs evolved and were deployed differently across missions and national armies.³¹¹ In a literature review about American-led or initiated PRTs, Luehrs argues that “there is a fundamental uncertainty as to the proper concept, role, and objectives of PRTs in Iraq and Afghanistan”.³¹²

It is therefore impossible to provide a general description of PRTs’ activities. Their effectiveness and ability to contribute to the understanding of the local context differed between the armies that controlled them. However, the way that the Dutch Army used PRTs in Afghanistan did contribute to the understanding of local tribal structures. In Iraq, where the Dutch have not deployed PRTs, the knowledge of tribal structures was limited—also due to the absence of proper pre-mission knowledge. Former SFIR and ISAF commanders Matthijssen and van Harskamp both stated that PRTs added great value to the understanding of the local context in Afghanistan, where they served in July 2008-February 2009 and January 2008-June 2008 respectively. Having experienced the benefits of PRTs in Uruzgan, both commanders argued that they would like to have had PRTs at their disposal in Iraq—where they served in July 2004-December 2008 and January 2004-June 2004 respectively.³¹³

I identify three reasons why PRTs contributed to the development of theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures. First, PRT members had a micro-level perspective on tribal structures—more than any other military element during the Dutch ISAF mission, the intelligence unit included. Former SFIR and ISAF commander General van Griensven gave the following example: “the walls of the PRT office were literally covered in schemes and images of tribal actors, their interrelatedness, how they acted, and why they did so”.³¹⁴ The PRT members’ in-depth knowledge of these tribal structures is a product of

³⁰⁹ Ibid; Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

³¹⁰ T.S. Szayna et al., *Integrating Civilian Agencies in Stability Operations* (N.p.: RAND Corporation, 2009).

³¹¹ M. Grandia Mantas, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Symbol van NAVO-commitment in Afghanistan of meer?”, *Militaire Spectator* 179, no. 10 (2010).

³¹² C. Luehrs, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams: A Literature Review”, *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (2009): 95.

³¹³ Interview #6, July 8, 2019; Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³¹⁴ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

the PRT's central role in the province of Uruzgan, and ultimately within TFU.³¹⁵ First and foremost, their role was to serve as the eyes and ears of TFU. By going outside the military base as much as possible, PRT members were able to make contact with the population of Uruzgan and the ones who had the most local power: tribal leaders. Rietdijk, commander of PRT4—that operated from September 2007 until April 2008—explained: “80 to 90 percent of my time went to the relations between tribes, with tribes, and the relation between tribes and the government: the tribal map of Uruzgan was my most important field of work”.³¹⁶

Second, PRT members not only had a different role, but also a fundamentally different perspective than other TFU personnel. When regular units operated outside a base, they acted predominantly on traditional military principles. PRT personnel acted less upon military principles and rather included sociological and cultural perspectives in their work; something unique within the Dutch Army. Initially, PRTs were filled with—although not exclusively—military personnel trained in CIMIC principles—aimed at boosting stabilization, public order, political reform and eventually reconstruction by making contact and building relations with civilian agents.³¹⁷ The civilian-minded specialists within the PRT were accompanied by aid workers and outside experts such as cultural advisors (CULADS).³¹⁸ PRT members were equipped with a certain cultural or local sensitivity, which is an absolute prerequisite for gaining knowledge of tribal structures. Starting in 2009, PRTs were no longer formed by military personnel and became exclusively staffed with civilians, led by a career diplomat.³¹⁹

Third, PRTs in Uruzgan evolved and their perspectives on the local context and local tribal structures was eventually incorporated within the overall focus of TFU. At the start of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan, PRTs were not part of TFU staff. There was little cooperation and their activities were sometimes ad odds. In the first months, the PRT's ambitions were hampered by TFU staff and soldiers who regarded PRTs as useless, arguing that engaging with the local population could also be done by ‘general’ units.³²⁰ However, TFU commander van Griensven was the first to keep harping on the importance of tribal structures within the context of the mission. He considered PRTs as crucial for understanding tribal structures and pushed for its incorporation within TFU.³²¹ Understanding tribal structures, and the local context in general, became more important to the overall TFU. With the TFU paying more attention to the local population, its structures, and its powerholders, the work and importance of the PRT became acknowledged more widely. After their deployments in Uruzgan ended, former PRT commanders van der Voet, Rietdijk, and Wijnen took their knowledge and experiences home and managed to incorporate their ideas into policy and doctrinal documents at the ministerial level.³²²

³¹⁵ Klep, *Uruzgan*.

³¹⁶ Ibid; Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³¹⁷ Brocades Zaalberg, “The Historical Origins of Civil-Military Cooperation”.

³¹⁸ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³¹⁹ Brocades Zaalberg, “The Use and Abuse of the ‘Dutch Approach’”.

³²⁰ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³²¹ Ibid; Interview #7, July 17, 2019.

³²² Interview #7, July 17, 2019.

PRTs greatly contributed to the Dutch ability to develop theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures. Because they aimed specifically for the local population, they were able to gain basic knowledge on tribal structures, tribal dynamics, and the influence they had within a specific area. PRT members had a unique, non-military mindset. Their members were experts in the local context and had a certain cultural sensitivity. With the efforts of some keen individuals, who saw how important understanding the local context was, PRT members were able to develop and influence policy well into TFU staff and the Ministry of Defence. The experiences and successes of the deployment of PRTs in Uruzgan paved the way for understanding local structures in future operations.

4.3.3 Outside experts

The last important way through which the Dutch Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures was by cooperating with outside experts, that is, individuals or organisations that were not part of the Ministry of Defence, nor of the Dutch Army. Their expertise came from their direct experience with tribal structures or from the fact that they had done extensive research on the topic. Two examples of outside experts stand out: research done by the Tribal Liaison Office (TLO), and tribal and cultural advisors (TRIBADs and CULTADs respectively).

In May 2006, just two months before the first rotation would arrive in Uruzgan, a research team conducted a study on the population and social background of the province. The ethnographic field research was conducted by TLO, an Afghan NGO hired by the Dutch embassy in Kabul. Zeroing in on local power-relations, the *Survey of Uruzgan Province* “was to act as guidance for the strategic engagement of communities through development aid”.³²³ It contained fine-grained information about the Pashtun tribal system, the existing tribes in Uruzgan, their distribution, their mutual relations, tensions, and rifts.³²⁴ The document was very valuable, especially to the first Dutch PRT and the first rotation, both starting in July 2006.

The mere fact that a detailed report on the social context of Uruzgan was produced suggests that understanding the local context is important. It also suggests the initial intention to really work with the assessment, to benefit from it, and to find a better coherence between operational plans and the context of the area in which the Dutch operated. However, this initial intention did not translate into actions or a proper use of the information. Kitzen explains:

“The civil assessment was completed in August, which was too late for the first TFU rotation to incorporate its findings in the pre-deployment training and planning. Thus, while the civil assessment and especially the TLO analysis meant a huge leap forward in the overall Dutch knowledge of Uruzgan, the soldiers of TFU-1 did not fully benefit from it”.³²⁵

³²³ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”, 380.

³²⁴ The Liaison Office, *A Survey of Uruzgan Province*.

³²⁵ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”, 380.

The assessment was also not effectively distributed among the different ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had initiated and ordered the assessment, only shared limited parts of it with Dutch military personnel, arguing that information was not ‘useful to them’.³²⁶ Kitzen also argues that there were “insufficient civil experts to assist the military in overcoming their inexperience in dealing with this kind of fine-grained information”.³²⁷ The assessment “was placed in a drawer and rarely came out again”.³²⁸ Even though the full potential of the TLO survey remained largely unexploited, the Dutch intelligence position about tribal structures in Uruzgan was greatly augmented by the report.³²⁹

The employment of TRIBADs and CULTADs at the end of 2006 also made an important contribution to the Dutch development of theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures. Before they arrived in Uruzgan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already sent to other advisors, a POLAD and a development cooperation advisor (OSAD). The new TRIBAD was an absolute expert on Afghanistan. He had many contacts and friends in Uruzgan and spoke Pashto.³³⁰ But when arriving in Uruzgan, the TRIBAD’s non-military perspective on the local social context met resistance or was simply ignored by the majority of TFU personnel. Hence, the TRIBAD mainly cooperated with the PRT and further developed their knowledge of the local context and tribal structures—when the TRIBAD was extensively linked to and co-located with the PRTs, these became more effective and successful over the long-term.³³¹ In 2008, the first TRIBAD was replaced by two others. One of them was Willem Vogelsang, a Dutch scholar with many years of experience in Afghanistan. Vogelsang argued that the Dutch Army placed too much emphasis on the tribal dimensions of Uruzgan and hereby left out other social factors and non-tribal groups.³³² By placing tribes in perspective, Vogelsang boosted the understanding of the local social context and of how to develop theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structure.

In Iraq, mission commanders only had one POLAD at their disposal, while in Afghanistan there was a whole team of advisors and outside experts. The Iraqi POLAD—who also looked at tribal leaders and their local power—had to be able to go outside and speak to local political figures. As one of the only non-military individuals within the SFIR personnel, his role in understanding tribal structures was even more crucial. However, there were some problems around the POLADs’ ability to go outside the military base. Hence, his contribution to the understanding of the local context was limited. SFIR commander Matthijssen recalls:

“When the POLAD went outside the military base, he was protected by the *Brigade Speciale Beveiliging* (BSB) that was part of the military police. Their capacity was only limited and, at a certain point, they were recalled

³²⁶ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

³²⁷ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”, 397.

³²⁸ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

³²⁹ Kitzen & Vogelsang, “Obtaining Population Centric Intelligence”; Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³³⁰ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”; M. Kitzen, “Afghanistan’s Lessons: Part 1. The Netherlands’ Lessons”, *Parameters* 49, no. 3 (2019).

³³¹ Kitzen & Vogelsang, “Obtaining Population Centric Intelligence”; Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”; Seppen & Lucius, “Civilians in Military Operations”.

³³² Interview #8, July 12, 2019.

and left Iraq. So, my POLAD could not go outside. It took me quite some time before the ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs let me arrange something so he could go outside again. After a few weeks he could go outside again”.³³³

4.4 Conclusion

In Iraq, the Dutch development of knowledge on tribal structures through intelligence and outside experts was limited and less thorough than in Afghanistan. First, there was little intelligence available in the SFIR pre-mission phase. Second, the Dutch Army did not deploy PRTs in Al-Muthanna. Third, The Dutch Army rarely worked with outside experts to get a better understanding of the local context. In Iraq, there was only one POLAD and his capacities to contribute to the Dutch knowledge of tribal structures were limited. The Dutch limited knowledge of tribal structures was also the result of the character of the SFIR mission, in which the Dutch had a more supportive role towards civil authority, the police, and the Iraqi Army. There was less need to actively engage with local tribes—that responsibility was with the Iraqi authorities, police and army—and hence to know more about tribal structures.

In Afghanistan, the Dutch Army developed knowledge on tribal structures through intelligence, PRTs, and outside experts. All three contributed significantly to the Dutch theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures. First, during the ISAF pre-mission phase, the Dutch Army liaised with U.S. PRT’s intelligence units and POLAD. They also had access to detailed intelligence reports by the MIVD. Second, Dutch PRTs were able to develop a thorough and detailed overview of local tribal structures. Third, the *Survey of Uruzgan Province* and the deployment of TRIBADs and CULTADs deepened the Dutch knowledge. In Afghanistan, the three ways through which the Dutch Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge of tribal structures were well integrated, which boosted the effectiveness of each individual element—for example, the effectiveness of PRTs grew when they closely cooperated with the TRIBADs and CULTADs.

In the scope of this research, it is impossible to compare the Dutch Army’s ability to develop knowledge of tribal structures to other international military partners. However, several of the interviewees argued that the Dutch Army had a different knowledge of tribal structures than, for example, the U.S. Army. Van Griensven explained the difference in knowledge as the Dutch ability to “see many different shades of grey. Nothing is black or white”.³³⁴ Because of the Dutch perspective on the local population, they were able to develop a proper knowledge of tribal structures and built a good relationship with the local population.

³³³ Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

³³⁴ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

Developing knowledge of the local context alone does not make COIN campaigns successful. Armies need to actively engage and collaborate with local actors and powerholders in order to successfully pursue COIN goals.³³⁵ Kilcullen argues that in Iraq and Afghanistan, the COIN approach aimed at “marginalizing extremists and co-opting anyone who proved ready to reconcile, support a peaceful settlement, and cease fighting”.³³⁶ Local actors, leaders, groups, or populace need to be moved towards cooperation based on shared objectives.³³⁷ I call the effort to seek collaboration with the local actors, and specifically with tribes, ‘engaging with’.

There are several mechanisms that each stand for specific ways of engaging or collaborating with local actors or powerholders. Co-option, control, coercion; these terms all refer to the crucial COIN element of engagement and collaboration, each with a slightly different definition and entailing different tactics and practical principles. Co-option entails the process to seek collaboration with local powerholders. Control can be defined as the mean to achieve collaboration through shared objectives. Coercion is a harsher method to control and force tribes to collaborate. Repressive methods often have a contrary effect: alienating local leaders and driving them into the hand of the insurgents. Kitzen argues that “it is precisely for this reason that modern counter-insurgency theory does not emphasize the use of sanctions, but rather takes the creation of incentives for collaboration as its focal point”.³³⁸

According to Lansdale and Nye, COIN combines elements of soft and hard power.³³⁹ Hence, Prince identified soft and hard COIN. ‘Soft COIN’ is “the not necessarily manifest element of armed campaigns that are designed to win the hearts and minds of local populations as part of a cooptive effort to curry favour, influence policy, decrease dissent, and increase complacency”.³⁴⁰ Hard COIN is defined by kinetic or armed operations. During missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, international military partners pursued both soft and hard COIN. On the one hand, the coalition protected the population and encouraged local leaders to collaborate with the government and coalition forces (soft COIN), involving “communal engagement, nation building, and a minimum use of force”.³⁴¹ On the other hand, “intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance technology were utilized to locate and neutralize the insurgency’s leadership”,³⁴² hereby

³³⁵ Department of the Army, *FM 3-24*.

³³⁶ D. Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency. The State of a Controversial Art”. In *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, edited by P.B. Rich & I. Duyvesteyn (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 141.

³³⁷ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³³⁸ Kitzen, “Close Encounters”, 715.

³³⁹ E. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars. An American Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York, Harper and Row, 1972); J.S. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

³⁴⁰ D.H. Prince, “Soft Power, Hard Power, and the Anthropological ‘Leveraging’ of Cultural ‘Assets’. Distilling the Politics and Ethics of Anthropological Counterinsurgency”. In *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, J.D. Kelly et al. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 247.

³⁴¹ B. Brooks, “Western COIN: The Rise of “Soft” Counterinsurgency Doctrine”, *Small Wars Journal* (September, 2019). Accessed November 3, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/western-coin-rise-soft-counterinsurgency-doctrine>

³⁴² Ibid.

using more violent and invasive ways to engage with the local population and to end the insurgency (hard COIN).

In this chapter, I elaborate on both engaging with tribes through soft and hard COIN. Engaging with tribes through soft COIN has been rather extensively practiced by the Dutch Army. Engaging with tribes through hard COIN has been problematic for the Dutch Army, who mostly refrained from military action. However, I identify and explain how the Dutch Army did engage with tribes other than in a soft way. The last section of this chapter will explain how tribes have—in their own ways—tried to influence, manipulate, and engage with the Dutch Army.

5.1 Engaging with tribes through soft COIN

In *Soft Power, the Means to Success in World Politics*, Joseph Nye argues that soft power is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion”.³⁴³ Nye’s definition of soft power falls into a larger political (non-military) context. However, ‘soft’ actions are also important in the context of conflict and peacebuilding.³⁴⁴ Borrowing from Lansdale and Nye, Prince defines both soft and hard COIN. Brooks and Joseph also translated the distinction between soft power and hard power to COIN. The ‘soft’ COIN approach is not prompted by military strategical thinking, but by social science. Actions that are in line with soft COIN are often instigated by scientific sociocultural information. Therefore, a thorough sociocultural knowledge of the operational context is essential.³⁴⁵

The distinction between soft and hard COIN has been especially relevant in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the population has played an important role in the insurgency and the conflict.³⁴⁶ There, international military partners had to cooperate and build friendly relations with the local population.³⁴⁷ The Dutch Army creating incentives for cooperation through both interaction and financial, material, or diplomatic support. The soft way of engaging with tribes suggests that the Dutch Army expected tribal leaders to cooperate. However, in pursuing soft COIN the Dutch were not completely subject to the willingness or intentions of tribes or their leaders. Their approach was reward based and included subtle coercive strategies.

5.1.1 Interaction: building and using good relations

When the Dutch Army wished to engage with tribes, they had to build stable relations.³⁴⁸ Through building relations with local tribes, the Dutch Army created conditions under which they could further engage with and influence tribes—for instance, by providing them with financial and material support. The Dutch Army was able to influence tribes and steer or point them in directions that benefited the mission. Keeping good relations with tribes also offered the Dutch Army the possibility to get extra insights and gather intelligence. This extra information was important in mapping tribal disputes and divides. By having a good overview of

³⁴³ Nye, *Soft Power*, x.

³⁴⁴ Prince, “Soft Power, Hard Power”.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Brooks, “Western COIN”.

³⁴⁷ Nye, *Soft Power*, xi.

³⁴⁸ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

which tribal leader was responsible for what area, water system, or road, the Dutch were able to develop knowledge on the actions of local power figures. When the Army picked up signs of tribal disputes, or insurgent attack on a tribal area, they could talk to the tribal leaders involved try to settle issues before they got out of hand or before the insurgent attack caught a sheik by surprise.³⁴⁹

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the Dutch built solid relations with local tribes. Their relationships with tribes were taken a step further when the Dutch pressed tribal leaders to take their responsibility in local safety and security. Tribal leaders were held accountable for safety and security issues within their tribal territory. On one occasion, Dutch Military personnel confiscated weapons from a group of Iraqi civilians who did not have the required permits. The Dutch returned the weapons to the sheik in charge of the area. He had either illegally supplied the weapons or at least had the responsibility to control the local flow of weapons. In meeting with the sheik, the Dutch pointed at his responsibilities and pressed that, whenever something weapon related happened in the area, they would hold him responsible.³⁵⁰ Most sheiks were well aware of what happened in the area under their authority. They knew who was responsible for shooting, IEDs, or other incidents.³⁵¹

The Dutch developed a subtle way to manipulate tribes through discouraging and promoting specific actions and behaviour, hereby steering tribes and tribal leaders towards cooperation. The Dutch tactic can be considered 'subtle' because the focus was not on punishment or coercion, but on encouraging and stressing expectations that came with their mutual relation. By making tribal leaders responsible for the security and stability within their tribal area, the Dutch created mutual obligations and expectations. The subtleness of the Dutch way of engaging with tribes is well expressed by van Harskamp:

"We often did two things. First, we took young men from every tribe and trained them to be a police officer. Police units were thus tribally diverse and the tribal leaders were pleased. Second, we asked tribal leaders what their needs were. We needed to know exactly what they needed so we could provide them with help. What happens next is crucial. We said: 'I don't want you to shoot at X as long as we pay for and help you with your project. And I also find it difficult that you do not attend the tribal meetings and do not support Y. It would be really nice if you could do that' ".³⁵²

In turn, tribes were rewarded for their cooperation and effort to keep an area safe. When Dutch SFIR commanders had guests over in Al-Muthanna, they often visited a local sheik and had dinner all together, through which they boosted the local position of the tribe in question.³⁵³ In Iraq specifically, the strategies of discouraging and promoting certain behaviour were successful on a larger scale, as the influence and appearance of tribes and their leaders was not only concentrated locally. Historically, tribal power can

³⁴⁹ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

³⁵⁰ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁵¹ Interview #7, July 17, 2019.

³⁵² Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁵³ Ibid; Interview #7, July 17, 2019.

expand well beyond the tribal area and reach well into provincial governmental bodies. A powerful position and friendly relations with the Dutch Army locally was therefore beneficial to the tribes' position at the provincial level.³⁵⁴ Tribes that supported and maintained good relationships with the Dutch Army locally were sometimes given seats in the provincial council, hereby having a voice in far-reaching and important affairs. These tribes could see their power and status grow at the provincial level.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, relations were mostly built and maintained by PRTs, CULADs, TRIBADs, and POLADs. However, as described above, TFU commanders also personally corresponded with tribal leaders and held bilateral meetings. Sometimes such talks resulted in extraordinary information that could not be collected by PRTs or HTAs:

“One day, there was a situation which left one of our armoured vehicles upside down on the side of the road. It was total-loss. I went to the local sheik, and at the end of our conversation, I told him: ‘how are you going to help me explaining to the Dutch government how one of our vehicles has 50.000 dollars of damage?’. When I returned the next day, he had 50.000 dollars in cash for me. I said: ‘I do not want to know how you got it and I will not take it. Instead, I want you to spend it on your own people, on your own community. But I want to know one thing. We were attacked by mortars last week. You know who did it and I want you to tell me’. He told me”.³⁵⁵

The above example also illustrates a quite upfront approach, which was typical for van Harskamp but not for other commanders. Some commanders in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan were more willing and more capable to bluff and manipulate than others—sometimes balancing between what was right and what was not, both legally and morally. “Sometimes you need to be a bit of a rascal”, van Harskamp argued.³⁵⁶ Van Harskamp was rather skilful in contacting and engaging with local tribal leaders, and attributed more importance to building bilateral contacts compared to other commanders. Van Griensven and van Harskamp in particular have been open towards engaging with tribal leaders personally³⁵⁷—sometimes crossing a legal- or mandate-set boundary, often with a successful outcome locally and temporarily.

Relations with tribes were quite stable while the Dutch operated in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan. Situations as the ones described above, with tribes being manipulated and steered towards behaviour and actions that contributed to the Dutch mission, were valuable but ad-hoc. From the moment the Dutch started operating in Iraq and Afghanistan, they knew their presence was only temporary. It was not realistic to expect structural changes at the intra- and inter-tribal level that could contribute to the stability of the regions. Focussing on what could be changed ‘here and now’ and contributed to the mission at that moment in time was most important.³⁵⁸ In the Dutch Army’s contact with tribes and tribal leaders, the main goal

³⁵⁴ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

³⁵⁸ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

was creating safety. The Dutch tried to seduce, influence, coerce, and bribe tribes to create a safer environment for the military personnel to operate in. For more durable stability and peace in the long run, the Dutch Army—together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Developmental cooperation—also provided financial, material, and diplomatic support.

5.1.2 Financial, material and diplomatic support

*“The American way of engaging with tribes entails empowering tribes by offering them military advisors, military means and resources. Such as weapons. We also empower tribes, but without supplying them with weapons. We present them economic and diplomatic offers”.*³⁵⁹

Another way to engage with tribes in a soft manner is to support them diplomatically and financially, by providing tribal leaders with funds, material, or political advice. Engaging with tribes through financial, material and diplomatic support was rather aimed at boosting development. It was in line with the 3D Approach,³⁶⁰ which had been deemed successful in Afghanistan, partially because of the bottom-up character of tribal engagement.³⁶¹ It was also in line with COIN doctrine *FM 3-24*. The Dutch seemed to have killed two birds with one stone: they pursued their own 3D strategy while meeting coalition-wide COIN efforts, such as building relations with tribes and boosting development.

In a 2010 report, the TLO listed several ways through which the Dutch boosted development and reconstruction in Uruzgan, contributing to local capacity building and improving their image vis-à-vis the local population—for example, through big landmark projects (e.g., roads, dams) or hiring local labour. Although these projects were developmental in character, they were also used to engage with and manipulate tribes, and influence tribal balances. Van Griensven explained that many of these big development projects could be used to start dialogue or boost cooperation between tribes.³⁶²

The Dutch Army favoured and helped the tribes that contributed to the safety and stability in the region. In the Afghan Barakzai triangle—the triangle-shaped geographical homeland of several Barakzai sub-tribes—some tribal leaders were given more money than others—for example, because they were anti-Taliban. Through boosting their financial standing, tribes developed supremacy over other, poorer, pro-Taliban tribes in the area.³⁶³ By giving money or prioritizing specific tribes in assigning developmental projects, the Dutch showed that cooperating with them came with benefits, not only to the tribes and their members, but also to their leaders. In Afghanistan, tribal leaders were very well aware that supporting developmental projects in their area could significantly boost their standing vis-à-vis other local tribes.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁹ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

³⁶⁰ Moelker, “The Genesis”.

³⁶¹ The Liaison Office, *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010. A TLO socio-political assessment* (N.p.: TLO, 2010).

³⁶² Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³⁶³ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁶⁴ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

The Dutch tried to create incentives for tribes to cooperate. It has always been common knowledge that, as soon as the Dutch left or the payments stopped, the historical tribal balance was reinstated. Some Dutch military officials therefore argued that paying tribes would not tackle the root causes of regional instability and inter-tribal rivalry.³⁶⁵ A more effective way to achieve a peaceful and stable tribal balance in the long run was the diplomatic support that the Dutch Army offered tribes and their leaders. The essence was to politically empower specific tribes, or to balance inter- and intra-tribal relations, not only by mediating conflicts but also by organizing district and province-wide tribal meetings.³⁶⁶ The Dutch Army has always aimed at strengthening local governance structures, not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but during all its missions.³⁶⁷

In Al-Muthanna, this way of engaging with tribes was still in its infancy and more experimental. Due to the experimental character of engaging with tribes, it was difficult to get enough funding from the government in The Hague to continue the strategy. Creating financial or material incentives and spending money on developmental projects to keep tribes at peace was something new and the Dutch government was unwilling to spend money on these tactics. Due to the lack of Dutch government funding, Dutch commanders had to go Basra to collect large amounts of money, provided instead by the American government. At the end of TFIU rotation 3—led by van Harskamp—U.S. funding stopped. Van Harskamp explained that he had to pull quite some tricks to leave his successor with enough money to continue their strategy of engaging with tribes. The Dutch government only made extra money available after the Dutch Army had suffered a new casualty, in the first two months under commander Matthijssen.³⁶⁸

In later stages of the ISAF mission, engaging with tribes through financial, material, and diplomatic support proven successful. Strategies were institutionalized, not only within the Dutch Army, but also across different ministries. The ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation ran their own programs in Uruzgan, often separate from the military missions. They also aimed at working with tribes and tribal leaders, offered them financial support, or tried to influence them. In Iraq, the possibilities for the Dutch military to engage with tribes through financial, material, and diplomatic support were rather unregulated and experimental, while in later missions, financial, material, or diplomatic support were much more channelled and controlled, for example through different Dutch ministries.³⁶⁹

Keeping the tribal balance in mind was imperative for successful engagement. Matthijssen summarized: “we did not want to create the impression that we were good friends with one tribe and provided them with many benefits, while we ignored or forgot other tribes. Mingling in a centuries old tribal balance can have a contrary effect”.³⁷⁰ The Dutch Army needed to balance between engaging with tribes in a soft manner, and engaging with them the hard way.

³⁶⁵ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³⁶⁶ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

³⁶⁷ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

5.2 Engaging with tribes through hard COIN

Where tribes can be moved towards cooperation through building and maintaining relationships and creating incentives, cooperation can also be enforced. Within COIN, these hard measures are found in “the key role of coercion, harsh emergency legislation, rigorous population-control measures and what British doctrine still calls ‘neutralizing the insurgent’ in defeating insurgencies”.³⁷¹ Mechanisms of control or harsh coercion are sometimes inevitable. However, collaboration through non-violent and diplomatic means are preferable.³⁷² Kitzen underlined the undesirable character of harsh coercion and control in order to pursue COIN goals, especially in tribal societies. When tribes were, for example, forced to cooperate with or act for the purpose of SFIR of ISAF operations, they were more likely to develop grievances and anti-coalition resentment.³⁷³ The critical stance that Kitzen takes is congruent with the position of the Dutch Army and of SFIR and ISAF commanders.³⁷⁴

Officially, the Dutch Army did not work through harsh mechanisms such as control. However, in Iraq and Afghanistan, they did not completely distance themselves from engaging with tribes through hard COIN. Some situations, whether ad-hoc or premeditated, asked for an approach that was far more invasive than mechanisms of interaction and financial, material and diplomatic support. The invasiveness laid in the fact that these ways of engaging with tribes were not as developmental in character as the soft ways as described in the previous section. Although substantiated by social and behavioural scientific research, they were more instigated by military thinking. Through military collaboration and support, but also through the use of force and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) units, the Dutch Army tried to engaging with tribes through hard COIN.

5.2.1 Use of force and PSYOPS

Hard COIN entails the use of force, not only against insurgents that operate nationwide or are important figures at the top of the insurgency’s organization, but also against insurgents at the local level.³⁷⁵ The Dutch Army neutralized insurgents on the ISAF target list, or the *Joint Prioritized Effect List* (JPEF).³⁷⁶ However, the overall tendency within the Dutch Army was to try to collaborate with and influence local leaders. On one occasion, a tribal leader who was on the JPEF list sought collaboration with the Dutch Army. Although he had fled his tribal area to avoid getting killed, he remained very influential and willing to collaborate with the Dutch Army in the long run should the Dutch Army help him come back to his tribal area. The tribal leader should have been arrested but the Dutch saw great strategical benefits in the collaboration, even though the tribal leader was on the JPEF list and should have been arrested. For the Dutch Army, the JPEF

³⁷¹ T.W. Brocades Zaalberg, “Counterinsurgency and Peace Operations”. In *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, edited by P.B. Rich & I. Duyvesteyn (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 93.

³⁷¹ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Interview #4, July 24, 2019; Interview #5, July 5, 2019; Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

³⁷⁵ Brooks, “Western COIN”.

³⁷⁶ Interview #1, May 24, 2019; Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

and the ability to target individual leaders were sometimes subordinate to engaging with tribes through soft COIN—through which, in this specific case, they could possibly reach better effects for the mission.³⁷⁷

Through PSYOPS—officially called ‘Information Operations’—the Dutch Army tried to psychologically influence and manipulate tribal leaders or other important local figures, sometimes with kinetic outcomes. They could, for instance, play two rival tribes and play them off against one another to provoke a clash and hence altering the tribal balance in a specific area in a way benefitting running operations or the overall mission. This type of PSYOPS, called ‘Black PSYOPS’, are not officially used by the Dutch Army. However, forms of PSYOPS that were legally allowed could also have far reaching effects. Where PSYOPS capacities in Iraq were limited, in Afghanistan they were more common and more effective:

“In Afghanistan we tried to eliminate some Taliban leaders. They were not the tip of the iceberg, but just a few levels beneath the Taliban top. However, every time we ran an operation such as a raid or a bombing, these leaders had a lucky escape. So, during our conversations with informants we dropped hints about our cooperation with these Taliban leaders. While this was actually not true. By spreading the rumour that these Taliban leaders were alive because they secretly cooperated with us, we indirectly made sure that the leaders were eliminated by their own people within a week. Through these PSYOPS operations we really contained the power of the Taliban”.³⁷⁸

One hand, PSYOPS operations have been effective in both Iraq and Afghanistan, where they were important means through which the commanders could carry out operations. Dutch PRTs closely worked with PSYOPS elements as PSYOPS teams, who joined them when they went outside the military base.³⁷⁹ On the other hand, gathering political support for these operations was hard.³⁸⁰ Hard COIN mainly took place through military collaboration and support.

5.2.2 Military collaboration and support

Officially, the Dutch Army did not provide military support, military training, or weapons to tribes, militias, or armed groups. Nor have they officially tried to kinetically coerce them into action.³⁸¹ However, the Dutch Army engaged with tribes in more ways than initially acknowledged. The military way of engaging with tribes can be subtle and indirect. Decisions to engage with tribes in a military way were often made ad hoc and when there were no other options to preserve the local security situation. Van Griensven summarizes why the Dutch Army had to manoeuvre around official mandates to prevent the insurgency from growing:

³⁷⁷ Interview #3, June 11, 2019; Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³⁷⁸ Anonymous source within the Dutch Army.

³⁷⁹ Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

“Many years ago, local communities organized a neighbourhood watch or small militia. Purely to resist threats coming from, for instance, a neighbouring village. We were not allowed to organize or help such local groups. Because then we had to arm them as well. However, we have tried to breathe new life into these organizations. Just to make local villages more defensible. We could not supply these organizations with weapons or openly support them. But we could turn a blind eye to the re-grouping and re-organization of such local neighbourhood watches or militias”.³⁸²

This is typical of how the Dutch Army positioned itself in situations or operations that inevitably included cooperation with kinetic or violent elements. Several SFIR commanders in Iraq recognized the benefit and possibilities of engaging with tribal militias or armed groups. The limiting factor in the cooperation between the Dutch Army and tribal militias was the sensitive balance between possibilities on the ground and official political orders. In Iraq and Afghanistan, tribal militias were able to defend themselves against insurgents and maintain regional stability. However, The Hague banned the military from engaging with militias. Where engaging with tribal militias, in some cases, would have brought positive effects for the mission, it conflicted with official orders stated that the Dutch needed to build official security institutions.³⁸³

Only when official programs or soft ways of engaging with tribes were insufficient to achieve the intended results, did SFIR and ISAF commanders seek ways to engagement with tribes in a hard way—for example, offering indirect support to tribal militias. In Al-Muthanna, several local tribes were well-armed and had fighting experience.³⁸⁴ Some tribes had large militias at their disposal and were hence able to interfere in situations that threatened their safety and stability. With the Dutch Army’s consent, tribes from in and around the city of Al-Rumaitha were able to offer resistance against the escalating Al-Sadr revolt in 2004.³⁸⁵

In Uruzgan, the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) was set up to institutionalize local militias, “enhancing the governments security footprint and improve the security situation at the grassroots level”.³⁸⁶ Almost all Iraqi militias and auxiliary forces were driven by strong tribal loyalties.³⁸⁷ As part of the ANAP program, TFU soldiers and PRT members established contacts with local militia leaders. Militias who could contribute to stability and had extensive local power were brought into the program as local self-defence forces.³⁸⁸ Where the Dutch Army did, unofficially, militarily collaborated with tribes, this was often outside of the ANAP program.

In situations where violence was escalating and the local security situation deteriorated, cooperation with tribes was seen as a possibility to deescalate and quell the violence.³⁸⁹ There is one successful—as well

³⁸² Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³⁸³ Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

³⁸⁴ Interview #7, July 17, 2019.

³⁸⁵ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁸⁶ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”, 392.

³⁸⁷ The Liaison Office, *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan*, 34.

³⁸⁸ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³⁸⁹ Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

as controversial—instance in which the Dutch Army collaborated with tribal militias. This happened in 2007 during the battle of Chora, which countered a large Taliban attack. Van Griensven, TFU-commander at that time, explained: “half of the operation was conducted by Afghans. That has never been put on paper; it is unofficial. But it was done by tribal militias”.³⁹⁰ The Dutch Army coordinated and commanded the operation of both their own forces and Barakzai and Achakzai sub-tribal militias. The military cooperation between the Dutch Army and tribal militias was, as van Harskamp calls it, an ‘occasional coalition’,³⁹¹ a coalition that could exist at that particular moment because the conditions were right and because extensive intelligence on individual tribal leaders and their interests made it possible. Forming a coalition with a tribal militia requires extensive and detailed information about the tribe in question. The Dutch Army did not have high quality and detailed information about every tribe. Not all tribes were suitable for forming alliances, either because of a lack of information or because a specific tribe was—for many possible reasons—considered unfit. Alliances such as the one formed around the battle of Chora emerged in a rather ad hoc fashion.³⁹²

Engaging with tribes in a military way, but also in a soft way, requires extensive thought and consideration. It is crucial that armies also consider the consequences for tribes who cooperate with coalition partners. In Al-Anbar, Iraqi tribes worked with the U.S. Army to expel AQI from the province in 2006. The U.S. Army was insufficiently prepared for the consequences of this collaboration for local tribes. In lack of sufficient protection, many local tribal leaders were killed by AQI as soon as the group returned a few years later.³⁹³ In later years, the U.S. Army had troubles building cooperative relations with local tribes, as the previous lack of security destroyed the trust between the U.S. Army and local tribes.³⁹⁴ Only when the U.S. Army offered active protection were tribal leaders willing to cooperate again. Kitzen argues that the same happened to tribal leaders and other local partners that helped the Dutch Army in Iraq and Afghanistan.³⁹⁵

The Dutch Army primarily looked at the short-term post facto consequences for tribes who helped them. For example, the consequences of the losses suffered by families and tribes were compensated. Local ethical codes prescribed that families and tribes get paid, as a reward for their efforts and to compensate their losses. Right after the battle of Chora, TFU commander van Griensven went to see relatives of the tribesmen that helped the Dutch Army and had lost their lives. He visited the tribes and families together with the local governor:

“It was important that the local governor went to the families and tribes that suffered losses. But he neglected his duty, as he did in the past. For us it was important to empower the governor; making him important again. We pushed him to go to the families. He told us that it was a tradition to offer the families

³⁹⁰ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³⁹¹ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

³⁹² Interview #4, July 24, 2019; Interview #5, July 5, 2019; Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

³⁹³ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

³⁹⁴ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”.

³⁹⁵ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

and tribes something. But he had nothing. We organized him a bag of money and went with him. He sat there, speaking to his people. And he could generously hand out some money”.³⁹⁶

Hence, together with compensating immediate consequences, the Dutch Army also tried to incorporate some long-term stabilizing measures. Empowering the local governor contributed to the stability of the region. The Barakzai and Achakzai sub-tribes that worked with the Dutch Army during the Battle of Chora, were rewarded with several benefits, such as developmental projects and official governmental positions. The appointment of one of the Barakzai commanders as chief of the Chora district, contributed to the long-term stability of the district, and of the Dutch mission.³⁹⁷ In this specific case, the Dutch Army benefitted from the decision to militarily cooperate with tribes. Even though the Dutch Army generally omitted to provide ‘aftercare’ and protection for tribes who had cooperated with them, some tribes also greatly benefitted from their cooperation and became more powerful after. The possible benefits of cooperating with the Dutch Army could sometimes serve as a perverse incentive and created situation in which tribes tried to manipulate and misinform the Dutch Army. ‘Engaging with’ tribes is a two-way street. Where international military partners used tribal structures to their own benefit and the benefit of the mission, tribes also used their cooperation and contact with military partners to their own benefit.

5.3 Engaging with: the other way around

Not only tribal leader cooperate with international military organizations to gain power. In Iraq and Afghanistan—but also in Somalia, Mali, Libya, and Liberia, for example—other inventive individuals and local entrepreneurs have cooperated with international coalition partners and supported peace-building initiatives, to extend their power.³⁹⁸ Clients instrumentalizing patrons—where the asymmetric relation between patron and a client is turned around—is common in neopatrimonialism systems where seemingly modern and democratic political systems are paralleled by stronger, non-official ways to govern. Based on “long traditions of decentralized, collective/communal decision-making” these power structures often are decisive local politics.³⁹⁹ Theros and Kaldor argue that the international community has failed to consider how neopatrimonial power relations influence authority and politics.⁴⁰⁰

In the first years of the U.S. led campaign in Afghanistan, U.S. forces struggled with the consequences and side-effects of cooperating with local power holders. Martin argues that “individual actors were able to capitalise on U.S. ignorance of local politics”.⁴⁰¹ Between 2004 and 2008 many tribal elders had found a way to abuse the process set up to claim for damage caused by ISAF to make large amounts of money. ISAF’s ignorance of Afghan society and local economy resulted in a rising corruption, from which

³⁹⁶ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

³⁹⁷ Kitzen, “Close Encounters”, 725-726.

³⁹⁸ R. Malejacq, *Warlord Survival: The Delusion of State Building in Afghanistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

³⁹⁹ S. Schmeidl, “The Contradictions of Democracy in Afghanistan: elites, elections and ‘people’s rule’ post-2001”, *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 6 (2016): 576.

⁴⁰⁰ M. Theros & M. Kaldor, “The Logics of Public Authority: Understanding Power, Politics and Security in Afghanistan, 2002-2014”, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 7, no. 1 (2018).

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

many tribal elders benefitted.⁴⁰² Also, among the population, the idea rose that powerholders who cooperated with the U.S. enjoyed impunity. These individuals personally benefitted from developmental projects and were able to extract money from these projects for personal use. Also, some families and tribes were able to greatly extend their power base.

Another important consequence of the Americans' limited understanding of the local social and political context were false reports that powerholders offered to U.S. forces to target their enemies.⁴⁰³ Tribal leaders or tribes who had issues with rival or neighbouring tribes tried to frame them as pro-Taliban, pro-AQI or pro-insurgency.⁴⁰⁴ U.S. forces were being played on a large scale and got involved in the power struggles and political games of local tribal leaders and warlords. Other coalition forces felt at the mercy of tribal leaders and political entrepreneurs as well. False reporting was also a problem for the Dutch Army in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Intelligence officers and HTAs were confronted with false information on a regular basis. The JISARC analyst—who has served as HTA in Afghanistan—that I interviewed, referred to it as “a daily play of cat and mouse in which we tried to influence each other”.⁴⁰⁵ The HUMINT process is especially subject to false reporting. People who were willing to speak with HTAs had their own, personal reasons. The former HTA stated: “Only few people talked with us for altruistic reasons”.⁴⁰⁶ False reporting was a useful mechanism for local leaders or individuals to benefit and boost their own interests. Hence, tribes dragged Dutch forces into their own private conflicts. Sometimes people provided misinformation about fellow tribespeople or even their commander:

“Local tribal leaders of militia commander were rarely willing to talk to us. However, deputy commanders were sometime eager to speak with us. Just to boost their own position. They came with stories about their superior, hoping that we would eliminate the commander”.⁴⁰⁷

False reporting is partially the result of the perverse system created by the international military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. With each new coalition partner, people saw new opportunities to maximize their interests.⁴⁰⁸ For example, when people could not get what they want from the Dutch Army, they went to U.S. military post and hoped to maximize their interests there.⁴⁰⁹ The Dutch Army underestimated the strategical capacities of tribes and forgot that tribes, in essence, are good at setting long term goals that focus on the future, safety, and continued existence of the tribe.⁴¹⁰ As Martin argued in the context of the U.S. Army, the vulnerability to misinformation and manipulation was the result of a lack of knowledge. Because of this lack of knowledge, the outside military intervention and its large-scale aid

⁴⁰² Martin, *An Intimate War*.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview #1, May 24, 2019; Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

⁴⁰⁵ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview #5, July 5, 2019.

⁴¹⁰ Interview #2, July 4, 2019.

provision “contributed to, and exacerbated, abusive neopatrimonial power relations”.⁴¹¹ Coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan often looked at the local political practices and social structures from their own, western point of view. And although the Dutch Army developed extensive knowledge of local social structures and tribes, their ability to truly *understand* these structures was limited. Hence, ‘having knowledge of tribes’ is structurally and fundamentally different from ‘understanding tribes’. I turn to the lack of understanding in the next chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the Dutch Army engaged with tribes through both soft and hard COIN. Soft COIN is less violent or non-kinetic and aims at building and maintaining good relations with tribes and their leaders. The Dutch Army engaged with tribes through soft COIN by ‘interaction’ and ‘financial, material, and diplomatic support’. The Dutch Army built stable relations with tribal leaders and from here on steered towards cooperation. Tribal leaders were rewarded for keeping their area safe, hereby benefitting personally from cooperating with the Dutch Army. The Dutch Army also offered tribes diplomatic and financial support, providing tribal leaders with funds, material, or political advice. In trying to create a safer and more stable tribal balance, the Dutch Army creating incentives for cooperation and favoured cooperating tribes over less cooperative tribes.

The Dutch Army engaged with tribes through hard COIN. Hard COIN, which entails the use of force or kinetic action, was used less frequently than soft COIN. At least there is limited information on how and when the Dutch Army used hard COIN strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The best example of military collaboration is the Battle of Chora. Hard COIN requires extensive insight on and understanding of the local tribal structures. True understanding specifically was limited within the Dutch Army. Tribes also manipulated and exploited the Dutch Army and other international military coalition partners—for example, through false reporting. The vulnerability to misinformation and manipulation by tribal leaders was—again—a result of a limited understanding of tribal structures.

In Iraq, engaging with tribes through both soft and hard COIN more experimental and less bounded by mandates. However, in Iraq, efforts to engage with tribes were not instigated by the Dutch Army’s extensive knowledge of tribal structures. In Afghanistan, the Dutch Army’s engagement with tribes were backed by thorough knowledge and better institutionalized in the mission—and therefore were more successful. Still, the Dutch Army’s engagement with tribal structures was often based on ad-hoc decisions and long-term effects were limited.

⁴¹¹ Theros & Kaldor, “The Logics of Public Authority”.

Chapter 6 Evaluating the Dutch Army's knowledge of and engagement with local social structures and tribes

The Dutch SFIR and ISAF missions in Iraq and Afghanistan ended in respectively 2005 and 2010. Now, almost 15 and 10 years later, the first Dutch missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are still very relevant to look at. Within new international missions, the Dutch Army still operates in both countries. In Iraq, they are part of an international anti-ISIS coalition and train Iraqi and Kurdish troops. In Afghanistan, the Dutch Army helps rebuild the Afghan security services, the police and the army. Current missions in both countries run until 2021.⁴¹² Although developing theoretical and practical knowledge on and engaging with tribes and local powerholder is less important in the current Dutch operations in Iraq and Afghanistan than it was during the SFIR and ISAF missions, lessons from previous missions in both countries are valuable for future operations—not only within the context of Iraq or Afghanistan, but also for operations in other non-western, traditional, or tribal societies.

In the last 10 to 15 years, research has brought new insights on engagement with the local actors. With today's knowledge, several researchers and commander now critically reflect on the Dutch Army's level of knowledge about the local context at the time of the SFIR and ISAF missions. How detailed and extensive was the Dutch knowledge of local tribes and their leaders? How well did the Dutch Army understand the influence of political entrepreneurs? Did the Dutch Army have a thorough understanding of the sociocultural environment in which they operated? In the first section of this chapter, I argue that the Dutch Army developed knowledge about the local social context, but lacked true understanding. This distinction between knowledge and understanding is crucial in modern day COIN, especially when engaging with tribes through soft COIN.⁴¹³ Thereafter, I explain the reasons behind the Dutch Army's lack of understanding. In the last section, I touch upon recent developments around the concept of understanding and how the Dutch Army now focusses on the local context in preparation for future missions.

6.1 From knowledge to understanding

Several of the people I interviewed for this research pointed at the complexity of social structures and the local political landscape in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Through intelligence, PRTs, and outside experts the Dutch Army tried to develop knowledge of the local context. But having knowledge of the local context is different from understanding it. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the Dutch Army mainly focussed on knowledge. They all too often forgot to, as a Dutch saying goes, look past the tip of their nose. Western perceptions and presumptions remained leading in the process of developing knowledge. Therefore, the Dutch sometimes hit a barrier, a barrier separating knowledge from understanding.

⁴¹² Ministerie van Defensie, "Missie in Irak", accessed on November 21, 2019, <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/missie-in-irak-en-oost-syrie>; Ministerie van Defensie, "Missie in Afghanistan", accessed on November 21, 2019, <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/missie-in-afghanistan>

⁴¹³ Joseph, "Soft" Counterinsurgency, 38.

Joseph explains the distinction between ‘cultural awareness’ and ‘cultural intelligence’. He points out that cultural intelligence reaches a deeper layer, one that not only describes the elements that one sees but also provides a deeper appreciation of society. His explanation of the two different ways of seeing the local terrain reflects exactly the difference between knowledge and understanding:

“Cultural awareness describes features of the local society and provides knowledge that can be useful for soldiers to move through a population without causing undue friction. Many soldiers and their officers did not possess this basic ‘map’ of the ‘human terrain.’ Cultural intelligence reflects a deeper appreciation of how that society works, its continuities, fault lines, motivations, traditions, and the possibilities for change. It implies a more proactive stance that anticipates the synergy between one’s own actions and the dynamics of the larger society”.⁴¹⁴

Joseph concludes that the Human Terrain System (HTS) was unable to “provide cultural intelligence and communicate it to military commanders”.⁴¹⁵ Although Joseph writes of the U.S. Army, similar conclusions can be made about the Dutch Army’s understanding of the local context.⁴¹⁶

The lack of a realistic and structural understanding of the social and political landscape is best illustrated by the story of how the Dutch Army handled the situation around Jan Mohammed Khan (JMK), an important local powerholder and warlord in Uruzgan. He was the former provincial governor of the province, a close friend of the Karzai family, and a helpful ally of U.S. forces, who he long manipulated. The Dutch diplomats who came to Uruzgan with the inventory teams prior to the start of the mission concluded that JMK had blood on his hands. Since the Dutch government did not want to be associated or cooperate with him, they demanded his removal as governor of Uruzgan. This happened in only short before the official start of the mission. The same situation took place in Helmand, where the Dutch demanded the removal of Sher Mohammed Akhunzada. Both he and JMK were sent to Kabul and appointed to government positions.⁴¹⁷

At first glance, it appears that the Dutch Army had a thorough understanding of the local context in Uruzgan. They refused to cooperate with a warlord and freed repressed tribes of his leadership. But this is deceptive. In later stages of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan, the consequences of the removal of JMK surfaced. Many high placed officers within the Dutch Army and civilian experts who worked in Uruzgan pointed at the mistakes made around JMK’s removal. In Uruzgan, many of JMK’s rivals tried to exploit the power vacuum that emerged. Also, JMK remained highly influential in the province and the majority of the population still supported him. Van Harskamp argues that the Dutch Army pushed JMK into the underworld, which was very inconvenient: “when we would have done nothing, JMK would be a normal

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Interview #1, May 24, 2019; Interview #2, July 4, 2019; Interview #3, June 11, 2019; Interview #4, July 24, 2019; Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

⁴¹⁷ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option”; Interview #5, July 5, 2019; Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

discussion partner. We could have tried to point him at his responsibilities. Or try to influence and manipulate him”. With his removal, the Dutch Army lost its grip on JMK, although he still—unofficially and locally—controlled Uruzgan’s society.⁴¹⁸

Kitzen, who also wrote on the situation around JMK’s removal, speaks of a “hiatus in knowledge”.⁴¹⁹ The Dutch government and Ministry of Defence did not fully take into account the complexity of Uruzgan’s society. Intelligence and information that led to the decision of removing JMK were superficial and not as detailed as needed. The Dutch Army’s limitations were later acknowledged by the Dutch government.⁴²⁰ Kitzen argues that the Dutch Army had a poor understanding of the local context, in particular during the first TFU rotation. Later, the appointment of TRIBADs and CULTADS enhanced the understanding of the “conflict ecosystem in Uruzgan as multi-faceted and consisting of multiple layers”.⁴²¹

The limited understanding resulted in unexplored possibilities to engage with tribes. In theory, playing two different tribes against one another is an effective way of engaging with tribes and can benefit the mission. But, because of the Dutch Army’s limited understanding, it was hardly considered.⁴²² Due to the limited understanding of the local context, the Dutch Army only temporarily managed to influence the tribal balance. Long-term changes were not made.⁴²³ Decisions to engage with tribes through hard COIN were made ad hoc. If the Dutch-Army had a better understanding of tribal structures, they would have had the opportunity to engage with tribes in a structural and more effective way.⁴²⁴

Kitzen also reflects upon this limited understanding and its consequences for engaging with tribes. The Dutch Army has barely explored the possibilities for engaging with tribes, mainly focusing on engaging with tribes through soft COIN—the safest option for engagement. Capabilities for engaging with tribes through hard COIN were “weakly developed”.⁴²⁵ Kitzen argues that the Dutch Army’s refusal to engage with tribes through hard COIN has been devastating for the long-term stability of Uruzgan:

“The combination of a hampering mechanism for co-option domination with the Dutch refusal to engage in co-optive relationships with Uruzgan’s dominant local powerholders—as opposed to the general trend—ultimately proved disastrous for the establishment of an inclusive local administration that could serve as a platform for long-term stability. Yet, it should be noted that TFU at least temporarily succeeded in restoring the tribal balance in the province and connecting this new political order to a more or less independent

⁴¹⁸ Interview #4, July 24, 2019.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 380.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option, 500.

⁴²² Interview #2, July 4, 2019.

⁴²³ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

⁴²⁴ Interview #1, May 24, 2019; Interview #2, July 4, 2019; Interview #3, June 11, 2019; Interview #5, July 5, 2019; Interview #6, July 8, 2019.

⁴²⁵ Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option, 512.

government under Governor Hamdam by use of the above mentioned co-optive methods that are typical of modern counterinsurgency warfare”.⁴²⁶

6.2 Hiatuses in making the transition from knowledge to understanding

There are numerous reasons behind the Dutch Army’s lack of understanding the local context. Most of these hiatuses have been relevant during the SFIR and ISAF missions and still are today. Some are specific to the Dutch Army—for instance, the way the Dutch Army structured and organized, or how rotations were assigned and commanded. Missions in complex environment marked by unfamiliar social and power structures ask for specific military methods. The way the Dutch Army designed the SFIR and ISAF deployments and its rotations affected the ability to develop knowledge and understanding of the local context. For example, Dutch individual deployments were short, especially compared to other countries. As Dutch military personnel were often deployed for three to four months, it was nearly impossible to get a good understanding of the local context. Although every deployed individual was able to further build upon previously gained knowledge, three to four months was too short to look past first impressions of a new, unfamiliar environment. People who had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan before needed less time to adjust. Iraqi and Afghan culture are unknown to westerners; understanding all the sensitivities and delicate local balances takes years.⁴²⁷ This is time that no single person in the military has. Therefore, understanding the local context remained limited.

During missions, the Dutch Military systems rotated their task force commanders every six months. These commanders were not selected based on individual competencies or personalities. Often, commanders were selected because they were in the right phase of their careers. When in the same rank for several years, military officers have to fulfil certain tasks, posts, or education to be promoted to a higher rank. A deployment as task force commander often is part of the career path that officers have to take to get to a higher rank. One of the consequences of this way of selecting task force commanders is that personality, capability, and interest in the local context highly differ with each individual commander. Some SFIR and ISAF commanders were more open towards engagement with local tribes or local leaders than others. Some were more aimed on gaining knowledge of the local context than others, whether because of individual interests, preferences, or capabilities.⁴²⁸ A commander’s focus and interests define the approach of the whole task force, including the HTAs and PRT. To a large extent, the commander is either open to the information provided by HTAs and the PRT, or he sees limited value in the information and goes his own way. Ideally, the Dutch Army would, as van Harskamp argues, select its task force commander based on their individual knowledge, mindset, and capabilities to get to know and understand the local context.⁴²⁹

Another reason behind the Dutch Army’s lack of knowledge—and what struck me in the process of this thesis—is that the Dutch Army is quite reluctant to share information, even internally. KCT—the

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Interview #3, June 11, 2019.

⁴²⁸ Interview #4, July 24, 2019

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

Dutch Army's special land forces—, PSYOPS, the PRT, JISARC, and the MIVD all gather intelligence. While combining all information—from extremely specific to general information—would have significantly contributed to a better and wider knowledge and understanding of the local context, inter-departmental information or intelligence remained limited. KCT, for example, assemble very detailed intelligence products. As they mostly run small, local operations, their intelligence is extremely detailed. This information can be of great value to PRTs, PSYOPS or other intelligence units.⁴³⁰ Within the Dutch Army in general there is a tendency to keep information and intelligence seclusive. Operational security can be a reason not to share information. But all too often, different units or departments do not cooperate and do not know what valuable information other units hold. The Dutch military's organisational structure and culture are closed and this hampers the spread of information. Hence, sharing information and intelligence is not integrated in the organisation. Combining all information—from extremely specific to general information—significantly contributes to a better and wider knowledge and understanding of the local context.⁴³¹

Many international military partners face similar problems.⁴³² Even within the context of international missions, coalition partners are reluctant in sharing information with each other.⁴³³ Information sharing between coalition partners rarely happened during the SFIR and ISAF missions. A multinational intelligence unit was first created in 2014, during the United Nations (UN) mission in Mali. This 'all-source information fusion unit' (ASIFU) combined intelligence of all northern European countries and Canada.⁴³⁴ Because it focussed extensively on how different groups within the population interacted, ASIFU has significantly contribute to knowledge of the local context in Mali.⁴³⁵

A structural and almost inevitable reason behind the Dutch Army's lack of understanding local social structures was their western bias. For many years, western coalition partners tried to transfer their own norms and values, enforcing a political blueprint on a society that is different from our own. After two years in Iraq and four years in Afghanistan, the Dutch Army reached their peak of knowledge. Anonymous JISTARC analysts summarized the Dutch Army's level of knowledge at the end of the four-year deployment: "Because of all the knowledge we developed we understood the local context, as far as that we knew that we would never be able to understand it".⁴³⁶ The Dutch Army had a well-functioning intelligence system. However, information was often collected and analysed based on western or Dutch perspectives and perceptions. Military personell often deemed information as useless, while in the context of the mission it was actually very relevant. Also, military personnel often asked the wrong questions. Questions that were coloured by etic perspective.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁰ Interview #2, July 4, 2019.

⁴³¹ Interview #9, August 28, 2019.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Interview #1, May 24, 2019; Interview #2, July 4, 2019.

⁴³⁶ Interview #1, May 24, 2019.

⁴³⁷ Interview #2, July 4, 2019. Etic and emic refer to viewpoints obtained in research. "An etic view is from the perspective on an outsider looking in. The etic perspective is data gathered by outsiders that yield questions

During the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, COIN developed from a strategy in its infancy to a more mature military doctrine. Intelligence collection changed and HUMINT became increasingly important. However, HUMINT required a different approach than other forms of intelligence. Human bias does not have such influence on the quality and usefulness of the information collected through other forms of intelligence. Even though the new COIN doctrine *FM 3-24* focused extensively on the local social context, it also had its flaws. Kitzen argues that the document is indeed a very useful population-centric counterinsurgency guide, but that it is problematic to use in a tribal society. The manual is centred around western concepts of how society and politics should be structured.⁴³⁸ Groups or networks, for example, are described as fixed entities with well-defined and shared goals.⁴³⁹ These characteristics do not match tribal groups as identified in chapter 2 and 3. Therefore, even if COIN as set out in *FM 3-24* was closely followed, knowledge of the local context was still biased and understanding limited.

6.3 A new focus

“The Dutch Army is a non-learning organization”.⁴⁴⁰ Lessons learned are often poorly interpreted. Recommendations are rarely implemented and, if implemented, they are only instrumental. The ability to learn and change is often instigated by individuals.⁴⁴¹ In the course of this research, I spoke to some of these individuals. For instance, the commander of the Civil-Military Interaction Command (CMICO) and a KCT staff officer ‘understand and influence’. KCT has been a frontrunner in better developing theoretical and practical knowledge on and engaging with the local actors. Together with CMICO and KCT, the Dutch Army is on its way to develop and implement a new focus on how to better understand the local context.

KCT runs small, highly local operations and depend—more than any other military department—on understanding the local context in which they operate. Because of the size of KCT operations, new insights and methods can be implemented relatively fast. In recent years, KCT has been experimenting with the implementation of new methods to understand the local context. In 2017, a Dutch KCT research team spent four months in Iraq. In their case study, KCT staff officers looked at the awareness of the local context among coalition partners during the ISAF mission. They concluded that the awareness of the local context required extensive nuances. In 2017, KCT collected information locally, going into villages and asking questions or interviewing residents—in sharp contrast with the intelligence officers who collected information in the same area during the ISAF mission, who rarely went into villages and asked questions

posed by outsiders. An emic view is ultimately a perspective focus on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society, often considered to be an ‘insider’s’ perspective. While this perspective stems from the concept of immersion in a specific culture, the emic participant isn’t always a member of that culture or society”.

“Two views on culture: etic & emic”, Lumen, Cultural Anthropology, accessed on January 7, 2019, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/culturalanthropology/chapter/two-views-of-culture-etic-emic/>

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁴³⁹ Department of the Army, *FM 3-24*.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview #9, August 28, 2019.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

biased by their own western perspectives.⁴⁴² By asking questions that were tailored to the local context, KCT officers were able to create a better and more detailed picture of the local context.

This approach requires military personnel that is capable of looking past their own boundaries and biases. KCT therefor trained its personnel in Target Audience Analysis and Behaviour Dynamics Methodology (BDM), designed to understand deep-rooted group behaviour. Through such methods, military personnel is not only able to better understand a foreign culture, but also to better reflect on their own etic perspective. In collecting information, the clue is to not just look for potential valuable information, but also for information that is deemed unavailable in the first place, when looking at it from one's own etic perspective. From there on, intelligence units try to understand information and analyse it in the right, local perspective.

KCT mainly focusses on better understanding the local context during operations by looking at intelligence from a less biased perspective. Over the last two years, the CMICO has transformed into a department that not only delivers CIMIC and PSYOPS personnel, but also looks at pre-mission knowledge and understanding of the local context. When a social, or political situation anywhere in the world draws the attention of the Dutch Army, CMICO needs to be able to provide a report that aims at the understanding of that specific situation or area. The 'behavioural research cell' and the section 'cultural affairs and information' will conduct a qualitative analysis, based on anthropological science (and as free of western assumptions as possible). The report needs to provide advice on how the Dutch Army should respond to specific situations, based not on military strategical thinking and western views but on social science and realities on the ground.⁴⁴³ KCT and CMICO are frontrunners in the Dutch Army's new focus on the cognitive domain and emic perspectives. From here on this new approach will make the Dutch Army better capable of analysing, understanding and influencing local actors.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Tribes and their involvement in military operations are often exemplified by the Iraqi Al-Anbar Awakening and the U.S. army's efforts to engage with these tribes. However, both tribalism and military efforts to engage with tribes are not unique to Iraq, nor to the U.S. Army. During their SFIR and ISAF missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Dutch Army encountered a local context that was unlike their own, a local context in which tribal structures were—and still are—an important factor. To contribute to a safer and more stable Iraq and Afghanistan, the Dutch Army had to work closely with local tribes. In this thesis, I aimed to understand and explain *how the Royal Netherlands Army has developed theoretical and practical knowledge on and engaged with tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan*.

7.1 Research findings

The central question of this thesis is twofold: zeroing in on how the Dutch Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures and focussing on how the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures. Therefore, I develop two sets of findings. First, I focus on the structural concept of a tribe and on its social, political, and violent action. Both in general and in the context of the Dutch missions in the Iraqi province of Al-Muthanna and the Afghan province of Uruzgan. Thereafter, I analyse how the Dutch Army perceived and understood tribal structures; how the Dutch Army developed theoretical and practical knowledge on tribal structures. Hence, connecting the level of knowledge and understanding of tribal structures to the structural concept of a tribe and its social, political, and violent action.

7.1.1 Theoretical and practical knowledge

As the Al-Anbar Awakening of 2006 showed, tribes are more than simple, traditional modes of organization. They are complex social structures that come in many forms and with different organizing principles, norms, values, and codes. In the context of military operations, mere anthropological or sociological concepts are not satisfying; they need to be translated into action and practice. My approach to tribes is not a mere abstract one. It is connected to tribal realities on the ground. The twofold definition and its connection to action allows us to look at tribes from a non-normative point of view and leave room for nuance, context, and flexibility. This approach can be instrumental for looking at tribes in the context of military operations. By connecting tribal realities on the ground to theoretical concepts that explain tribes as acting social and political units, the Dutch Army could have created understanding and develop strategies of tribal engagement. However, the Dutch Army perceived and tried to develop knowledge of tribes differently, looking at tribes from their own, western point of view, which did not result in an optimal level of knowledge about tribal structures—in particular during the first months of the operation in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan.

The Dutch Army had limited knowledge of tribal structures during their SFIR deployment in Al-Muthanna and relatively thorough knowledge of local tribal structures during their ISAF deployment in Uruzgan, developed through intelligence, PRTs and outside experts. The limited knowledge during the SFIR mission can be explained by issues with (or complete absence of) some of the three ways through which the Dutch Army developed knowledge. At the start of the missions in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan, the Dutch

Army was dependent on the information provided by coalition partners who had already been active in the provinces. At the start of the SFIR mission, the Dutch Army received little information of coalition partners. Therefore, information on tribes was limited and the Dutch lacked intelligence on tribal structures. During later stages of the Dutch SFIR mission, the Dutch Army developed more knowledge on tribal structures through intelligence. However, the stability and continuity of knowledge about tribal structures was sometimes hindered by SFIR commander's individual interests in and capabilities to understand the importance of tribes. The absence of PRTs, TRIBADs, and the limited capacities of the only two POLADs hampered the Dutch development of knowledge about tribal structures.

In Uruzgan, the Dutch Army had access to rather extensive intelligence on tribal structures at the start of the ISAF mission. Also, PRTs were deployed from the immediate start of the Dutch ISAF mission and contributed to the development of knowledge about tribal structures significantly. PRTs had a micro level perspective, a certain cultural sensitivity, and were able to incorporate their perspective within TFU staff. Outside experts—through the TLO report—also contributed to the Dutch knowledge of tribal structures in Afghanistan, which was further enhanced by the employment of TRIBADs and POLADs.

It is impossible to develop a standard to measure the Dutch Army's level of knowledge of tribal structures. However, my findings show that the Dutch Army's knowledge of tribal structures had its limitations. As argued above, these limitations can be connected to the absence of PRTs and outside experts in Iraq and the overall problems and inefficiencies of these two elements. The Dutch Army's limited knowledge of tribal structures can also be explained by its western bias and failure to use the right framework to identify tribes and understand tribal action. In Afghanistan, the knowledge of tribes was deepened by more objective and nuanced information provided by TRIBADs and the civil assessment. Intelligence and the use of PRTs also contributed to the development of knowledge. However, contrary to the information provided through outside experience—such as advisors and the civil assessment—intelligence and PRTs boosted the development of knowledge instead of developing understanding. Where outside experts were specialists on Afghan society and part of the Afghan based organization TLO, PRT personnel was more prone to western bias. Also, the Dutch deployment of PRTs was still at its infancy.

The Dutch Army mainly looked at tribes from a western point of view, using western ideas of social groups in trying to grasp what they encountered, hereby hampering true understanding. In Iraq, the Dutch Army was confronted with the complexity of tribal structures for the first time. Without proper pre-mission information about tribal structures, the Dutch Army developed knowledge through what they encountered and experienced on the ground. Their understanding was based on these first encounters and lacked a framework of analysis, nuances, context, and an emic perspective, and hence remained limited.

7.1.2 Engagement and its effects

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the Dutch Army engaged with local tribes through both soft and hard COIN. Soft COIN aimed at building and maintaining relations with tribes and their leaders and created incentives for cooperation. It has been extensively practiced by the Dutch Army. Hard COIN centres around on the use of force, PSYOPS, and military collaboration. The Dutch Army has been rather reluctant to hard COIN in

Iraq and Afghanistan, as the overall tendency was to try to collaborate with tribal leaders. However, when engaging with tribes through soft COIN was insufficient, the Dutch Army engaged with tribes through PSYOPS and military collaboration.

In Iraq, knowledge of tribal structures was limited during the SFIR mission. But the possibilities to engage with tribes were rather open and unrestricted: standards on how to engage with tribes were not set in doctrine and were experimental in character. Although the Dutch government was reluctant in providing enough funding to soft COIN, the Dutch Army was able to successfully offer financial, material, and diplomatic support to local tribes. Several SFIR commanders have achieved positive short-term results through both soft and hard COIN, although these results were often concentrated locally.

During the ISAF mission, the Dutch Army had relatively thorough knowledge on tribal structures. In these conditions, the Dutch Army engaged effectively with tribes through soft COIN. Doctrinal documents, Dutch politics, and mission goals supported their extensive attempts to interact with tribes and to financially, materially and diplomatically support them. Overall, engaging with tribes through soft COIN was well institutionalized in the ISAF mission, while engaging with tribes through hard COIN was not institutionalized. Not only were attempts to engage with tribes through hard COIN often unofficial, there were also highly local and based on ad-hoc situations and decisions. Where PSYOPS occurred frequent, there is little evidence for the use of force in this research. Regarding military collaboration, the coalition between the tribal armed groups and the Dutch Army during the Battle of Chora was unprecedented and an isolated success—at least for as far as my research shows.

I argue that the effects of the Dutch Army's efforts to develop theoretical and practical knowledge on and engage with tribes through hard and soft COIN were limited. Due to structural and practical problems, the Dutch Army has failed to achieve long term stability in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan. First, the Dutch Army's decisions to engage with tribes were often made ad-hoc. The formed coalition during the Battle of Chora shows exactly this: only when the security situation deteriorated, military cooperation with tribes was considered a possibility. Because of the ad-hoc decisions to form military coalitions with armed tribal groups, tribal structures and the consequences of such collaboration were ill-researched and poorly balanced out.

Second, during the SFIR and the ISAF missions, unanimous or harmonious policy on how to engage with tribes was absent. This resulted in an operational climate where there was room for individual commanders to focus on and pursue their own ideas of how to engage with tribes. The individual interests ranged from relative apathy towards tribal engagement, to effective initiatives of tribal engagement that contributed to the mission.

Third, the Dutch Army has structurally lacked understanding about tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan. The lack of understanding not only hampered intelligence collection but also effected the way the Dutch Army has engaged with tribes in practice. HTAs or PRT members often asked the wrong questions because of the bias within the Dutch Army. Western perceptions were leading and defined the process of intelligence collection. Information about tribes that was deemed invaluable—from a western point of view—was often ignored. The Dutch Army's overall refusal to engage with tribes through hard

COIN was the result of its limited understanding of tribal structures. Their awareness of the possibilities and occasional need for cooperating with tribes in a military way, was limited. Together with the limited knowledge of tribal structures, this lack of engaging with tribes through hard COIN did not contribute to long-term stability.

7.2 Contribution of research

Despite more than fifteen years of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is little scientific research on social structures and tribes in either country. There is even fewer information on the influence of tribes on the conflicts and on whether engaging with tribes has positively contributed to the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this section, I reflect upon how this research contributed to filling these gaps in research. I explain how existing definitions and frameworks can be used to conceptualize and operationalize the term tribe (theoretical contribution), and by providing insight into the use of these concepts within the military (practical contribution).

7.2.1 Theoretical contribution

This research has delved into the term tribe and added a practical and workable dimension to this highly-disputed concept. I have not offered a new concept but instead, based my definitions on Gingrich's and Tilly's work. By combining their definitions of respectively tribes and trust networks, this research offers an approach to the term tribe that includes both an anthropological and a sociological perspective. This research thus contributed to the debates on tribalism. It offered a practical and workable concept for the purpose of military operations that can serve as a tool to help identify and understand tribal structures. However, the concept might have different meanings in different contexts.

This research confirms the widely accepted idea that tribalism is a very diverse and complex concept. The cross-cultural check between tribalism in Iraq and Afghanistan confirms the fact that a one-on-one comparison of two tribal contexts is fraught with problems. Each tribal context has its own specific characteristics. Hence, this research also confirms that anthropological insights are needed in order to develop a true understanding of tribal structures on the ground. In line with Galtung's call for a transdisciplinary approach in peace and conflict studies,⁴⁴⁴ this research combined literature and theory from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, military sciences, and conflict studies to provide a more nuanced, flexible, and emic approach.

This research also contributed to broader research on military operations in changing environments, in which the local actors and powerholders are increasingly important factors to take into account. Within the context of the Dutch Army's engagement with local actors, Kitzen's PhD dissertation stands out. Where Kitzen places co-option with local powerholders in Afghanistan in a historical perspective—as he draws a comparison between Afghanistan and Aceh—this research zeroed in on engagement with tribes, focussing on two phases of the engagement process: the preparatory or initial phase in which the Dutch Army tried

⁴⁴⁴ Galtung, "Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution".

to develop knowledge of tribal structures, and the actual engagement phase. Therefore, this research can provide an explanation for the effectiveness of engagement with tribal structures, offering a glimpse of what the Dutch Army misunderstood and what lessons might be learned for future operations.

7.2.2 Contribution to military practice

The recently published *Afghanistan Papers* showed the gross misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Afghanistan's culture, organizational structure, politics and society among officials within the U.S. Army and the U.S. Ministry of Defence at the time of the ISAF mission. Now, years later, lessons from the international operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been implemented in new strategies and doctrines, including within the Dutch Army. As explained in chapter 6, the Dutch Army is on its way to develop and implement a new focus on how to better understand the local context. As motion is already set in action, the results of this research will not come as a surprise. However, my findings substantiate the need for a new approach and the importance of looking past first assumptions and western perspectives.

Within the CMICO and KCT, this research can contribute to the understanding of the local context, offering a framework on how to look at social structures. Deconstructing tribal structures by using both anthropological and sociological perspectives can serve as an example for military practice and offers a starting point from which researchers within CMICO can build understanding, completed by psychological and behavioural perspectives. This research can also benefit conflict analysis and prevention units within the Dutch Army, who analyse and research instable and (potential) conflict situation worldwide. As tribal structures are interwoven with wider politics, inter-tribal tensions can also affect national political and stability. In turn, tribal mechanism of dispute resolution offer bottom-up opportunities to mitigate potential conflict and contain further instability.

7.3 Recommendations for practice

This research provides several tools for identifying and understanding tribal structures. It also shed light on the limitations of the Dutch Army's ability to understand and engage with local tribes. Based on the main findings, I offer the following recommendations for military practice and the Dutch Army.

First, local social structures should be deconstructed to create a generally applicable framework to identify and understand specific social structures.

Through deconstruction, mere structural concepts are strengthened by practical knowledge. The underlying principles that explain social group behaviour are crucial for its understanding. Practical frameworks make the identification of specific social structures easier and more workable in the context of complex operational environments.

Second, a multidisciplinary approach combining psychological, sociological, historical and military science should be adopted to analyse what tribes can politically and socially produce.

Although proper understanding of the concept of a tribe is important in understanding tribal structures, they still remain abstract concepts. A multidisciplinary analysis provides several different perspectives that are relevant for military strategy. Also, by identifying what action tribes can produce, tribes become more real and definite. This practical approach is pivotal within the context of engaging with tribes on the ground.

Third, information and intelligence sharing between different departments within the Dutch Army should be encouraged.

This would significantly boost the overall understanding of the local context. Information and intelligence sharing that is only based on ‘need to know’ is not desirable in current day complex operations, which require the involvement of scientist and researchers. They too need to have access to unique and valuable information.

Fourth, task force or mission commanders should be selected on the basis of knowledge and willingness to understand and engage with the local actors and powerholders.

A complex local environment not only asks for capable military commanders, but also for commanders who are able to see the importance and opportunities of engaging with the local populations and can convince others of this importance.

Fifth, the military should work more closely with local social and anthropological research organization, experts and politicians, especially in the preparatory phase of a new mission.

Local researchers, experts, or civilians that are born and raised in the county or area of interest are the best possible chance to provide an emic perspective and understanding of the local social context.

7.4 Reflections on research and theory

I identify three main points of reflection: on the concepts, on the research design, and on the physical context in which this research was conducted.

7.4.1 Reflections on concepts

The term ‘tribe’ is the main concept used in this research but also its the most difficult and potentially contested part. The term tribe is centuries old and over time, its meaning and use have changed. The way I approached this term is the context of its use in military operations. My approach I to and explanation of the term is not all-encompassing or definite. Despite efforts to deconstruct the term tribe and to develop the concept for this research, the aporia of ‘tribe’ remains. To some, tribe and tribalism are still colonial categories. The term is easily taken as self-evident. But, most importantly, misrepresentation and oversimplification of socio-political realities cannot be completely eliminated. The use of the term tribe in scientific research remains opaque and the scope of this thesis has not been large enough to clarify all the controversies.

Two second terms that I want to reflect upon are ‘counterinsurgency (COIN)’ and ‘kinetic’. These terms are backed by an extensive body of literature, mostly coming from military disciplines and military

strategical thinking. These are different than the humanities and social science perspectives that I am trained in and from which this thesis departed. Because of my limited scientific knowledge on the military fields and to prevent further complexity, I refrained from deconstruction these military terms, presenting them as if they were simple and universal. I used these terms for the purpose of researching the role of tribes in military operations. However, their meaning and use is subjected to complexity and multiple scientific approaches.

7.4.2 Reflections on research design

This research takes a structuralist/interpretative approach as I aimed at providing an interpretation of tribal structures and an interpretation of how the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures. The research process was practice oriented: aiming at providing knowledge about tribes that can contribute to military operations in tribally organised contexts. To interpret tribal structures and offer practical knowledge, this research was based on two ways to gather information: a secondary analysis and interviews. The secondary analysis combined scientific theory on social structures in general with theoretical and practical information about tribal structures specifically. This way I was able to develop a multi-layered concept of tribes and interpret tribal structures in Iraq and Afghanistan. Together with the data collected through interviews, I was able to analyse how the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures in both countries. However, I identify several limitations in this research design.

First, the secondary analysis requires sufficient information about tribal structures and individual tribes in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I collected an extensive amount of information about tribes and tribal structures in Afghanistan, both in the form of academic literature and military documents. However, information about tribes and tribal structures in Iraq was limited. Specific information on Al-Muthanna was almost completely absent. Some information was classified or non-verifiable, and could therefore not be used. This imbalance in information prevented me from conducting the thorough secondary analysis I initially had in mind.

Second, this research focusses on a subject that lays in the past. Memories from the individuals interviewed are not as vivid anymore, which might have affected the details and correctness of the information. As it has been more than ten years since the SFIR and ISAF missions started, it was sometimes difficult to analyse how developed the Dutch Army's understanding of tribal structures was then. With longer and more recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, interviews might be based upon and coloured by insights about tribes that have only recently been acquired. Also, memories about experiences and deployments in Al-Muthanna and Uruzgan are less vivid now than they were several years ago. I differentiated between current knowledge about tribal structures in Iraq and the 2005-2010 level of knowledge. However, I cannot guarantee that I have completely isolated information on the 2005-2010 level of knowledge from more recently gained knowledge about tribal structures.

Third, for the purpose of this research, I conducted nine interviews. By interviewing a diverse range of people, I tried to strengthen the external validity of this research. However, the number of interviews is limited. With more time, I could have also interviewed PRT members and low-rank soldiers, whose

perspectives are missing. The sample size was limited too. Only a select group of people has engaged with tribes, come outside the military base to build relations with the population, or have been in the position to directly determine how to engage with tribes.

7.4.3 Reflection on research within military context

The subject of this research is positioned at the interplay between classified and non-classified information, which effects the work's internal validity. Some interviewees were very careful in answering specific questions or speaking about their experiences. Others freely spoke during the interviews but later requested me to remove their answers from the transcripts. When interviewees freely spoke—for example, about the use of force—they often argued: 'it was a long time ago, and it is no longer seclusive information'. The fact that this research includes sensitive and sometimes contested topics makes it difficult to gather enough valid information. More than once, I was given information that I could not cite or write down. Also, some information was impossible to verify. Hence, this research mainly includes information that is non-classified, which limits its scope. Much information about this topic remains classified.

7.4.4 Suggestions for further research

First, a recent wave of literature has focused on the organizational structure of armed groups. However, as Malejacq argues: "organizational approaches are less suitable to the study of fragmented, patronage-based societies, where personal relationships and patrimonial networks are often more important than institutional arrangements".⁴⁴⁵ The role of specifically tribalism or kinship within armed groups has not received much attention. Future research into tribalism in conflict could contribute to the broader literature on the organization of armed groups. Hence, a new dimension can be added to the understanding of conflict in societies where tribal structures still play an important role.

Third, tribes can also—as explained in the introduction—contribute to peacemaking processes. Where this research looked at on engagement with tribal structures for the benefit of military operations, the role of tribes in peacemaking has remained absent. Ginty is a notable exception. He worked on traditional and indigenous peacemaking, also in the context of tribal societies, arguing that traditional modes of peacebuilding and dispute resolution can contribute to societal stability.⁴⁴⁶ Within military science, there is a gap in research on this topic—besides focusing on engaging with tribal structures. This research can be extended by also looking at traditional and indigenous peacemaking and the possible role of military organizations in enhancing these processes.

Fourth, the above limitations show that more research on how the Dutch Army engaged with tribal structures is needed. This is partially caused by the lack of non-classified documents on tribal engagement. Also, researchers that do not work for or who have little connections with the Dutch Army only have limited

⁴⁴⁵ R. Malejacq, *Warlord Survival*, 11.

⁴⁴⁶ R.M. Ginty, "Traditional and Indigenous Approaches to Peacemaking". In *Contemporary Peacemaking*, edited by J. Darby & R.M. Ginty (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); R.M. Ginty, "Indigenous Peace-Making versus the Liberal Peace", *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 2 (2008).

possibilities to access relevant data. Researchers that work within the Dutch Army itself are more able to access sensitive, internal data. Although the findings of such research would probably be inaccessible for individuals outside the Dutch Ministry of Defence or the Dutch Army—due to the sensitive and restricted content—its importance is crucial for the Dutch Army’s future operations in tribal societies or environments with social structures unlike their own.

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