



## PhD thesis

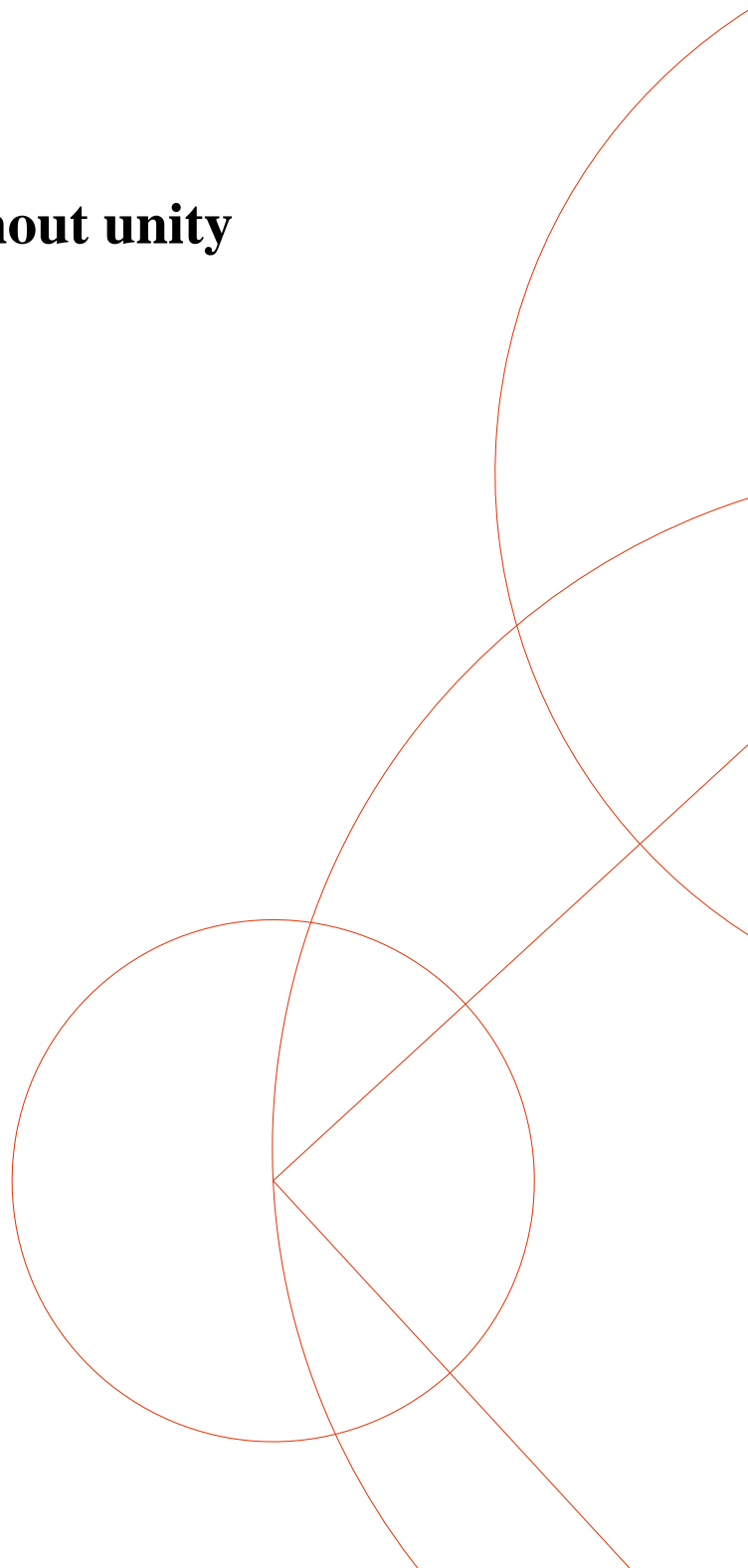
Peter Dahl Thruelsen

# Fighting an insurgency without unity

NATO in Afghanistan, 2006 to 2010

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this PhD project is to investigate some of the reasons for the fragile state of the Afghan mission by examining the role played by the international military forces and the variety of actors with whom they must interact in the search towards a credible end state. The role of the international military forces, their approach to supporting the overall project and their interplay with other actors will be dealt with, with the aim of generating comprehensive conclusions to be learned from the engagement in Afghanistan and beyond.

I have chosen to focus on the international military because of their crucial role for success as an understudied and often less understood aspect of nation-building. While many scholars have studied single aspects of the military contribution, be it peace support, counterinsurgency, security sector reform or the comprehensive approach, only very few have examined all of them and their interaction in the same study. This dissertation rests on the assumption that such a holistic approach is crucial to better understand the military contribution to nation-building in general and in Afghanistan in particular. Therefore, the study will remedy this by analysing four sub-types of the international military engagement – peace support, counterinsurgency, security sector reform and the comprehensive approach – individually but at the same time collectively. This means that the conclusions will only be of value when they are connected to the additional elements of nation-building and not as stand-alone sub-types. In this way, the presented comprehensive research design of this study in itself becomes a valuable contribution for research within the field.

The project has been guided by the following research question:

*How can the strategy and effectiveness of the military contribution to nation-building be enhanced? A study of the international military involvement in nation-building in Afghanistan.*

The project has been carried out using a qualitative research design incorporating five field research trips to Afghanistan. These field studies have covered both the political level at military headquarters and ministries in Kabul, and the tactical level in forward operational bases and combat patrols in the southern parts of the country. The PhD project takes the form of a collection of articles and a framework description covering specific aspects of the role of the international military. The empirical focus of the study has been limited to Afghanistan from summer 2006 to spring 2010, a period that represents the beginning of the NATO-led counterinsurgency efforts in the country through to the emerging takeover of the mission by the US.

The main findings of the study can be summarised as follows:

- The missing narrative:

My findings point to a situation in which there is no common framework for the engagement: conflict and post-conflict instruments are being implemented but not synchronized. A unanimous narrative – one that frames the overall perceptions of the environment and the local collective idea of the Afghan state – is crucial if the strategy is not to escape reality. Optimally the narrative should frame both the long-term mission goal of nation-building and the short-term context of insurgency, bridging the two and thus bringing the political ambitions of the project together.

- The missing counterpart:

Through the analysis of the four sub-types, one overall deviated effect of the missing strategic narrative takes the form of the missing counterpart that is needed to balance

and prolong the durability of the reach of the mission. A counterpart is needed, working at all levels that can suspend or pause the planned development and relate this to the objectives of the overall nation-building programme.

- Bridging the gap:

In taking the conclusions to a higher level beyond the empirical confines of this study, I suggest that there is a need for an element that has the strength to counterbalance the military engagement. Obviously, in the context of this study, the external military will be the most highly resourced and manned actor in theatre, but having overall objectives of the engagement that reach far beyond the military focus on bringing stability, a counterbalancing actor has to be in place to ensure that the initial military objectives are merged with the long-term nation-building ones. Without this counterbalancing actor, the prospects of long-term sustainability are at great risk of being undermined by short-term, military-defined end states. Thus, to bridge the gap between the military and civilian components and their goals, the 'military machine' should be balanced by an equally influential counterpart.

- The limited operational reach of an alliance:

It would be going too far for this study to offer full conclusions on whether NATO's mission in Afghanistan is a bridge too far. However, what this study can do is to offer conclusions on NATO's conduct of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. In this respect the mission cannot be characterised as a bridge too far in terms of geography, but I would argue that it has proved to be a bridge too far in terms of campaign theme (i.e. counterinsurgency). Of course NATO might not be willing to accept this development, but being in deep in a mission that lacks the glue to unify all the actors involved, a logical limitation or adaptation would be a retreat to types of operation on which the 'NATO family' can more easily find a broad political consensus, such as peace support, peacetime military engagement or anti-piracy. When the more extreme scenarios of counterinsurgency operations need to be conducted, NATO can provide the overall and much coveted legitimacy and strategic

guidance to a mission led by one or several strong states supported by a case-specific coalition of the willing. Following this reasoning, Afghanistan does not represent the limit of NATO's out-of-area but a limit regarding what to do out of area.

## **Resumé (in Danish)**

Formålet med dette ph.d.-projekt er at undersøge nogle af de mulige forklaringer på den meget skrøbelige udvikling af missionen i Afghanistan. Dette gøres ved at undersøge den rolle, som det internationale militær spiller og ved at undersøge deres interaktion med det store antal aktører, som det internationale militær skal samarbejde med for at opnå et bæredygtigt mål for missionen. For at dette studie kan udlede dybdegående konklusioner, vil det internationale militærs rolle samt dets tilgang og støtte til det overordnede nationsbygningsprojekt i Afghanistan blive undersøgt.

Jeg har valgt at fokusere på det internationale militære engagement som et led i nationsbygning, fordi den militære rolle heri ofte er misforstået, og fordi der i høj grad mangler forskning inden for området. Mange forskere har undersøgt enkelte elementer af de militære bidrag til nationsbygning – fx fredsstøttende operationer, oprørsbekæmpelse, sikkerhedssektorreformer eller samtænkning – men det er kun få, der har studeret alle disse bidrag samlet inden for samme projekt. Denne afhandling tager udgangspunkt i, at en samlet undersøgelse af alle elementerne er nødvendig for, at der kan udledes samlede og anvendelige konklusioner, der ikke i sidste ende vil underminere hinanden. Derfor bygger dette studie på et metodedesign, der samler alle elementerne, så der både kan genereres konklusioner individuelt inden for de fire elementer, men samtidigt også kollektivt på tværs af disse. Dette øger anvendeligheden af konklusionerne, og studiets metodedesign er derved et vigtigt bidrag i sig selv.

Projektet er ledt af følgende forskningsspørgsmål:

*How can the strategy and effectiveness of the military contribution to nation-building be enhanced? A study of the international military involvement in nation-building in Afghanistan.*

Projektet er blevet gennemført ved at anvende et kvalitativt forskningsdesign, der inkluderer fem feltforskningsbesøg til Afghanistan. Under disse besøg er både det politiske niveau i Kabul og det taktiske niveau ude i landet blevet afdækket. I Kabul er det militære hovedkvarter for de internationale styrker samt afghanske ministerier blevet besøgt. Ude i provinserne er specielt fremskudte militære baser blevet besøgt, og jeg har deltaget i et antal patruljer og kamppatruljer for at indhente empiri fra det taktiske niveau. Selve projektet er udformet som en samling af artikler og en rammebeskrivelse, der samlet set dækker de undersøgte elementer af det internationale militære engagement i landet. Empirisk fokuseres der på tiden fra sommer 2006 til forår 2010. Denne periode repræsenterer begyndelsen på den NATO-ledte oprørsbekæmpelseskampagne til perioden, hvor amerikanerne begyndte at overtage lederskabet af missionen igen.

Studiets overordnede konklusioner kan opsummeres som følgende:

- Det manglende narrativ:

Studiet peger i retning af en situation, hvor der ikke findes et fælles narrativ for engagementet i Afghanistan. For at løse opgaven anvender de mange forskellige aktører både konflikt og post-konfliktinstrumenter. Disse instrumenter bliver dog ikke synkroniseret før anvendelse og ender derfor ofte med at underminere hinanden. Et samlet narrativ, der kan skabe en fælles forståelse for miljøet og ideen om den afghanske stat, er yderst centralt, hvis de anvendte instrumenter og strategier skal forblive forankret i virkeligheden. Optimalt set skulle et sådan narrativ både indfange de korte og de langsigtede mål med missionen og derved skabe en direkte relation

mellem disse. Dette vil samle de mange politiske ambitioner med missionen og derved skabe en forståelse for opgaven, der er i overensstemmelse med netop disse politiske ambitioner.

- Det manglende modstykke:

Gennem analysen af de fire elementer for det internationale militære engagement og konstateringen af det manglende narrativ for missionen, viser det sig også, at der mangler et stærkt modstykke (counterpart) til det militære element. Et modstykke der kan balancere det militære engagement med det formål at øge holdbarheden og rækkevidden af missionen i landet. Dette modstykke, der skal arbejde på alle niveauer, skal have indflydelse og kapacitet til at kunne bremse og vende en eventuelt negativ udvikling, så det kan sikres, at den planlagte aktivitet er relateret mod det overordnede nationsbygningsprogram og ikke mod mere kortsigtede fragmenterede mål.

- At bygge bro:

Ved at anvende konklusionerne uden for den empiriske grænse af dette studie (Afghanistan), anbefaler jeg, at man udvikler et element, der har styrke og kapacitet til at balancere et fremtidigt militært engagement. Det må forventes, at det internationale militære element i en tilsvarende mission vil have langt flere ressourcer og mandskab end øvrige aktører i missionen. Dette skaber store udfordringer i en mission, hvor målene for denne ofte vil række langt videre end det militære bidrag og de militære opgaver. Derfor skal der udvikles en modbalancerende aktør, der kan sikre, at de initiale militære fremskridt er forenelige med de overordnede og mere langsigtede mål for nationsbygning. Uden en sådan aktør vil perspektivet for langsigtet stabilitet nemt kunne undermineres af mere kortsigtede og militært definerede mål. Derfor er det essentielt, at den "militære maskine" modbalanceres af en tilsvarende indflydelsesrig aktør.

- Den begrænsede operative rækkevidde for en alliance:

Dette studie kan ikke til fulde konkludere, hvorvidt NATOs mission i Afghanistan er ”a bridge too far” i geografiske termer. Dette studie kan dog konkludere på NATO som oprørsbekæmpende aktør i Afghanistan. I dette perspektiv kan missionen ikke betragtes som en bro for langt set geografisk, men jeg vil argumentere for, at det har været en bro for langt i forhold til operationstype – dvs. oprørsbekæmpelse. Det er muligt, at NATO ikke vil erkende denne udvikling, men ser man på det faktum, at NATO er dybt engageret i en mission, der mangler den lim, der skal skabe den nødvendige sammenhængskraft for alliancen, der skal kunne samle alle medlemmerne i fuldførelsen af missionen, synes udviklingen uundgåeligt. Meget kunne pege på, at NATO skal vende tilbage til opgavetyper såsom fredsstøttende operationer, fredstidsengagementer eller anti-piratoperationer, hvor ”NATO-familien” nemmere kan opnå enighed og bred politisk konsensus. I de tilfælde, hvor de mere krævende oprørsbekæmpelsesmissioner skal gennemføres, kan NATO tildele missionen den overordnede og yderst vigtige legitimitet og strategiske vejledning. Selve missionen kan så ledes af enkeltstater eller af en koalition af villige stater inden for NATO. Set ud fra den betragtning er Afghanistan ikke den geografiske begrænsning for NATO, Afghanistan repræsenterer snarere en begrænsning for, hvad alliancen kan lave ”out-of-area”.

# 1. Introduction

The situation in Afghanistan is serious; neither success nor failure can be taken for granted. Although considerable efforts and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating. We face not only a resilient and growing insurgency; there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans – both in their government and the international community – that undermines our credibility and emboldens the insurgents. Further, a perception that our resolve is uncertain makes Afghans reluctant to align with us against the insurgents.<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of the commander of the international forces in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010, US General Stanley A. McChrystal, based on his initial assessment on the situation in Afghanistan, which was leaked to the *Washington Post* in September 2009. The assessment came some eight years into the mission and pointed to obvious signs of possible failure in the absence of clear leadership and priorities. It seems clear that the current mission in Afghanistan is among the most challenging endeavours the international community has been involved in since the Second World War, and that an acceptable success is still not within reach. Indeed, as McChrystal's successor, US General David H. Petraeus, said during his confirmation hearing on 29 June 2010, 'There is no question that levels of violence in Afghanistan have increased significantly over the last several years. Moreover, the Taliban and its affiliates had, until this year, steadily been expanding the areas they control and influence.'<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this PhD project is to investigate some of the reasons for the fragile state of the Afghan mission by examining the role played by the international military forces and the variety of actors with whom they must interact in the search for a credible end state. The role of the international military forces, their approach to

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<sup>1</sup> [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf) p. 1-1.

<sup>2</sup> To view the entire speech see: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/world/2010/petraeus-opening-statement.pdf>

supporting the overall project and their interplay with other actors will be dealt with, with the aim of generating comprehensive conclusions to be learned from the engagement in Afghanistan and beyond.

I have chosen to focus on the international military because of their crucial role for success as an understudied and often less understood element of nation-building. While many scholars have studied single aspects of the military contribution, be it peace support, counterinsurgency, security sector reform or the comprehensive approach, only a very few have examined all of them and their interaction in the same study. This dissertation rests on the assumption that such a holistic approach is crucial to understand better the military contribution to nation-building in general and in Afghanistan in particular.

The project will be guided by the following research question:

*How can the strategy and effectiveness of the military contribution to nation-building be enhanced? A study of the international military involvement in nation-building in Afghanistan.*

I will divide the answer to this question into three parallel and interconnected phases: 1) identify the dilemmas involved in the approach chosen by the military actor; 2) identify the reasons for the lack of progress in Afghanistan; and 3) draw conclusions from the lessons derived from the study.

The project has been carried out using a qualitative research design incorporating five field research trips to Afghanistan. These field studies have covered both the political level at military headquarters and ministries in Kabul, and the tactical level in

forward operational bases and combat patrols in the southern parts of the country. The PhD project takes the form of a collection of articles, and this framework description covers specific aspects of the role of the international military in the country. By choosing this approach, I have been able to investigate the ongoing complexities involved and to study developments over time, which in itself has contributed to the findings of the project. The empirical focus of the study has been limited to Afghanistan from summer 2006 to spring 2010, a period that represents the beginning of the NATO-led counterinsurgency efforts in the country through to the emerging takeover of the mission by the US.

This PhD framework description has been drawn up in order to present the reader with all the considerations concerning the project: the methodological design, the theoretical point of departure, the operationalisation of the focus areas (sub-types<sup>3</sup>), my contribution to the field, and finally an analysis which incorporates the conclusions of the articles that have already been published as part of the project. The framework description will proceed by situating the project within the current literature<sup>4</sup> and presenting the empirical context and the project structure. Chapter 2 will set out the methodical foundations of the study. Chapter 3 will present the theoretical understanding of the background concept of nation-building that this study adopts and place the study within this field. From there the chapter will identify, discuss and operationalise the role of the international military in nation-building in a non-permissive environment. Also, the contribution to the literature on the four identified sub-types will be clarified. Chapter 4 will analyse the findings of the published articles within each sub-type. In this chapter, the findings of the articles that have an identical focus, such as security sector reform, will be analysed and

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<sup>3</sup> Four sub-types of the study will be identified and will lay down the analytical foundations for the overall project. These will be identified and operationalised in Chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> Here this will only be done at the overall level. A more thorough discussion will be presented in Chapter 3 below.

cross-referenced with the aim of presenting higher level findings than those featured in the individual articles. Finally Chapter 5 will extract findings from Chapter 4 to generate cross-sectored conclusions and conclusions going beyond the confines of the study itself, that is, Afghanistan.

### **1.1 Relevance, problems and contribution**

Among contemporary conflicts the eyes of the international community have been particularly focused on developments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the attack on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan on 7 October 2001 and the following invasion of Iraq in 2003, the international community,<sup>5</sup> strongly led by the US, has kept some 200,000 to 250,000 soldiers stationed in the two countries on a permanent basis. The many soldiers fighting within this alliance or coalition perform tasks that have not been seen in such variety or complexity in previous engagements in recent history. The international military forces became engaged in something that has been described as a ‘three-block war’, where, within a very limited time and space, troops have conducted high-intensity combat operations (block I), conducted stabilisation operations and less intensive counterinsurgency operations (block II), and been handing out humanitarian aid and providing development assistance (block III) (Krulak 1999). Such a complex type of operation places extreme demands on the overall strategy, the cooperation between the actors involved and the unity required in implementing the agreed strategy, all of which are crucial elements in the quest for a mission’s achievable and sustainable politically defined end state.

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<sup>5</sup> My understanding of the term ‘international community’ is in conformity with that of Hedley Bull (1977) in *The Anarchical Society*.

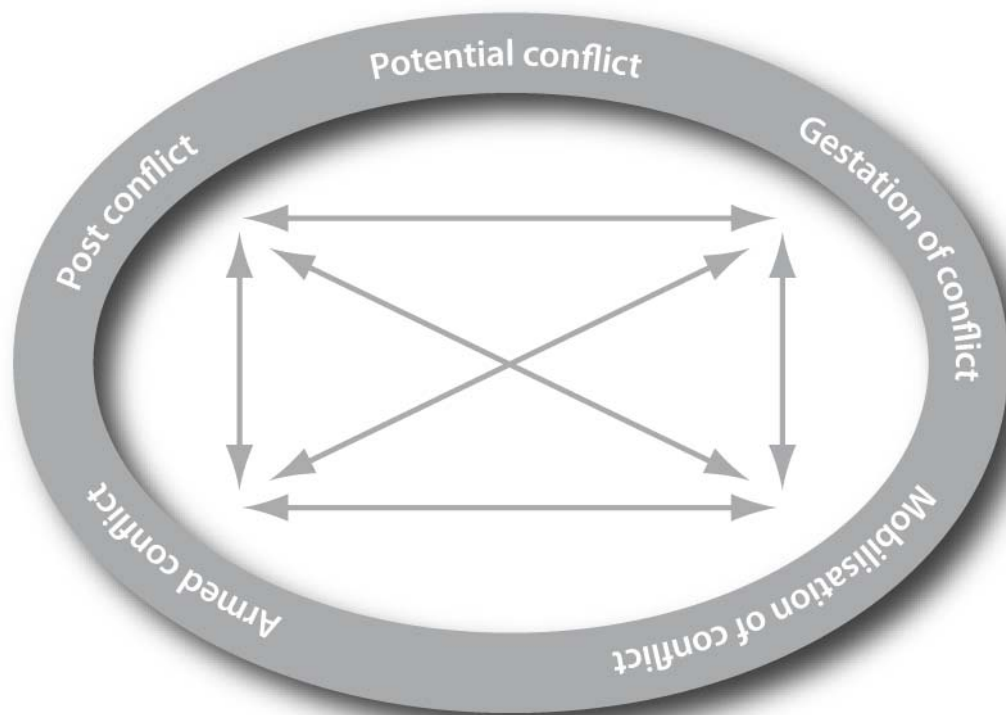


Figure 1.1: Cycle of Conflict (Thruelsen (ed.) 2009b: 15).

This type of engagement often falls outside the traditional cycle of conflict, in which large-scale external involvement will often not arrive until a ceasefire or peace agreement has been signed, and where there is a minimum of consent by the parties towards the external actors. Indeed, the Iraqi and Afghan engagements have both fallen between the phases shown in Figure 1.1 of armed conflict and traditional post-conflict peace-building, with the consequence that in both cases the mechanisms used to progress from one to the other have been dominated by those of the former without clear links having been formulated. In the context operating between these phases, attempts have been made to combine the military tools of fighting a war and the more traditional tools of peace-building, but with the military instrument as the primary and most resourced instrument. This has not been without its consequences and has presented major challenges in fully connecting the different tools so that they do not undermine each other. It is within this complexity dominated by a non-permissive

environment that this study situates itself.<sup>6</sup> Some of the dilemmas created by this complexity that have been identified through this study are whether post-conflict tools are applicable at all in a conflict setting and whether the campaign theme of counterinsurgency is in danger of undermining the overall nation-building project in the security surge. These dilemmas will be discussed thoroughly in the conclusion, but it will be important to keep them in mind while reading this entire study.

The overall framework for the investigation is the concept of nation-building. This has been used with a variety of meanings throughout history, with special attention being given to the aftermath of the Second World War, when the rebuilding of West Germany and Japan especially could be considered the largest nation-building programmes ever implemented (Dobbins 2003, 2005). These cases were contrary to those of Iraq and Afghanistan in that they were implemented in a context in which major fighting had ceased and the majority of the population saw itself as defeated, as opposed to Iraq and Afghanistan, where the majority saw itself as having been liberated. Local perceptions and the level of acceptance of the occupation play a major role in the progress of a mission, as well as in determining which tools are likely to work in trying to reach an end state (Edelstein 2004). Here I am emphasising that conducting nation-building using instruments from a variety of toolboxes (i.e. post-conflict peace-building and war-fighting) when a major part of the population basically wants self-determination is a challenging endeavour, one that is hard to compare with historical cases.

Based on this complexity, the study will be led by the fact that:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the understanding of the non-permissive environment as used in this study, see Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> This understanding is shared by others, e.g. Barnett 2006, Cordesman 2007, Dobbins 2008, Fukuyama (ed.) 2006, Mills 2006, Patel (ed.) 2007, Rubin 2006, and Sedra 2004.

*The involvement of the international military in nation-building in Afghanistan is far from optimal, because many of the military tasks are neither supportive of nor supported by the other actors involved in the country.*

Nation-building as a concept has been widely discussed and criticised, and the mere use of force to implement such a concept can certainly be questioned. However, developments since the end of the Cold War have not put an end to the use of military means as a vital tool of nation-building and therefore still have a vital role to play in stabilising states. In looking at the frequent use of nation-building tools today, it becomes evident that the concept is still a highly relevant subject to investigate. Indeed, the US involved itself in this type of operation on average once a decade during the Cold War, and since the fall of the Berlin Wall it has been engaged in new nation-building operations almost every other year. At the same time, UN involvement has grown from initiating a new nation-building project every fourth year during the Cold War to almost one new mission every six months in the post-1989 era (Dobbins 2008: 68). However, looking more closely at these figures, it can surely be argued that the success rate of these missions is very much open to question, which is why research within the area of nation-building is equally important (see Chapter 3 for more discussion of this issue) (Paris and Sisk 2009 (eds.): 11-14).

Overall, the existing literature on nation-building and on the role of the international military within this framework can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of research that focuses entirely on the overall elements of nation-building and the complexity and meaning of the term. At this ‘political’ level, discussions have centred on defining nation-building, and the dilemmas and contradictions of ‘external’ peace-building, philosophical debates on whether nation-building can be imposed upon a nation at all (top-down or bottom-up), studies on whether to adapt an

minimalistic or maximalist approach, the level of coercion needed and the relationship between regional and country specific strategies lead the debate. In recent years, Francis Fukuyama, James Dobbins, Roland Paris, Timothy D. Sisk, David Chandler, Simon Chesterman, Michael W. Doyle and many others have published books within this framework of post-conflict peace-building, looking at the overall framework or conducting case studies on the more than twenty major multilateral peace-building missions around the world.<sup>8</sup>

The second category involves research that thoroughly investigates individual sub-elements of nation-building typically divided into a civilian-led and a military-led focus. At this ‘technical’ level, single-stringed studies of individual themes dominate, where ‘lessons learned’ are presented often detached from the surrounding context.<sup>9</sup> Delving into the most recent literature, and focusing especially on the role of the external actors engaging in peace-building activities, names such as Nicole Ball, Dylan Hendrickson, Michael Brzoska, Herbert Wulf, Mark Sedra, John A. Nagl, Greg Mills, Andrew F. Krepinivich, Austin Long, Seth G. Jones and many more appear. Most of them, however, have conducted analyses only of single aspects of involvement.<sup>10</sup> From a civilian focus, elements such as the rule of law, good governance programmes, rural development, human rights and judicial reforms dominate, whereas the military-dominated research focuses on elements such as disarmament programmes, security-sector reforms, specific military campaign planning and so on. However, such work is undertaken without cross-referencing the individual findings in order to establish contextual explanations for individual

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Fukuyama (ed.) (2006), Dobbins et al. (2007), Paris (2004), Paris and Sisk (eds.) (2009), Chandler (2006), Chesterman (2004), Chesterman, Ignatieff and Thakur (eds.) (2005), Doyle and Sambanis (2006), and Stedman, Rothchild and Cousens (eds.) (2002).

<sup>9</sup> This category can also be labelled the ‘problem-solving approach’ (Chandler 2006: 5).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g., Ball (2000), Hendrickson (1999), Brzoska (2000), Wulf (2000), Sedra (2004), Nagl (2002), Mills (2006), Krepinevich (2005), Long (2006), and Jones (2008).

findings or to determine whether their recommendations will undermine others' efforts within the same framework.

This PhD project is situated between the two approaches by presenting a unique research design that bridges them and provides an in-depth focus on especially the military activities within the context of nation-building. Here I will clarify my understanding of nation-building while at that same time place this study within the existing literature (first category); identifying the role of the military as an actor within it and conducting investigations of these roles (second category); and finally and most essentially combining the findings of the different military tasks attached to the overall nation-building frame, thereby filling a vacuum in the existing literature (see Figure 1.2). As will be seen throughout this study, the failures that have been identified in Afghanistan can very much be attributed to the missing amalgamation of the four elements of the military role in nation-building – more than to the specific flaws of the individual sub-types – and as a result to lost comprehensive effects. By using the research design presented below and merging the individual elements, a new level of findings emerges.

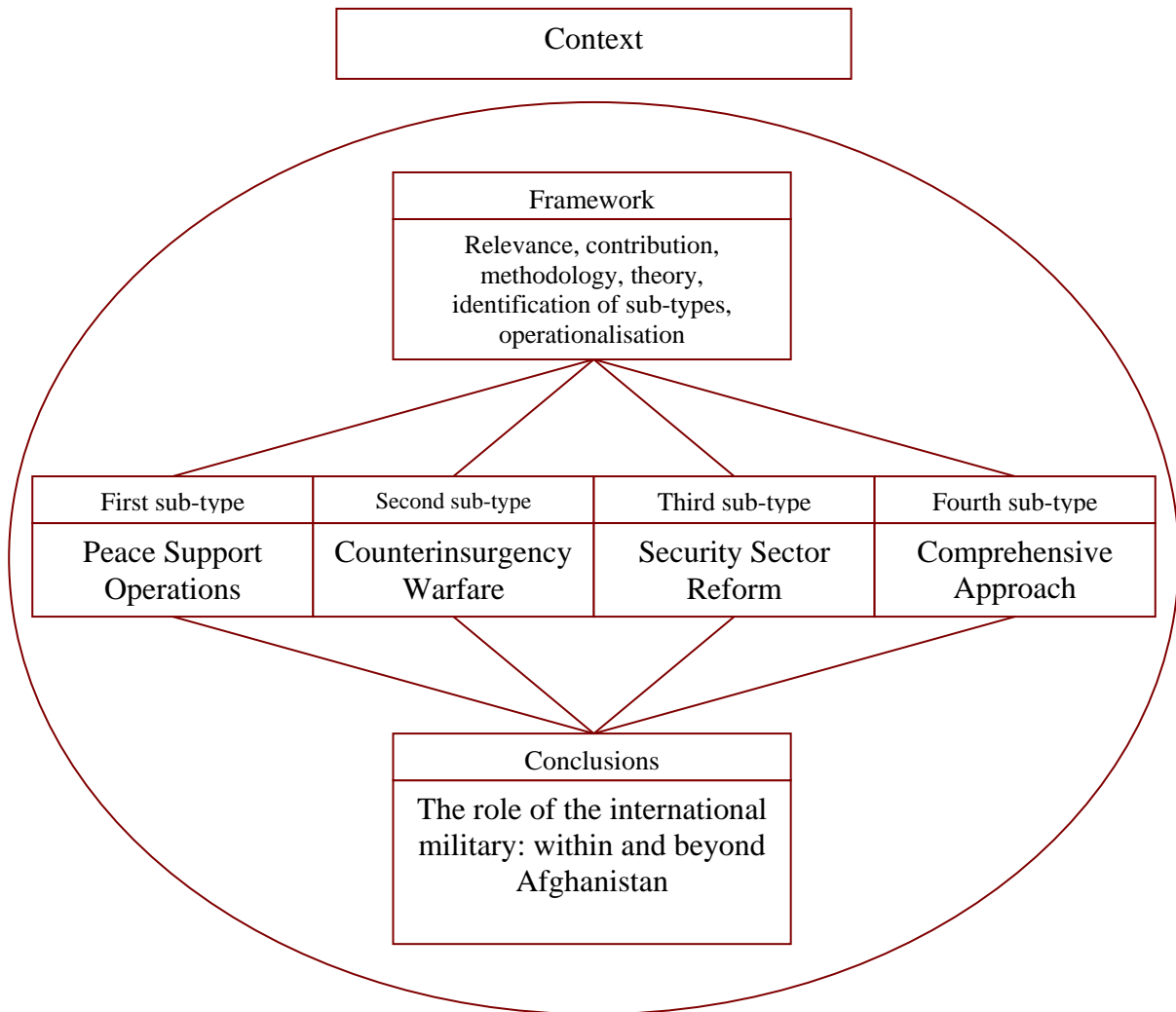


Figure 1.2: The comprehensive research design applied in this study.<sup>11</sup>

The above model is built on the assumption that nation-building will only be successful when the four sub-types are implemented fully coordinated and interlinked without these pointing in separate and not aligned directions. When implementing nation-building in such diverse contexts as, for example, Afghanistan or Kosovo, the implementation will only succeed if the main identified elements of the military contribution are closely connected. The developed comprehensive research design on which this study is built aims exactly at measuring this connection, thus countering stovepipe findings that fail to uncover the essence of combined efforts. This study

<sup>11</sup> The four sub-types shown in the figure will not be thoroughly identified and presented until Chapter 3.

will remedy this by analysing the four sub-types individually but at the same time collectively. This means that the conclusions will only be of value when they are connected to the additional elements of nation-building and not treated as stand-alone sub-types. In this way, the comprehensive research design presented here in itself becomes a valuable contribution for research within the field.

The strength of the developed comprehensive research design is thus the analysis of individual findings that are closely linked to the other individual elements within the overall framework of nation-building. The importance of analysing specifically identified sub-types closely derived from a specific framework is that the conclusions will not be decoupled from the framework and context, thus eliminating the risk of generating conclusions that are not aligned with or that might undermine other initiatives – something that often is the case within the existing literature. The only way to guarantee this is by applying a research design in which all the individual elements are closely linked by a common framework, thus minimizing the drawing of individual conclusions out of context. Especially when examining the sub-elements of an overall project, loosely connected studies and conclusions outside the overall framework and context will be in danger of losing their relevance and usability. In addition to this, the advantage of the design used in this study is that it will contribute to an in-depth and at the same time a more holistic analysis unified by means of the common framework and context, so that the conclusions derived from it will be interrelated (more on this in Chapter 2).

In addition to the contribution made by studying the individual subtypes and the crucial interaction between these, my contribution, as shown throughout this framework description, will also cover the context of nation-building, the framework of the international military involvement and a combination of both – thus conducting analysis through the comprehensive research design presented here. Within the field

of nation-building, I will situate the study between a top-down and a bottom-up approach, or between what Miles Kahler calls the revisionist approach and the disengagement approach (Kahler 2009: 287-91). This study will therefore plug into ‘an ongoing debate between those who espouse revised and more modest forms of engagement – but engagement nonetheless – and those who favour disengagement in favour of local solutions and local empowerment’ (Kahler 2009: 289).<sup>12</sup> In placing this study between these two logics, I also acknowledge that ‘compromised peace-building’ is probably the most likely outcome of external involvement in nation-building in the surge for affordable and sustainable end states (Barnett and Zürcher 2009: 32-6).

Placing the study within the role of the international military in nation-building will fall under four themes: peace support operations, counterinsurgency warfare, security sector reform and the comprehensive approach.<sup>13</sup> My contribution to the field of peace support operations will be a test of the principles and lessons of earlier peace support operations to what can easily be characterised as an extremely difficult case. Because of its unique nature, the mission in Afghanistan provides the ‘ultimate’ test-bed for the more or less universally accepted principles of peacekeeping. Thus an important ‘worst case scenario’ test will be conducted to test the ultimate reach of the more generic principles by showing whether the principles still are of value in this extreme context. Even though Afghanistan is not a UN peacekeeping operation as such, I will show that most of the principles of peacekeeping also apply in this environment, which is generally characterised as an insurgency.

Within the field of counterinsurgency warfare, two primary areas of the contribution of my study should be highlighted. First, it is a study of counterinsurgency conducted

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<sup>12</sup> This will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup> The four themes will be defined through literature reviews in Chapter 3, where the individual contributions also will be presented at greater depth.

by an alliance. Secondly, it is a study of the rebuilding of national security forces in a counterinsurgency context. The first contribution in itself provides new important empirical evidence to the field together with a critical analysis of the merits of alliances – this being the first counterinsurgency campaign in history that has been led by an alliance. Secondly, the study contributes to filling the gap in the literature on the role and process of rebuilding and applying national security forces in counterinsurgency. While most theorists and practitioners recognise the importance of building national security forces as an element of counterinsurgency, the field is generally understudied.

The third theme of security-sector reform is connected closely to the study of counterinsurgency. In stressing the link between the two, I contribute by filling a central gap in both the literature and the practical field by building a model that connects the long-term objectives of traditional security-sector reform with the short-term focus on creating stability as an element of the counterinsurgency campaign. Without connecting the two through a sustainable framework, there is a risk of mission failure. In addition, I have collected and provide empirical data from a highly complex environment to which most have only limited access, thus presenting new empirical evidence on SSR in practice. Lastly, through the study of the comprehensive approach, I contribute with new field evidence and practice to this still nascent field. Apart from showing the importance of applying a comprehensive approach, I also clearly relate the tactical level in theatre with the national strategic level, through which I challenge the conventional understanding of the comprehensive approach and the national political and bureaucratic willingness to achieve genuine implementation of the concept. In this way, important conclusions on the reach of the comprehensive approach are highlighted for actors to incorporate into future mission planning.

## **1.2 The point of departure**

My point of departure is a specific understanding of nation-building. Nation-building has often been seen as a contested concept, and a mixture of understandings and empirical examples have been used when trying to define the core elements of the term. This will be elaborated further in Chapter 3, but for the sake of clarity it is important to briefly describe the understanding upon which this study and the four sub-types identified within it rests.

The study starts from the assumption that social engineering of a nation by outsiders will seldom prove successful. Therefore, I will not regard the state as an actor that can survive without the loyalty of the nation(s), but rather take the position that the nation(s) can exist without the state, and that the state will succumb without its citizens' loyalty (Buzan 1991: 70-2). Thus the nation(s) of a state continue to exist after the state's collapse, and in many instances they thrive (Zartman (ed.) 1995: 268-9). In terms of a nation-building perspective, this means that the focus should not be on building or creating a new nation fitting the state, but rather on building a state that embraces its citizens and their representative nations.

This means that, when the international military actor sets out to implement its instruments within the framework of nation-building, it should focus on enhancing its legitimacy among the citizens of the host nation, and not merely on satisfying the needs of the state. Thus, the criteria for success that can be laid on all the sub-types in this study (focusing on the non-permissive environment) should ultimately be assessed in terms of the perceptions and sense of legitimacy of the citizens.

The results of the different publications within this study vary, but they are generally negative. Some eight years into the Afghan campaign, the local population, who should be seen as the main beneficiaries, is still for the most part living in an

uncertain environment where neither security nor the provision of basic services have improved markedly compared to the efforts in these respects made by the international community. My contribution to the study of this complexity will be set out on three levels: 1) within each identified military task; 2) across the identified military tasks; and 3) as much as possible, beyond the context of Afghanistan for future missions to consider (see Chapter 5).

It is important to mention here that the findings of this study do not amount to an overall conclusion that nation-building with a firm external military commitment is the best solution in bringing peace and prosperity to a conflict-torn country. On the contrary, some of the findings will show that the mere presence of a military component implementing its main tasks of providing security without being properly balanced by a civilian counterpart of equivalent implementation capacity will create solutions and results that do not fully satisfy the basic idea of nation-building, namely to leave behind a governing state that is sustainable and legitimate in the eyes of the local population. Also, as a single case study, the present work will only provide analysis within the context of Afghanistan. This in itself challenges the level of generalisations that can be made beyond the case, and given a context as unique as Afghanistan, this limitation has to be acknowledged. These considerations are built into Chapter 2 on methodology.

### **1.3 Presentation of the empirical case**

A civil war revolutionizes the polity, society, economy, and culture. Civil wars, obviously, break up sovereignty and then sometimes create ferocious hierarchies in factions. Warriors, sometimes criminals, replace civilian elites. Economies become geared to military production or looting. Hatred shapes interethnic or factional

identity. To create a self-sustaining peace, peacebuilding has to reverse all that. (Doyle and Sambanis 2006: 337)<sup>14</sup>

The above quotation could very well apply to Afghanistan. When the country left behind some twenty years of conflict in December 2001, not many of the pre-war political or social structures were still intact. The initial ten years of fighting between the Soviet Union, the Afghan government and the mujahedeen, followed by yet another decade of intrastate warfare had severely weakened cohesiveness throughout the country. Building on this fragile state, shortly after the fall of Kabul in November 2001, a conference was convened in Bonn, Germany, under the auspices of the UN with proposals for recreating the Afghan state.<sup>15</sup> The Bonn Agreement, as it is known, signed on 5 December 2001, outlined the conditions under which the peace process was to be implemented. It was followed, among others, by two conferences in Geneva in 2002 establishing the premises for the reform of the Afghan security sector. To support the implementation of the Bonn Agreement and establish peace and security, the UN authorised an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), initially led and organised by the United Kingdom, to take on this role.<sup>16</sup> ISAF was initially mandated to bring security to Kabul and the surrounding areas, but in October 2003 the UN Security Council mandated ISAF to expand beyond the capital.<sup>17</sup> Prior to this, on 11 August 2003, NATO took over command of ISAF, and today the ISAF operation covers the whole of Afghanistan.

In dealing with the military component of the engagement in Afghanistan, it is crucial to clarify that two different mandated missions have been and still are operational in

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<sup>14</sup> My understanding of the term 'peace-building' is built on that of Paris and Sisk (eds.) (2009), who view concepts such as state-building and nation-building as sub-components of the overall concept of peace-building (Paris and Sisk (eds.) (2009): 14-15). See also UN (1992): Articles 55-59.

<sup>15</sup> UN S/RES/1378 (2001) and S/RES/1383 (2001), 'Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions' (S/2001/1154).

<sup>16</sup> UN S/RES/1386 (2001), authorising ISAF under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

<sup>17</sup> UN S/RES/1510 (2003).

the country: ISAF, working as mentioned above under UN Security Council resolution 1386; and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), mandated through Article 51 of the UN Charter as a direct reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The elements of OEF that have still not been fully incorporated as part of ISAF are led by the US and are primarily conducting counter-terrorism operations directed against Taliban and Al-Qaeda sanctuaries throughout Afghanistan. ISAF, as already mentioned, is now a NATO-led mission, has operational responsibility throughout Afghanistan and currently has participants from 46 countries manning 27 Provincial Reconstruction Teams and some 120,000 troops.<sup>18</sup>

The first years of the mission were characterised by positive progress overall. The international community viewed this initial development with growing optimism, and the eyes of the international community soon began to wander to focus on other major international concerns. Developments in Iraq from late 2002 to the spring of 2003 in particular took the international focus away from Afghanistan, and the US among others soon lost its genuine interest in developments on the ground – everything was simply going too smoothly. By the summer of 2005 the situation had begun to deteriorate, especially in the eastern and southern parts of the country, and when preparations on the ground for the ISAF takeover of operations in the south from OEF began to materialise in the spring of 2006, the international community soon found out what was to come. To make way for the takeover, US and other coalition forces as part of OEF conducted at that time the hardest combat operations seen in the country post-9/11. Operation Mountain Thrust, involving some 10,000 troops, swept through the south trying to create as much stability as possible prior to the ISAF takeover, though with little success. Apart from representing the ISAF takeover, the operation also marked the move from more counterterrorism-style

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<sup>18</sup> As of June 2010. For more on the organisation and manning of ISAF, see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/isaf-placemat-archives.html>

operations led by special forces and smaller combat teams to the current phase of large-scale insurgency and counterinsurgency activities.

It is within this context that this study takes its starting point, focusing primarily on ISAF involvement from summer 2006 to summer 2010. This period represents the NATO struggle to command a counterinsurgency operation manned by some forty individual partners within an overall nation-building project. But it also represents the move from US-led to NATO-led operations and again back. With the election of President Obama and his re-launching of the Afghan mission on 27 March 2009,<sup>19</sup> the mission gained a new much needed momentum, which materialised through the summer of 2009 with a significant shift in the overall command to US General Stanley A. McChrystal, an increase of 21,000 US troops and an overall mission assessment that eventually led to a new US strategy for Afghanistan, presented by President Obama on 1 December 2009.<sup>20</sup>

As of summer 2010, ISAF in southern Afghanistan in particular is struggling to implement the new strategic guidance laid down by General McChrystal and now implemented by his successor General David H. Petraeus, with its focus on embracing the local population rather than killing the enemy. Culminating in spring and summer operations in Helmand (Operation Moshtarak) and Kandahar Provinces (Operation Hamkari) in 2010, this represented ISAF's main effort to turn the tide and win back the counterinsurgency initiative from the insurgents. This stage also marks the end of this study. The mission in Afghanistan has reached a crucial stage in which the strategic patience of the West seems to be declining, the Afghan population is still

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<sup>19</sup> To read President Obama's speech, see: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/remarks-by-the-president-on-a-new-strategy-for-afghanistan-and-pakistan/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/remarks-by-the-president-on-a-new-strategy-for-afghanistan-and-pakistan/)

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, the mission assessment can be read here: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html> and the presentation of the US strategy for Afghanistan presented by President Obama on 1 December 2009 can be read here: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>

not convinced about the future, national and local governance structures are extremely fractured, and the strong emphasis on the military tools is in danger of putting the nascent civilian progress in the shade. As will be seen in the conclusions to this study, these are not new or surprising elements but represent dilemmas that have been steadily emerging since the beginning of the counterinsurgency phase of the mission, as well as aspects that will need renewed emphasis if the sustainability of the progress made thus far is not to be undermined.

#### **1.4 Structure of the project**

The findings and conclusions of the project are based on field studies carried out throughout its duration. As a result of these field studies, a monograph, two reports, a chapter for a monograph and five articles have been published. As discussed further in Chapter 2 on methodology, the project has been structured with reference to four sub-types, each of which represents crucial elements of the role of the international military in seeking to provide security in a non-permissive environment within the context of nation-building in Afghanistan. All the publications that constitute this study are therefore grouped within these four sub-types. The analysis and findings presented in the publications are brought together within this framework description with the purpose of 1) generating conclusions based on the different publications within each sub-type; 2) drawing conclusions across the four sub-types; and 3) lifting the conclusions beyond the present case for future nation-building programmes. All this will be presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this framework description. The categorisation of the publications for each sub-type is presented below.

*Peace Support Operations:*

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2007): 'NATO in Afghanistan: what lessons are we learning, and are we willing to adjust?', *DIIS Report 2007:14*, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen.

*Counterinsurgency:*

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2010): 'The Taliban in southern Afghanistan: a localised insurgency with a local objective', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 21, No. 2.

Ringsmose, Jens, and Peter Dahl Thruelsen (2010): 'NATO's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Afghanistan: Are the Classical Doctrines Suitable for Alliances?', *UNISCI Discussion Paper*, No. 22.

*Security Sector Reform:*

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (under review): 'Security Sector Stabilisation and Reform in Counterinsurgency Operations: Case Afghanistan', *Conflict, Security & Development*.

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2010): 'Striking the Right Balance: How to Build the Afghan National Police', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 17, No. 1.

Younossi, Obaid, and Peter Dahl Thruelsen (2009): *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica.

*Comprehensive Approach:*

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2009): 'The Comprehensive Approach in Helmand Province: from a Military Perspective', in Splidsboel Hansen, Flemming (ed.): *The Comprehensive Approach: Challenges and Prospects*, The Royal Danish Defence College, Copenhagen.

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2008): *Implementing the Comprehensive Approach in Helmand: Within the Context of Counterinsurgency*, Royal Danish Defence College, Report, Copenhagen.

Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2008): 'Counterinsurgency and a Comprehensive Approach: Helmand Province, Afghanistan', *Small Wars Journal*.

In Chapter 2 of this framework description, the study methodology will be presented, focusing heavily on research design and causality in conducting qualitative research. In Chapter 3 the theoretical point of departure will be set out by presenting the concept of nation-building and by situating the present study within this literature. The chapter will proceed by identifying the role of the international military as one of many actors in a nation-building programme in a non-permissive environment. In this chapter, the focus will be on the provision of security. When the four sub-types have been identified, these will be operationalised through literature reviews followed by positioning within each field. Building on Chapters 2 to 3, Chapter 4 will seek to identify the lessons from the field by bringing together the findings of each publication with the aim of linking them to generate comprehensive conclusions within each sub-type. Finally Chapter 5 will present the project conclusions, both in relation to the case study and beyond it.

## **2. Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodological framework of the study will be set out. The methodological design was developed in the early stage of the project and has proved to be a cornerstone in concluding anything valuable from a study with this degree of complexity of data collection. The design set out below has been strictly followed when drawing up the framework for data collection and on all my field trips to Afghanistan. The design has been a challenge to implement, but it proved possible to do so by thorough planning and by incorporating a degree of flexibility into the programmes.

### **2.1 Study approach: the qualitative research design**

The qualitative research design for this project was chosen for several reasons. John Gerring (2007) lists a number of characteristics of working with case studies which are very applicable to this study:

(a) that its method is qualitative, small-N, (b) that research is holistic, thick (a more or less comprehensive examination of a phenomenon), (c) that it utilizes a particular type of evidence (e.g., ethnographic, clinical, nonexperimental, non-survey-based, participant-observation, process-tracing, historical, textual, or field research), (d) that its method of evidence gathering is naturalistic (a real-life context), (e) that the topic is diffuse (case and context are difficult to distinguish), (f) that it employs triangulation (multiple sources of evidence), (g) that the researcher investigates the properties of a single observation, or (h) that the researcher investigates the properties of a single phenomenon, instance, or example. (Gerring 2007: 17)

The present research project to a large extent reflects the above. The study has a small N (single case); it is holistic in nature, meaning that a single phenomenon is comprehensively investigated in-depth; it is designed as a field research project, and includes some participant observation; it has been implemented in a real-life context; and finally it relies on multiple sources of evidence (i.e. triangulation). All these

elements situate the project within the category of case studies. However, of all these criteria and characteristics, two elements distinguish themselves in particular in this study: the decision to investigate a real-life context, and the decision to do within-case observations. As Gerring notes, ‘*Case* connotes a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. It comprises the type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain. [...] Each case may provide a single observation or multiple (within-case) observations’ (Gerring 2007: 19). Within this description, Gerring lists ten different research designs that are all to be seen as qualitative. The ten different research designs are distinguished by the number of cases (one, several or many), spatial variation (within-case, cross-case or both), and finally temporal variation (diachronic, synchronic or both) (Gerring 2007: 28).

This research project will use what Gerring has labelled a ‘type 4’ research design, that is, a project with one case (a single case) which includes several within cases that are subjects for investigation and where there will be a time variation with respect to both the single case and the within cases (both diachronic and synchronic analyses) (Gerring 2007: 27-8). In this research project, the single case is nation-building in Afghanistan; it includes four within-cases which are subjects for investigation. Nation-building represents the dependant variable (Y), Afghanistan the context. The international military engagement represents the independent variable (X), and the four within-cases (all represented at the same level within the case) represent the sub-types that are operationalised and assessed (see Figure 2.1 below) (George and Bennett 2005: 67). The operationalisation of the four sub-types will be conducted in Chapter 3 when identifying the role of the international military in nation-building in a non-permissive environment. As part of the operationalisation, a number of additional independent variables or measurement criteria will be derived from each sub-type.

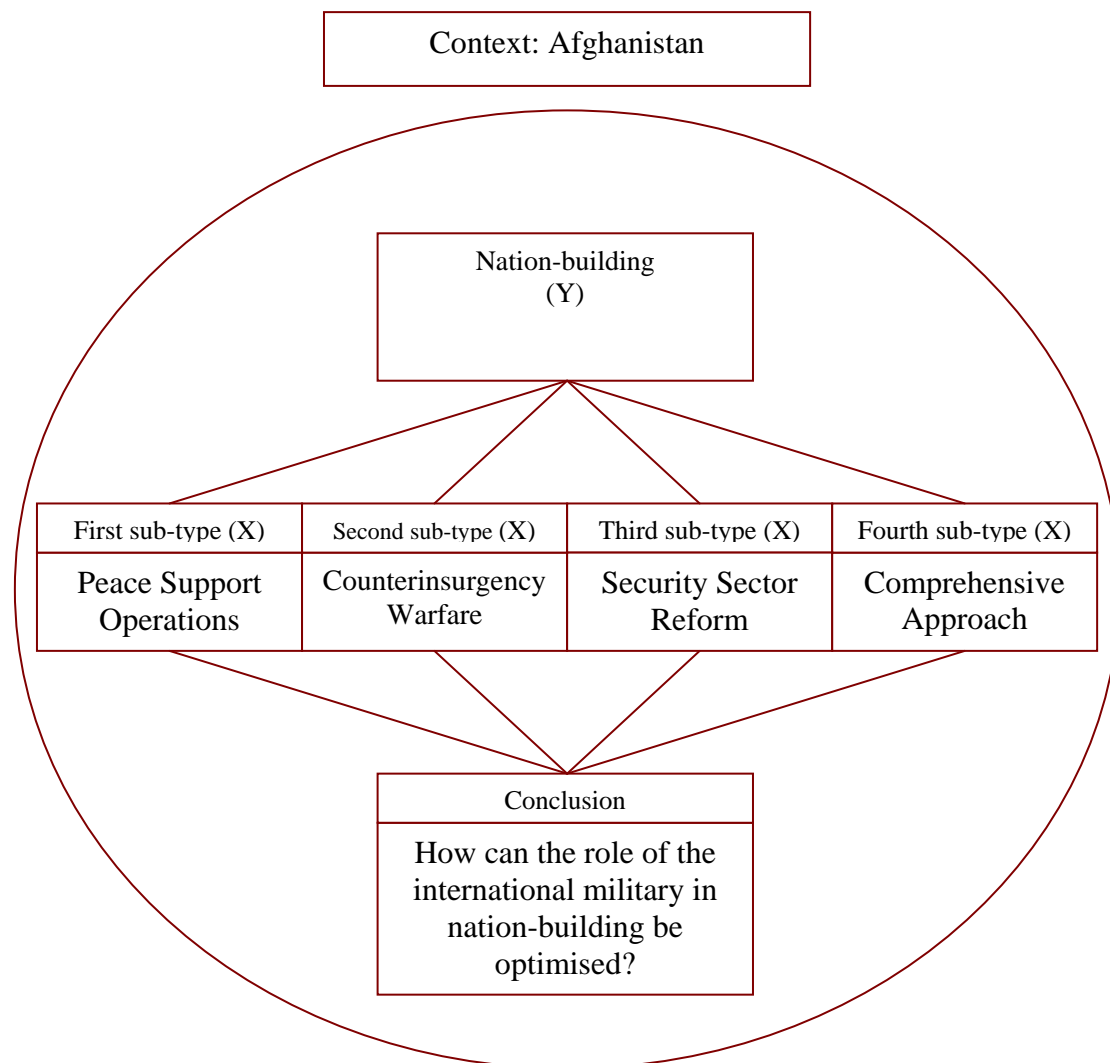


Figure 2.1: The comprehensive research design of this study.<sup>21</sup>

Building on this comprehensive explanatory research design, the purpose of this study and the choice of using a case study design is, in Gerring words, as follows: ‘What distinguishes the case study method from all other methods is its reliance on evidence drawn from a single case and its attempt, at the same time, to illuminate features of a broader set of cases’ (Gerring 2007: 29).<sup>22</sup> The advantages in using this design are therefore many. It allows the researcher to conduct in-depth analysis of a specific real-life case where the available level of already existing data is limited. The

<sup>21</sup> The identification of the four sub-types will be presented in Chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the explanatory research design, see Yin (2003): 3-7.

research design also allows for flexibility, which is almost a requirement in this type of context, where the setting is constantly changing (Dahler-Larsen 2007: 322). Flexibility in such a context should be resorted to when it is needed to uncover previously unexposed aspects of a case, which by nature limit prior knowledge to these aspects and thus deprive the researcher of any possibility to predetermine the survey categories uniquely prior to investigation. The research design also allows a certain level of flexibility to be introduced to the interview guide, which again is made necessary because of the limited data available prior to the investigation.

The use of the four sub-types mentioned earlier will build on a deductive approach. By using this approach, theory related to the four sub-types will be operationalised and used for assessment within the case (George and Bennett 2005: 67-72). The design will be what Robert K. Yin calls an 'Embedded, Single-Case Design', where several 'units of analysis' are investigated within the same context, namely Afghanistan, and the same case, namely the international military involvement in nation-building, with the purpose of extracting lessons (Yin 2003: 40-2). Thus in line with Gerring, Yin explains that 'A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context...' (Yin 2003: 13).

Within the four sub-types, the analysis will be carried out using frames for analysis derived from the operationalised theories, doctrine and earlier lessons from other cases (representing each sub-type). The operationalised frames and the survey categories derived from them will be on a generic level within each sub-type, thus enabling replications of the design to be used with other single case studies (Yin 2003: 32-3, 37-9). This process will be carried out in Chapter 3.

To sum up, the advantage of using this design lies in its ability to contribute to the field with new empirical findings, both within the four sub-types and within the

concept of nation-building itself, and in the inherited flexibility of the design, which enables the researcher to follow an ongoing case in a real-life context. By conducting these in-depth analyses and combining them with the nation-building concept, two types of literature within the field are combined. This could not have been done without the qualitative research design.

### ***2.1.1 Methodological design***

During this research project, five field research trips were conducted in Afghanistan, one research trip for each of the four sub-types, and one research trip to fill in the unanswered questions relating to all four sub-types taken together. During these trips data were primarily collected through interviews and observations. Each field trip began by uncovering information at the central strategic level and by moving from there to the tactical level within the country.

On all the field trips, qualitative data collection techniques were used. This was done by using semi-structured and open-ended interview guides combined with participant observation of actions in the field. Robert K. Yin connects this type of data collection to the case study approach by saying that, ‘The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian’s repertoire: direct observations of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events’ (Yin 2003: 7-8).

Within this study, data collection has, whenever possible, been divided into three levels: the strategic, the operational and the tactical. At the strategic and operational levels, semi-structured interviews with key informants have been used as the primary

model. This approach has been chosen because of the often limited time available when conducting interviews at this level, which seldom leaves time for longer conversations (Bryman 2001: 312-15). At the tactical level, attempts were also made to conduct some semi-structured interviews. These have, however, been supplemented by observations and more unstructured interviews when time and the environment allowed for this approach. This means that on several field research trips I have been ‘embedded’ within the military units I was to investigate, along with their personnel. As a consequence, I have been armed and dressed in military uniform to enable me to mingle into the unit without distinguishing myself from the unit or individual I was following.

## **2.2 Data collection**

In this section, the often large number of considerations and choices regarding data collection will be dealt with. Questions regarding setting and access will both be described theoretically and applied to the concrete data collection that has taken place in Afghanistan in connection with this research project. The huge task of identifying informants, considerations prior to interviews and the formulation of interview guides will also be discussed.

### ***2.2.1 Setting and access***

As with most qualitative research and data collection, the ‘setting’ is given by the overall research question and by ‘access’ to the individuals I wished to interview and observe. In this project, the majority of my informants were or are working in Afghanistan in what could be called a ‘quasi-private setting’. This implies that clear conditions were laid down for my access to these settings, but on the other hand it also implies that a certain level of access is possible. As John Lofland et al. note, the deep ethical questions begin ‘when the researcher moves out of the public realm and

into the private, that is, into a closed setting, access to which is not granted to just “anybody” (Lofland et al. 2006: 37). In this research project, ‘quasi-private’ should be understood widely as the whole context of where access is needed, namely here in Afghanistan, because of the often problematic conditions of a context that is characterised by war. In addition, the accessibility of individual informants within the context differs from informant to informant, as well as between the strategic and tactical levels. This means that informants are working in different settings within this context and different accessibility criteria relate to different individuals. Access to informants in other than strictly military structures, such as the UN or the EU, independent think tanks, Afghan government representatives or NGOs, will often be more accessible than access in military settings. Access to the former is often controlled by the possibility of being transported from A to B, combined with the contact established prior to the visit. Access to the latter – the military establishment – is often more complex and requires a great deal of planning prior to the visit. This access is especially complicated by the strict high-level military security clearances possessed by informants, which in turn requires that I possess an equivalent clearance for them even to consider an interview (Lofland et al. 2006: 41-2). Furthermore, mere access to military barracks or camps is often complicated by the security situation in the country. This becomes increasingly problematic as one goes from the strategic to the tactical levels – that is, from the capital to the provinces – where the security situation worsens proportionally as one approaches the units on the ground.

As already mentioned, the collection of empirical data matching the four sub-types can be divided into three levels, each representing different mandates within the four sub-types:

- *The strategic level* (primarily in Kabul). At this level, interviews have primarily been conducted through research visits to International Security

Assistance Force HQ (ISAF), Combined Strategic Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A), United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Royal Danish Embassy and different NGOs.

- *The operational level* (primarily in Kandahar province). At this level, information has been gathered through visits to ISAF Regional Command South and Regional Command North, UNAMA in southern Afghanistan, CSTC-A in southern Afghanistan, the Regional Police Training Centre and the Afghan National Army 205 Corps HQ, both located in Kandahar.
- *The tactical level* (primarily in Feyzabad and Helmand provinces). These data have been collected through visits to the Provincial Reconstruction Team Feyzabad, Provincial Reconstruction Team Lashkar Gah, UK Task Force Helmand, Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army 205 Corps 3rd Brigade in Helmand, UK Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams and UK Police Mentor Teams, UK Forward Operations Base Kajaki and the Danish Battle Group located in Camp Bastion, Forward Operations Base Price and Forward Operation Base Armadillo. All three bases are located in Helmand province.

### ***2.2.2 Identification of informants***

There were two phases involved in identifying informants, the first prior to the visit, the second during the visit. Preparations during the first phase consisted of identifying which institutions to visit and the job functions within these institutions that were of relevance to the project. This meant identifying positions of relevance to the specific sub-type being investigated. As Kenneth Goldstein notes, ‘The first step is identifying the research question and your target population. In other words, you need to decide which doors you need to get in and why’ (Goldstein 2002: 670).

Identifying the job function or position within the institution and not the person is important when dealing with a military organisation where the personnel are rotated approximately every six months. In such a setting one will seldom meet the same person twice even when one visits the same office (this happened several times during my field trips). Once the institution and specific job function had been identified, I used a 'snowball approach' to identify other relevant informants within the same organisation. Using the person initially identified (often a Danish military officer), the snowball approach proved invaluable in breaking through the often complex web of offices and branches within the overall institution. After explaining the purpose and focus (sub-type) of my visit, the person identified often connected me with other relevant informants within the same institution (Aberbach and Rockman 2002: 673). This approach often created a situation in which an initial contact with one person resulted in five to ten additional interviews focusing on the same sub-type (Lofland et al. 2006: 42-3).

The second phase in identifying informants took place during the field visit. In this phase, it is crucial to have a flexible data collection programme so that opportunities can be grabbed when they arise, especially in situations when one informant points to a second informant of relevance during an interview (Goldstein 2002: 671). The advantages of this are obvious. When gathering data in a context such as Afghanistan, informants are often placed within a delineated area; they were therefore easily accessible when I arrived in the area. This could, for example, be ISAF HQ, where approximately 1,800 people are working within a contained area in the centre of Kabul. The approach proved highly valuable and resulted in many significant interviews being conducted over a relatively short period of time.

However, there are some disadvantages with the snowball approach. Often a lot of information is accumulated during a relative short period of time when one informant

introduces several new informants by almost ‘dragging’ me from office to office. This has on several occasions resulted in six to eight interviews being conducted in a single day. It is hard to concentrate when working and receiving information at this pace, and it drains a lot of one’s energy (Jacobsen 1993: 72-3). In these situations the interview guides that I had developed prior to the field trips proved very helpful. In addition, this challenge has to be seen in a setting where informants are seldom willing to be recorded on a dictaphone. Because of the security requirements set by a context in which information can have fatal consequences if it falls into the wrong hands, many of my informants had been institutionalised by a culture where there is a constant awareness of the dangers of revealing classified information. This culture also effects non-classified information, creating a situation in which even the less significant information is highly classified. Because of this reality, I have applied strict criteria in making use of the information that I received during my research trips (Goldstein 2002: 671). First of all, before entering an interview situation, I informed the informant that I would not refer to his or her name but only to the institution from which the information was received (as seen in the articles related to this project). Secondly, I stressed that I had no interest in classified information because I needed to use the information I did receive in my writings. Finally, I stressed that all information would be dealt with confidentially (Lofland et al. 2006: 51-3; Goldstein 2002: 671). These precautions were often sufficient to satisfy the informant and to create an environment of confidence prior to the interview.

### ***2.2.3 Interview considerations***

Several considerations were made prior to the actual interviews. Interviews at the strategic and operational levels were conducted overtly, meaning that my informants knew the whole purpose of my visit. This approach was chosen in order to obtain access and to enable the snowball approach to be used. Prior to the visit, a short

project description was sent to the initial contact, including information on the sub-types, the importance of the interview and whether the information was to be used in a publication (Goldstein 2002: 671; Aberbach and Rockman 2002: 673-4). Shortly before the interview, this project description was then supplemented with information regarding related interviews conducted on the same field trip and an update on the specific purpose of the current interview (Kvale 1998: 132). When conducting interviews on these two levels – the strategic and operational – with civilian informants, I chose to be dressed as a civilian myself. This choice was made because of the frequent reluctance of civilians working in this kind of environment to be associated with the international military presence. However, I did not hide the fact that I work at the Royal Danish Defence College, but stressed that I was a civilian researcher. This approach proved to be an advantage in many situations. On the other hand, when conducting interviews with military informants on the same two levels, I wore a uniform in order to ease access to the international military establishments and to create a basic level of confidence between myself and the informant both prior to and during the interview (Lofland et al. 2006: 40-2).

At the tactical level, both overt and covert approaches were used in interviews and in participant observation. In most cases, prior to the field visit I informed the military informant of the purpose of the visit and which sub-type I was investigating. I seldom provided information about the whole project, but only what was relevant to the specific individual. This approach was chosen because informants at this level seldom possess the relevant knowledge regarding the academic framework that is structuring the study other than their specific knowledge of elements of one indicator (Lofland et al. 2006: 46). During field research related to two specific sub-types – security sector reform and the comprehensive approach – covert participant observations were used. As John Lofland et al. explain, ‘We expect that many fieldworkers have engaged in [...] short-term covert participation observation and

that their research would have been unnecessarily complicated, if not impossible, had they not taken this staged approach to revealing their research interests' (Lofland et al. 2006: 37). Again this approach proved useful, and a lot of information would probably not have been collected if attempts had been made to collect the data overtly.

When collecting data from local government officials and local residents living in smaller villages and rural areas in southern Afghanistan, I had to be attached to a military unit to obtain access. This was, of course, not optimal, but because of the security situation it was the only option open to me. Although this approach limited the availability of open and free discussions with the locals – because I was approaching them as part of a military patrol wearing a uniform – interviews conducted with lower-level government officials at district level proved valuable. This was probably because these individuals are used to talking to people in uniform, and because the units I followed had built up a certain level of confidence between themselves and the local representatives.

Also, when gathering data for the sub-type on security sector reform, the level of creativity was important. To collect data on operational proficiency, I was 'embedded' with British advisory teams attached to an Afghan army unit. Here I participated in small-scale combat operations, during which I was able to collect data through observations and loosely structured questions.

#### ***2.2.4 Interview guide and interviews***

Interview guides were developed for each sub-type. The interview guides include the overall subjects that were to be covered during the interviews (Kvale 1998: 133). They were constructed as semi-structured guides, meaning that they were not to be

followed strictly but to be used as what Jette Fog calls ‘thematic lists’. Such lists can be used to get the interview started, and they represent the framework under which the questions are to be asked. At the end of the interview, the list can again be used to sum up and to evaluate whether all the relevant information has been collected. The thematic lists are also useful if the interview develops in a wrong direction (that is, to other fields) and the interviewer needs to re-launch the interview (Fog 2004: 45-6).

All the interview guides representing the four sub-types were generated from one overall research question (the main question), which was formulated to catch a number of underlying aspects. The main questions are to be seen as the point of departure and, when asked, they frame the overall knowledge-gathering objective of the interview (Kvale 1998: 133-4, 136). Thematically all interview guides were subdivided into a number of categories relating directly to the sub-type and the theoretical framework of the study (for examples see Appendixes 1 and 2) (George and Bennett 2005: 86). This approach is fundamental to the structured, focused comparison method developed by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, which is followed in this study.

As already mentioned, actual interviews were structured as semi-structured interviews, where the interview is rather to be seen as a conversation framed by some main questions. Beth L. Leech describes the semi-structured interview as an approach that can ‘provide detail, depth, and an insider’s perspective, while at the same time allowing hypothesis testing [...] [using] semistructured interviews with open-ended questions’ (Leech 2002: 665). In this research, I also chose to use open-ended questions. This approach permits the informant to engage in the interview at greater depth, in a more nuanced fashion that is less controlled by the interviewer (Aberbach and Rockman 2002: 674). The main questions were developed by using several types of interview questions, such as ‘introductory questions’, ‘probing questions’, ‘indirect

questions’ and ‘specific questions’ (Kvale 1998: 129, 136-8). Below are some examples taken from the interview guides:

Introductory questions:

‘Can you give your overall view on the peace support operation in the country?’

Probing questions:

‘Do you regard the allocation of funds to MOD and ANA as controlled by the parliament, and is it a transparent system?’

Indirect questions:

‘Describe the institutional set up of the Afghan National Army regarding education and the operational role.’

Specific questions:

Used when the main question has not led to a reply framing the underlying elements.

The data collection strategy used for this research project was to conduct as many interviews under each sub-type until the data collected begin to show a pattern. As Bente Halkier writes, it is common in qualitative data collection for the researcher to keep interviewing and observing until he or she finds the data collected being reproduced (Halkier 2008: 35). This is an effect I experienced during all the field research trips. My experience shows that, when between 25 and 30 interviews had been conducted on each sub-type using the same interview guide, the information being received begins to show a pattern.

Apart from using this approach, all field trips were initiated with a ‘pilot interview’ normally conducted in Kabul with informants with whom I had some sort of

relationship of confidence. Subsequent to this interview, I normally covered the operational and tactical levels and from there moved back to the strategic level with the new empirical knowledge gained. This approach proved valuable because it enabled me to fill in the gaps in my knowledge when collecting data in an environment in which not all data had previously been revealed. In this way, I avoided situations in which I might waste the time of high-level informants, and this enabled me to be fully updated on the situation and concerns of the sub-type I was investigating (Leech 2002: 665).

## **2.3 Problems and limitations**

### **2.3.1 Causality**

Causality refers to the relationship between cause and effect, where the independent variable X (cause) is the explanatory causal factor that affects the dependant variable Y (effect). In an attempt to explain the cause of a specific outcome, the researcher often works backwards in the investigation, thus using a cause-of-effect approach. In doing so, it is imperative that it is X that affects Y if causality is to be maintained throughout the study. One of the fundamental considerations of a qualitative researcher relating to causality and the extent of 'cause' is an assessment of the necessary number of causations. At this level, the researcher has to identify the necessary number of variables and their combinations to enable the effect to be explained (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 230-2).

Overall two causal relations can be identified: the probabilistic and the deterministic. The starting point for the probabilistic causal relation is that the world is incredibly complex and that causation is never 100% certain. In using the probabilistic understanding, it will not be possible to infer causation that can verify with certainty that if X then Y will happen. Because of this, a high number of variables are needed

to enhance the possibility (but not 100%) of causation. Through a specification of the circumstances under which X departs, it is possible to enhance the probability of a causation related to Y, but it is not possible to establish a deterministic relationship. The deterministic causal relation departs from the notion that there have to be one or more independent variables to prove causation, and that it is possible to conclude that if X then Y. In the deterministic approach, single case studies are allowed (Brady 2008: 224-6).

In this study, nation-building represents the dependant variable (Y), the international military engagement the independent variable (X). The four within-cases – being the sub-types of X – represent the systematised concepts that are operationalised and assessed (see further, next section). In this study, the four sub-types are crucial to determining causality between X and Y because it is these that show whether there is causation in the study.

X (military role) → Sub-type 1, Sub-type 2, Sub-type 3, Sub-type 4 → Y (nation-building)

Figure 2.2: Study causality.

By listing a number of sub-types that can be identified and derived from the independent variable, single case studies are allowed because the deterministic causation can therefore be exposed (cause-of-effect).

The selection of the empirical case for the study rests on what could be called a positive selection. The empirical case has been chosen based on the current development and lack of obvious positive results and has been guided by the following working hypothesis: ‘The involvement of the international military in

nation-building in Afghanistan is far from optimal, because many of the military tasks are not supportive of nor supported by the other actors involved in the country.’ As a result, the study will investigate the reason for the missing results within the empirical case. The case has therefore been chosen on the basis of the dependant variable (nation-building), which could lead to some criticism from quantitative researchers especially. Traditionally qualitative researchers counter this criticism by stating that it is exactly within-case analysis that allows for causal interference that is fully legitimate, including in studies where N is 1 (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 239). Of course, it is vital for the within-case analysis to be built on clear and precise definitions of the central concepts of the study (see further, next section) (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 244).

### ***2.3.2 Measurement validity***

Overall two types of validity can be identified: conceptual validity and measurement validity. Conceptual validity deals with whether the indicators being used correspond to the systematised concept and the background concept: ‘Because background concepts routinely include a variety of meanings, the formation of systematized concepts often involves choosing among them’ (Adcock and Collier 2001: 532). Measurement validity deals with whether we are actually measuring what we intend to measure: ‘Measurement validity is specifically concerned with whether operationalization and the scoring of cases adequately reflect the concept the researcher seeks to measure’ (Adcock and Collier 2001: 529).

Measurement validity is central to this study because it focuses on creating the right relationship between the concept that is being investigated and the observations that are being conducted. As Adcock and Collier state, ‘Do the observations meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the concept?’ (Adcock and Collier 2001: 529). Thus

measurement validity ensures that there is a relationship between what is observed and the systematised concept (see Figure 2.3 below and level 2-4). This relationship is created when the ‘tool’ we are using to observe (e.g. the interview guide) has been systematically derived through the operationalisation of the systematised concept, which in turn has been derived from the overall background concept. If this connection is not in place and operationalisation is incomplete, the possibility of valid conclusions will diminish.

The systematised concept is to be viewed as the point of departure for measurement validity and for the journey from there to operationalisation to data collection and back again (Adcock and Collier 2001: 531). The systematised concept is crucial for validity and has to be defined precisely, based on the overall background concept. The background concept represents the overall understanding the study wishes to investigate. By choosing the case-study approach, this process is strengthened because ‘Case studies allow a researcher to achieve high levels of conceptual validity, or to identify and measure the indicators that best represent the theoretical concepts the researcher intends to measure’ (George and Bennett 2005: 19).

In this study, the background concept is nation-building. The conceptualisation of the background concept towards the systematised concept is therefore crucial if one is to ensure that the study is measuring what it intends to measure. Also, the background concept should not be systematised to such an extent that the possibility of generalisation evaporates from the conclusion (see Yin above; also Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 237). This is a crucial balance to strike. In this study, the background concept will be systematised only so far as to include nation-building in a non-permissive environment focusing on the role of the international military. More traditional nation-building implemented in permissive environments in which the role of the international military is minor is therefore not relevant to the study. However,

the systematisation will not narrow the background concept to such an extent that it only allows conclusions regarding the specific case. As Abraham Kaplan expresses it, ‘the better our concepts, the better the theory we can formulate with them, and in turn, the better the concepts available for the next, improved theory’ (cited in Adcock and Collier 2001: 532).

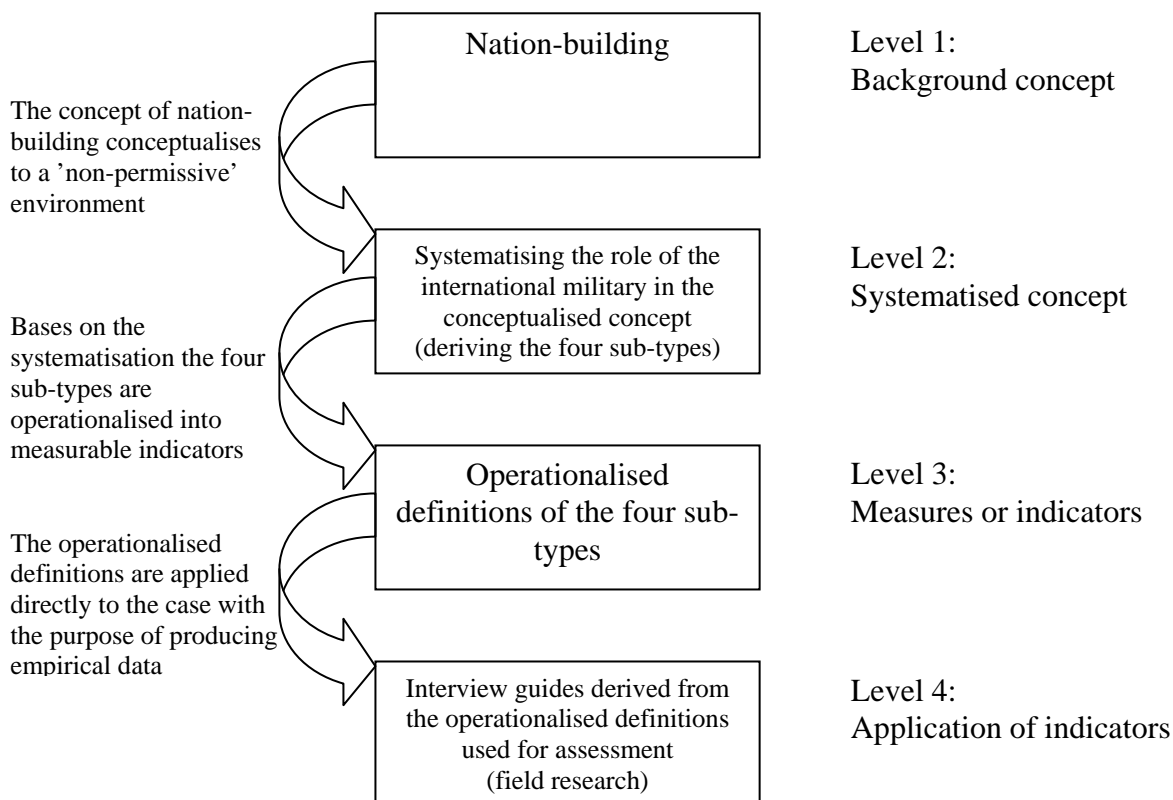


Figure 2.3: Flowchart of the study methodology (Adcock and Collier 2001: 531).

Measurement validity is thus based on the background concept, but it is from the systematised concept that the actual assessment is derived (Adcock and Collier 2001: 533). In this study, measurement validity is maintained on two levels in particular: validating the four sub-types (level 2), and validating the interview guides (level 4). Validation of the four sub-types is done through the identification of these based on the literature on the subject (see further, Chapter 3). When the sub-types have been identified, the next level of validation takes place through the field studies. Here one

field study has been allocated to each sub-type. During these specific and focused field studies, the systematised concept is tested against actual implementation in the field. In this way, the relevance of the sub-type becomes obvious depending on whether the informants can relate to the sub-type or not. During the different field studies in Afghanistan, it became clear that the sub-types were highly relevant and in line with actual implementation, and that the level of interdependence among the sub-types was very high. All these aspects stress the eligibility of the sub-types.

Measurement validity related to the semi-structured interview guides was also tested through the field studies. After the interview guides had been developed through a study of the literature on the subject (sub-type), their actual use in the field proved their eligibility. An average of 25 interviews were conducted per field trip. Here the same interview guides for each sub-type were used with informants located at the same organisational level in different institutions. Through this process, the interview guides were adapted and administered with an overall level of success.

In sum, by fully applying a ‘by the book’ research design, the level of reliability and validity will be high. The reliability of the study framework – the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 3 – determines the overall consistency of the study, which in turn will contribute to validity by clearly showing that what I claim to be measuring actually is being measured. Although it has been a challenge to follow this explanatory research design strictly, it proved to work in the field, which has also contributed to the level of replication of the study.

The overall choice of undertaking a single case study has challenged the extent of my conclusions and raised the question of whether it is at all possible to draw any conclusions beyond the confines of this case. If the study can only reach conclusions specific to this case, the possibility of filling the gap in the literature identified in

Chapter 1 will be extremely limited. Focusing on the more generic level, the research design allows for conclusions on three levels – individual sub-type, across sub-types and beyond Afghanistan. As will be shown in the following chapters, the research design has allowed me to generate conclusions that will fill the identified gap in the literature by correlating individual sub-type findings with parallel sub-types and the overall objectives of nation-building. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the identified failures of the mission in Afghanistan can very much be attributed to the lack of amalgamating former study conclusions found through analysis of individual identified sub-types of the military role in nation-building. Therefore the comprehensive research design applied in this study presents a new level of findings of great value for missions such as that in Afghanistan.

### **3. Nation-building and the international military actor**

We have less evidence to suggest that success can be attained, however, when intervention focuses on fundamentally altering the political and social culture of the target state. This is a very different task, since it requires building political processes and institutions, creating a basis for consensual politics, and establishing a political and social environment of trust and common interest. It also demands a willingness on the part of the intervening states to undertake long-term, costly, possibly dangerous, and certainly controversial operations. (Talentino 2002: 29)

As was seen in Chapter 2, it is crucial to systematise the background concept – i.e. nation-building – clearly to an extent that allows for a single case study to be valid, but at the same time permits generalisations beyond the empirical case itself. This chapter has three main purposes: first, to create exactly that level of systematisation that was described in Chapter 2. This will be done by providing a clear understanding of the term ‘nation-building’ as used in this study and through this process to situate the use of the term in the current literature. Secondly, the role and specific tasks of the main actors will be identified. Building on this, the role of the international military and its relation to the overall framework of nation-building will be presented. Thirdly, the identified tasks of the international military will be operationalised into clear measurement criteria that have been used to structure and focus the individual field studies and the following analysis.

#### **3.1 Identifying the background concept of nation-building**

When looking at the combined results of more than twenty large-scale missions that have been and still are active from the beginning of the new era of nation-building with the mission to Namibia in 1989 and UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s report, *An Agenda for Peace*, to the present, many would argue that the

success rate of these missions has been modest (Paris 2004: 13-37).<sup>23</sup> It could be argued that the only firm criteria for success that apply to most missions is the minimalist one of claiming that large-scale conflict has not resumed in the majority of them in the aftermath of the initial conflict (Paris 2004: 6; Kahler 2009: 289). However, using broader criteria in line with the definition offered by Lakhdar Brahimi, according to whom the process consists of ‘activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war’,<sup>24</sup> then success seems less frequent.

Criticism directed at the implementation of this kind of large-scale mission by focusing on building everything that comes between war and sustainable peace by external actors had reached a certain level of unity by 2004 (Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 7-9; Doyle and Sambanis 2000: 779-80). Here a number of scholars have identified some common lessons focusing on the under-prioritised ‘creation or strengthening of governmental institutions as a foundation for successful transformation from war to peace’ (Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 8), and the often to unrealistic aims when failing to acknowledge the limitations of the scope of externally sponsored nation-building (Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 7-11; Fukuyama (ed.) 2006: 4-8). The lessons from the missions and the lack of broader end states than the mere provision of security clearly showed that institution-building was a precondition for the wider development of society in the aftermath of the international presence. Dobbins argues that, broadly speaking, there are two approaches to institutional reform as an element of nation-building: the co-option model and the deconstruction model. The former approach involves working within existing institutions, while the latter approach dismantles former institutions with the

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<sup>23</sup> UN (1992): *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*.

<sup>24</sup> UN (2000): *United Nations Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*.

aim of building new ones (Dobbins 2008: 70-1). Most UN-led operations have applied the first approach, most US-led ones the second.

However, the view taken in this study will differ from that of Dobbins. Choosing between the two approaches based on external institutional preferences will eventually create delegitimized institutions in the eyes of the population, and therefore state institutions that are not reflected in the minds of the local population (see Figure 3.1 below for an illustration). In the constant search for sustainable end states or exit strategies, this choice between the two approaches will lead to failure in the long run. As Francis Fukuyama writes, ‘it is only the ability to create and maintain self-sustaining indigenous institutions that permits outsiders to formulate an exit strategy. A lack of conceptual clarity on how to promote institutional development makes it extremely difficult to transition out of the reconstruction phase of nation-building’ (Fukuyama (ed.) 2006: 6-7). In trying to ease this ‘lack of conceptual clarity’, I will argue, the approach to nation-building should be a combination of the above top-down preferences anchored through a bottom-up legitimising approach that takes as its starting point the perceptions of the local population. In this way, the top-down realities of nation-building will be combined with the bottom-up idealistic views of those who are in favour of a full local participatory approach.<sup>25</sup>

Whether the enterprise of nation-building today is too ambitious for it to be realistic, and whether the ambitions of the international actors have simply risen to a level beyond reach, are aspects that concern many scholars (Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 11-14). When investigating the most recent case of Afghanistan, some obvious findings point to the missing link between ambition, resource allocation and the lack of unity

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<sup>25</sup> My understanding of local participation stems from the development literature of Robert Chambers (1983), who advocates a strengthening of local ownership (and thus of sustainability) through enhanced local participation (the participatory approach).

(i.e. of a common strategy), which is not unique to nation-building. In placing this study within the field of nation-building – this being the background concept of the study – I emphasise the importance of incorporating both the realities of external nation-building (i.e. the demands of the external actors) and the quest for domestic sustainability (i.e. legitimacy from below). By viewing nation-building as a balance of the two, I place myself between what Miles Kahler labels the revisionist approach (top-down) and the disengagement approach (bottom-up).

According to Kahler, the advocates of the disengagement approach are in principle bottom-up focused and seek a more evolutionary approach to indigenous political institutional development. The focus is on local solutions and empowerment, the idea being that a strict embracing of the host nation's political apparatus will undermine successful nation-building. Reliance on local elites and their knowledge to guarantee a minimum level of order will not do the trick (Kahler 2009: 296-7). The revisionists' view, as a response to the disengagement approach, advocates five overall policy recommendations for a predominantly top-down strategy for nation-building: a lowering of expectations; intensive concentration on local ownership; multinational coordination; a less intrusive presence; and an experimental outlook. However; revisionists increasingly accept an outcome of 'co-opted or captured peacebuilding, in which resources serve primarily to maintain post-conflict political elites in power' (Kahler 2009: 297-8). This is especially seen in recognition of a missing policy instrument suited to nation-building. It could easily be argued that this is indeed the situation in Afghanistan.

I place the understanding of nation-building as used in this study in between focusing on the revisionist approach using disengagement tools, or put simply, how to do top-down nation-building bottom-up. This involves accepting the analysis made by Michael Barnett and Christoph Zürcher, who argue that 'compromised

peacebuilding’ is the most likely outcome where the interests of the international actors, the host nation state elite and the subnational elite are incorporated to a degree where ‘local elites and peacebuilders negotiate a peacebuilding program that reflects the desire of peacebuilders for stability and the legitimacy of peacebuilding and the desire of local elites to ensure that reforms do not threaten their power base’ (Barnett and Zürcher 2009: 24).

I will therefore work from the definition of nation-building offered by Paris and Sisk who describe nation-building by distinguishing it from state-building; ‘State-building is not synonymous with nation-building. Although the two concepts are related, state-building focuses primarily on public institutions—the machinery of the state, from courts and legislatures to laws and bureaucrats—whereas nation-building refers to the strengthening of a national population’s collective identity, including its sense of national distinctiveness and unity’ (Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 15). When talking of the ‘national population’s collective identity’ it is important to emphasise my understanding of both national population and collective identity.

The national population will not be viewed as one entity, but rather as a nation or a collection of nations within the state-defined territory. The nation(s) is the most crucial and central part of the nation-building process, though this involves not changing the nation(s) but rather creating the state as an image of the nation(s) (bottom-up). The nation(s) is to be the reference object on which all planning and progress is to be based and measured, while at the same time recognising the realities of the external community involved in the efforts (top-down). The reference object is ‘that to which one can point and say, “It has to survive, therefore it is necessary to...”’ (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 36). Thus the reference object has a legitimate claim to survival, which in this case is the nation(s) and not the state. Using this approach, functional state institutions which often resemble the external

measurement for success becomes less important if the nation(s) within the state do not imagine these as part of the idea. The effort in nation-building should therefore be focused on designing a construction of the state that facilitates the nation(s), with its survival and interaction as the focal point. Using this approach, nation-building becomes more than mere state-building, with legitimacy among nations and towards the state being the primary objective or end state of the process.

The central element in this legitimacy among the nation(s) is a collective identity based on the idea of the state. By this is meant that the only element that can foster a high level of horizontal legitimacy among a variety of nations within a state and high vertical legitimacy towards the state is a common idea of the state triumphing over cultural and ethnic issues between its nations (Buzan 1991: 69-82; Holsti 1996: 84-7, 94-5).<sup>26</sup> The notion is not of a collective idea of forming one nation, but of a variety of nations within the territory unifying around the collective idea. Therefore, the collective identity of the idea must be superior and prevail over all other issues. Thus to gain legitimacy, the performance of state institutions – i.e. the government – must encapsulate the collective idea of the state as perceived by its citizens.

In the next section, the overall actors working within the context of nation-building will be identified. Following this, their overall tasks will be identified and presented in Figure 3.1. Here the focus will not be solely on the tasks of the international military, but on the wider tasks to be performed by the major actors in nation-building. In Section 3.3 the specific tasks of the international military will then be specified.

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<sup>26</sup> Kalevi J. Holsti works with what he calls horizontal and vertical legitimacy when describing the relationship among nations (horizontal) and the nations' perception of the state (vertical). When Holsti talks about horizontal legitimacy, he is referring to the tolerance, acceptance and cohesion of the different groups and individuals within a state. Thus the higher the level of acceptance and recognition among these, the higher the level of legitimacy. Vertical legitimacy, on the other hand, alludes to the connection between the state and its citizens. If one or more nations or the majority of citizens within the state do not recognise the idea of the state's construction – that is, if they do not acknowledge the grand issues forming the state – vertical legitimacy will be low (Holsti 1996: 87-90).

### **3.2 The actors and tasks of nation-building**

There can be no government without an army,  
No army without money,  
No money without prosperity,  
And no prosperity without justice and good administration.<sup>27</sup>

This ancient saying from the Afghan region called the ‘Circle of Justice’ is very much in line with the tasks of nation-building identified below and the focus on the role of the international military analysed in this study. Building on the earlier described understanding of nation-building, a variety of actors crucial to this endeavour can be identified. While identifying these actors, it is important to stress that they all act based on individual institutional preferences, while at the same time they recognise that all actions should be based on interdependent relations when implementing nation-building in a conflict or post-conflict context. In contemporary missions in, for example, Afghanistan and Iraq, literally hundreds of different actors are involved. In classifying these, five main groupings can be identified: international civilian government actors, the international military, international organisations, non-governmental actors and host government actors. This variety of actors is then involved in an equally great variety of tasks, ranging from initial security concerns to holding free and fair elections and kick-starting the economy. These tasks for all the actors identified above to be involved in can also be grouped within four overall elements: security, the rule of law and reconciliation, economic development and

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<sup>27</sup> Cited from the Afghan National Development Strategy Volume 1: ANDS (2005): 14.

institution building.<sup>28</sup> All these elements should then be implemented following the principles of good governance and local participation (see Figure 3.1 below).

Today the principles of good governance and local participation are to a large degree universally recognised. Robert Chambers’ book on rural development (1983) has been especially crucial to the debate on local participation and ownership. The importance of good governance is often highlighted in various UN, World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publications (see also Call and Cook 2003). According to the UN, good governance covers eight principles: it ‘promotes equity, participation, pluralism, transparency, accountability and the rule of law, in a manner that is effective, efficient and enduring.’ In my understanding, the concept of the rule of law is more a basic element than a principle, as illustrated in Figure 3.1 (see also Chesterman 2004: 154-82).<sup>29</sup>

<b>Security</b>	<b>The rule of law and reconciliation</b>	<b>Economic and social development</b>	<b>Institution-building</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial and long-term provision of security</li> <li>• Rebuild/reform the security sector</li> <li>• Demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judicial services and justice system</li> <li>• Security sector reform</li> <li>• Reconciliation process</li> <li>• Constitutional consent</li> <li>• National laws</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanitarian assistance</li> <li>• Economic stabilisation and development</li> <li>• Development and reconstruction assistance</li> <li>• Social transition</li> <li>• Land reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution-building</li> <li>• Basic human rights</li> <li>• Capacity-building and inclusion</li> <li>• Political transition</li> <li>• Facilitating elections</li> </ul>

<sup>28</sup> For more on the actors and their roles, see, e.g., Dobbins et al. (2003) and (2007), Dobbins (2008), Ghani and Lockhart (2008), Edelstein (2009), Jones (2002): 89-115, Flournoy (2006): 86-104, Fukuyama (ed.) (2006): 1-16, Paris (2004): 13-39.

<sup>29</sup> For more on good governance, see: <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/governance/>

<b>Good governance</b>
<b>Local participation</b>

Figure 3.1: Elements and tasks for the overall actors.<sup>30</sup>

The international military – the main focus of this study – is especially central in the early engagement of nation-building when one is seeking to attain a permissive state of affairs. By this is meant that creating a certain level of stability or ‘security first’ is generally seen in the literature as a precondition for the other main actors to act. In the non-permissive end of the spectrum of conflict, the role of the military is to create the preconditions and the space for the other actors to implement. This is not to say that one actor should replace the other sequentially as conditions improve. On the contrary, the role of the international military is to foster an environment in which civilian actors can work in a synchronized manner manifesting the military gains. Neither the military actor nor the civilian actor will be able to implement successfully in this environment without the others being present.<sup>31</sup>

In this study, a non-permissive environment is defined through the categories of military engagement (see Figure 3.2 below). The level of non-permissiveness moves along this spectrum from major combat to low-risk military engagement. The absence of violence in the form of organised violence and kinetic activities against the host government and international military forces illustrates the move down the spectrum of conflict towards a peacetime environment. That said, it is recognised that the level of permissiveness is not a constant that can be applied equally across the whole country. A permissive environment may develop earlier in some parts than in others:

<sup>30</sup> See e.g., Chesterman (2004), Dobbins et al. (2007), Doyle and Sambanis (2006), Fukuyama (ed.) (2006), Paris and Sisk (eds.) (2009).

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Doyle and Sambanis (2006): 337-42, Fukuyama (ed.) (2006): 234-8, Sinno (2008): 254-77, Skinner (2008): 292.

even from region to region or from district to district, the level of permissiveness may differ.

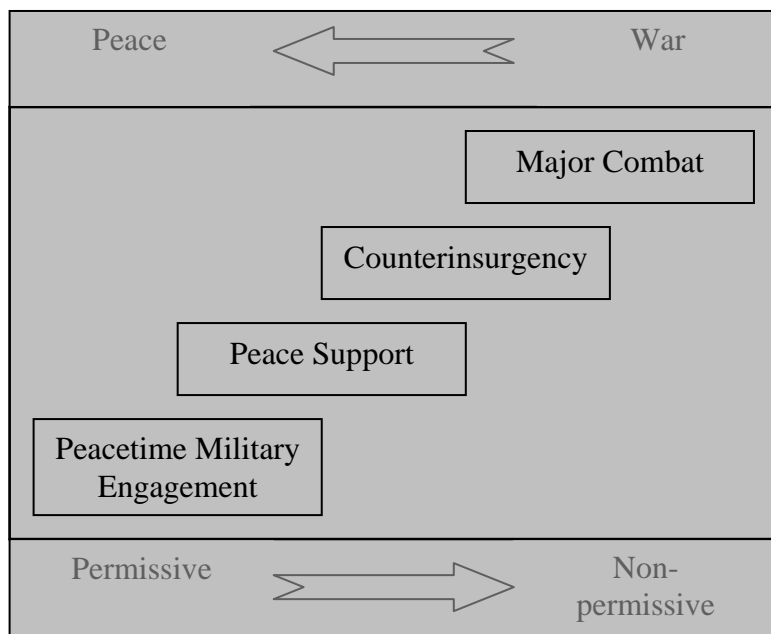


Figure 3.2: Spectrum of conflict.<sup>32</sup>

This chapter will proceed by examining the overall role of the international military when it acts in a non-permissive environment and by identifying the main tasks. When these have been identified, they will be related to the understanding of nation-building as presented above. Lastly, the identified tasks will be operationalised into clear measurement criteria to lead the field studies and the following analysis.

### 3.3 The role of the international military in nation-building

When talking about the international military presence in a given country that is going through either a conflict or post-conflict development, many different settings can be identified. The international military actor may be part of a UN-led mission or of a coalition of willing states, it may work as an individual country, or it may be part

<sup>32</sup> Based on NATO (2009): *Allied Technical Publication 3.2.1 Allied Land Tactics*.

of a regional or sub-regional organisation. No matter what the setting, many of the tasks will often be identical, as determined by the phase of conflict (see Chapter 1) and the context or environment in which the involvement is taking place. The tasks and role of the international military are, however, not static. They have developed rapidly since the early 1990s, when the international interest in and commitment to stabilising states prone to or emerging from war grew extensively (Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 1-11).

As early as the UN mission to Namibia in 1989, a wider understanding of the role of the international military developed as more than the mere monitoring of a ceasefire manning stationary observation posts and checkpoints, as during the Cold War (Doyle and Sambanis 2006: 12-18).<sup>33</sup> In this mission, elements such as facilitating the holding of free elections and the dismantling of paramilitary and ethnic forces were among the mandates issued by the UN. From this mission the momentum grew, and in *An Agenda for Peace*, the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's report of 1992, new roles were described. Apart from the more traditional task of peacekeeping and peacemaking (including peace enforcement), post-conflict peacebuilding was introduced as part of the role played by the variety of actors within the mission (Paris 2004: 13-37). In the 1992 UN report it is emphasised that, in order to be truly successful, missions 'must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people.'<sup>34</sup> These comprehensive efforts include:

disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights,

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<sup>33</sup> See also Security Council Resolutions 432 (1989) and 640 (1989) on Namibia.

<sup>34</sup> UN (1992): *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*.

reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.<sup>35</sup>

All these tasks are designed to avoid the recurrence of the given conflict. The first military intervention, where the role of the military and these comprehensive efforts became almost the same, was the US intervention in Haiti in 1994, where the aim was to establish a democratic government (von Hippel 2000: 96). This is not to say that the military had not been involved in or had not even led such nation-building efforts earlier in history. Indeed, the military was almost the sole leading actor in rebuilding both Germany and Japan following the Second World War (Dobbins et al. 2003: 3-53). The intervention in Haiti, however, was the beginning of interventions in which the military and civilian actors reached a higher level of unity and cooperation, and where the tasks to be performed by the military and civilian actors respectively became more aligned (von Hippel 2000: 100-1; Dobbins et al. 2003: 71-85).

In this study, I am not treating the objectives of the military in nation-building as identical to those of the overall nation-building process. Rather, the role of the international military will be seen as vital for the initial priority of securing the country, while ensuring the crucial connection through to the long-term nation-building objectives and recognising that ‘quick military wins need not translate into long political victories’ (Doyle and Sambanis 2006: 339). This means that the role of the international military should not be seen as equivalent to the final objectives or end state of the overall nation-building process, but as the main actor in facilitating the initial priorities of creating stability and strengthening the security institutions and elements of the rule of law mechanisms of the given country by focusing on both the initial provision of security and long-term sustainability. In the words of James Dobbins, ‘The initial priority for any nation-building mission, therefore, is to

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<sup>35</sup> UN (1992): *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*.

establish a secure environment in which people, goods, and services can begin to circulate more freely' (Dobbins et al. 2007: 13). The ones to facilitate this at the initial stage of a nation-building programme are the international military. In this project, my treatment of the role of the international military will follow that of Salman Ahmed (2005), who emphasizes the importance of strengthening the institutions of security and law and order. This focus corresponds to that of Roland Paris, who, in introducing a model he calls 'Institutionalization Before Liberalization', emphasises the need to focus on 'constructing a framework of effective institutions prior to promoting political and economic competition', the focus being on 'political stability and the establishment of effective administration' (Paris 2004: 187).

Today the international military presence in most of the ongoing missions around the world – which begin within one of the earlier mentioned settings – indeed has the role of creating a minimum level of security. The military has to do this in a vacuum if the host government is too weak to fill a contested political space that is constantly being challenged by, for example, paramilitary groups, criminal gangs or even an insurgency (Kilcullen 2006: 2-4). The international military must work within this context and fill this vacuum until the government of the given country can take over the task. This situation is not unique to nation-building. There might not always be the extreme of a growing insurgency in the country, but in most nation-building operations the capacity of the host government still is too weak to fill the political space throughout its territory (Collette and Muggah 2009: 434). When this is the case, local militias, strong men, criminal gangs, renegade soldiers, insurgents or unemployed former police officers will fill this vacuum, whether driven by individual or collective interests. From the time when a form of peace agreement is in place to the stage when the host government can fulfil the task of filling this political vacuum, the international military forces have to take on this role. Optimally they will do this

together with the other main civilian actors, and their tasks enable progress by the host government. Thus, successful nation-building – as advocated in this study – equals close coordination, cooperation and most importantly interdependent implementation of the main tasks across individual actor’s preferences, that is, adopting a comprehensive approach to programme implementation (something that the current research design will test).

Providing security in a non-permissive environment, therefore, entails two types of military engagement, depending on the level of non-permissiveness, and two approaches or mechanisms within these engagements (see Figure 3.3 below):

- The two types of military engagement are: counterinsurgency and peace support
- The two approaches applicable for both engagements are: security sector reform (SSR) and the comprehensive approach.<sup>36</sup>

Based on Figure 3.1, for the military actor, this will mean the interrelated implementation of peace support, counterinsurgency, security sector reform and the comprehensive approach within the two overall elements of strengthening the institutions of security and the rule of law.

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<sup>36</sup> These four types and approaches will constitute the four sub-types (as mentioned in Chapter 2) of this study.

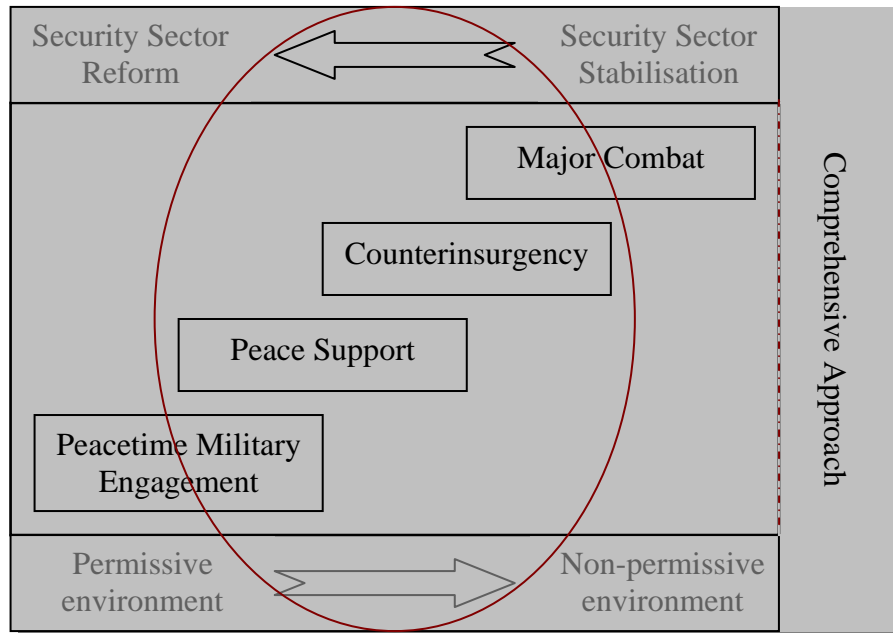


Figure 3.3: The focus of this study.

The element of security provision is connected to the two types of military engagement that involve counterinsurgency or peace support, which in turn involve mechanisms of or approaches to security sector reform and a comprehensive approach to facilitating both security and elements of the rule of law (see Figure 3.1 above). Strengthening the security institutions to enable the host nation to provide this service itself and to establish basic elements of the rule of law requires more than traditional counterinsurgency and peace support operations (which is more focused on mere security provision). To do this and secure long-term sustainability, a comprehensive approach is needed because building national security forces within a security sector reform programme is not a stand-alone endeavour, but also involves other elements of government and other actors than the military one. And above all, all these elements have to take into consideration the overall framework of nation-building by balancing the external top-down realities and the bottom-up perceptions of a sustainable state.

### **3.4 Operationalising the four sub-types**

Building on the above, I will precede by operationalising the identified four sub-types – peace support operations, counterinsurgency, security sector reform and the comprehensive approach. This means that a set of additional independent variables as measurement criteria for each sub-type will be identified and listed to guide the data collection and analysis of the articles produced for this study. The importance of this process is twofold: first, by operationalising the sub-types, I will be able to follow my research design, building on the methodology of George and Bennett’s ‘structured, focused comparison’. This process will enable the design to be replicated for others to use in similar contexts (see more on the methodology in Chapter 2). Secondly, in this process, it will become apparent how the study contributes specifically to each of the four sub-types in addition to the overall field of nation-building. Thus, as advocated earlier, successful nation-building involves the close coordination, cooperation and most importantly interdependent implementation of the main tasks across individual actor’s preferences. This research design enables a test of this in the Afghan case. The following operationalisation will be led through literature reviews – or rather bottom-up literature reviews – and best practice within each field (sub-type), where the measurement criteria related to each sub-type will be identified.

#### ***3.4.1 Peace support operations***

The analysis of peace support operations has been structured and focused according to lessons derived from NATO principles on peace support operations. The template chosen is the NATO (2001) ‘Allied Joint Population 3.4.1 Peace Support Operations’,<sup>37</sup> a collection of some of the most important and latest lessons derived from peacekeeping operations conducted by NATO and individual member states throughout the 1990s. The NATO doctrine series consists of dynamic documents which are reviewed, modified and approved by NATO expert panels from different

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<sup>37</sup> See: <http://www.osrh.hr/smvo/Library/ajp-3.4.1.pdf>

member countries on an on-going basis. The NATO doctrine on peace support operations is widely recognised and is also used as a guideline for states other than NATO members and international organisations engaged in peacekeeping operations, such as the European Union, the African Union and the United Nations.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the NATO doctrine template, the literature on peace support operations from the 1990s and 2000s has been reviewed with the purpose of identifying common and additional criteria to those of the NATO doctrine. Through this process, eight measurement criteria to be applied to the case study have been identified (see Figure 3.4).

The literature covering the development of peace support operations, focusing especially on the success and failure of such operations, gained some important insights and new lessons from the UN-led missions of the early to mid-1990s. Moving from ‘the first golden age’ (Goulding 1993: 452) of UN peacekeeping, with ten of the total of thirteen missions during the Cold War being mandated from 1956 to 1974, the second golden age emerged in the early 1990s, with twenty new and very different missions being mandated from 1988 to 1993.<sup>39</sup> In this period the missions especially to the former Yugoslavia with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) from 1992 to 1995 and the subsequent NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), the United Nations missions to Somalia and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) showed the world the importance of establishing a close link between mandates, objectives and resources, and that the optimism of the late 1980s and early 1990s on the reach of UN peacekeeping was probably overstated (Chesterman 2004: 87-8; Paris and Sisk (eds.) 2009: 6-7). The

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<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., UN (2008a): *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*.

<sup>39</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/list.shtml>

‘Brahimi report’ of 2000<sup>40</sup> and the UN report entitled ‘No Exit without Strategy’<sup>41</sup> clearly illustrated the problems facing these types of engagements.<sup>42</sup>

The principles of UN peacekeeping during the Cold War were often very different from the current ones used in this study. Marrack Goulding (1993) lists five principles that characterised missions in that period: first, peacekeeping operations were United Nations operations; second, they could only be set up with the consent of the conflicting parties; third, peacekeepers must be impartial between the parties; fourth, member states would commit troops for the operations; and fifth, force should only be used in self-defence (Goulding 1993: 453-5). With the rising number of UN-led peacekeeping missions in the 1990s and the growing complexities concerning especially the nature of conflict, the lack of consent from the parties and the growing examples of proactive UN actions from the peacekeepers towards hostile parties, a wide palette of principles emerged from field experiences (Yamashita 2008: 616). Elements such as the gap between mandate and resources, weak organisational structures, the low level of coordination and cooperation within missions, the complexities of particular conflicts, the large external expectations of the mission objectives, the problems of establishing ‘end dates’ and not end states, the lack of unity among the external contributors to a mission, differentiated rules of engagement and so on were identified by several practitioners and scholars.<sup>43</sup>

In 2008 the UN publication on principles and guidelines from the Best Practices Section identified several new principles in addition to the basic ones of consent, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence. In this publication, the

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<sup>40</sup> See: UN (2000): *United Nations Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*.

<sup>41</sup> See: UN (2001): *No Exit without Strategy: Security Council Decision-Making and the Closure or Transition of United Nations Peace Operations*.

<sup>42</sup> See also Call and Cook (2003).

<sup>43</sup> UN (2000): *United Nations Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*. See also Chesterman (2004): Chapters 2, 3 and 7, Doyle and Sambanis (2006), Paris (2004): Part III, Stedman, Rothchild and Cousens (eds.) (2002): Chapter 2, and Jakobsen (2006): Chapter 1-4.

concepts of legitimacy, credibility and the promotion of national and local ownership are included as elements derived from recent experiences.<sup>44</sup> In the figure below, these developments and the principles derived from the NATO doctrine are supplemented with literature based on the development of peacekeeping. These identified principles are then grouped into eight measurement criteria within three overall dimensions and used to structure the field study and the following analysis.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Measurement criteria</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Political/strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective and mandate</li> <li>• Unity of effort</li> </ul>	The political/strategic dimension is characterised by coherence among the main actors, the mandate, and the listed objectives. The focus is on formulating clear and attainable objectives (and not dates), and a coherent and cooperative approach to reach these objectives.
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unity of command</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Transparency of operations</li> <li>• Promotion of cooperation and consent</li> </ul>	The operational dimension is characterised by an overall clear, transparent and credible command and implementation of the mission. There the interaction and cooperation among the main actors and towards the host nation is the focus.
Tactical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media plan and public information</li> <li>• Use of force – rules of engagement</li> </ul>	The tactical dimension is characterised by openness towards the media, with a focus on inclusion as opposed to exclusion. Also, unity in the use of force by the peacekeepers is viewed as essential

<sup>44</sup> See: UN (2008a): *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, Chapter 3.

		for successful mission implementation.
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Figure 3.4: Measurement criteria on peace support operations.<sup>45</sup>

By listing these lessons from the past and applying them to the current mission in Afghanistan, this study will contribute to the field by evaluating whether the problems are still the same – have the lessons from the past been learned, and can new lessons can be identified for future missions to learn? My contribution within this sub-type will therefore be a test of the principles and lessons of earlier peace support operations in relation to a case that, for many reasons, can be characterised as a difficult one. The mission in Afghanistan is to a large extent unique in terms of its scale, intensity and vigilance, which provides the ‘ultimate’ test-bed for the more or less universally accepted principles of peacekeeping.<sup>46</sup> This is especially the case because the mission was regarded as such by most in the initial three to four years of the engagement, and still is by some states working in the more permissive parts of the country. Through this test it is shown that many of the problems facing the mission are not new, but are well-known dilemmas that the earlier developed principles were designed to minimise. This means that, not only was the principles of counterinsurgency – as shown later – ignored or forgotten in the initial phase of the campaign from 2006, the frequently applied principles of peacekeeping were also sidelined to make room for the national interests of the individual states engaged in Afghanistan. In addition to this, and even though Afghanistan is not a UN peacekeeping operation as such, this study also shows that most of the principles of

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<sup>45</sup> The individual characteristics of the measurement criteria are listed in the publication covering this sub-type. In the interview guide that was used for the field trip covering this sub-type, a total of eleven different measurement criteria were used. During the interviews and following analytical work, however, it became clear that the original eleven criteria could be grouped into the above eight ones. This made the analysis somewhat less complicated. See Appendix 1 on peace support and Thruelsen (2007): Appendix 1.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations publications from 2008 and 2003 respectively: *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, and *Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations*.

peacekeeping also apply in this environment, which today is generally characterised as an insurgency.<sup>47</sup>

### ***3.4.2 Counterinsurgency warfare***

As with all the sub-types analysed in this study, the investigation of the counterinsurgency element has been based on field studies, and a research agenda developed through a literature review and recent developments of the field. Nor has this study been dealt with in isolation from the other three sub-types, so in particular, elements of security sector reform and the comprehensive approach can be identified throughout the analysis. The focus on this sub-type will, however, still be on the historical lessons of counterinsurgency applied to one of the most recent cases. As shown in the article on counterinsurgency by alliances, the analysis is not the traditional one of investigating a unified or sole state actor engaging in a counterinsurgency campaign. By choosing to focus on the military role in nation-building in Afghanistan, I am also choosing to investigate counterinsurgency by an alliance, namely NATO (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010). With the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan being the first to be conducted by an alliance, the measurement criteria to be used in the field could not fully be developed by or be made to rely upon historical findings. Therefore, the primary focus of the field study was derived from the overall principle of unity that has been applied to most military operations throughout history (as also seen in the sub-type on peace support above), and the urge to find out how unity is expressed in the current mission in Afghanistan.

The overall philosophy behind unity – unity of command and unity of effort – is that the main actors within a campaign work, cooperate and allocate resources in

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<sup>47</sup> For obvious reasons, the principles of neutrality and impartiality do not apply in the counterinsurgency role. For more on the relation between the principles of peace support operation and counterinsurgency, see Friis (2010).

accordance with an overall plan and a common goal. The importance of unity as a principle of military operations was made manifest during the allied nations' experiences of the Great War (Hope 2008: 1-2). At this time, Marshal Foch (France) paid special attention to this issue when in 1918 he said to General Pershing's liaison officer (USA): 'I am the leader of an orchestra. Here are the English basses, here the American baritones, and there the French tenors. When I raise my baton, every man must play, or else he must not come to my concert' (cited in Mott 1979: 228). Foch thus emphasised that an overall, agreed-upon strategy should lead campaigns, not individual preferences or national agendas. Relying on the same understanding of unity as Marshal Foch, David Kilcullen elaborates on unity in the counterinsurgency environment by concluding that 'you cannot command what you do not control. Therefore, "unity of command" [...] means little in this environment. Instead, we need to create "unity of effort" at best, and collaboration or deconfliction at least' (Kilcullen 2006: 4) if a mission is to make progress.

Today, unity of effort and command is in theory a non-negotiable principle within NATO. NATO doctrine states that the resources and personnel allocated to a given mission should be under the command and control of the mission, and that everyone involved should work in accordance with an overall strategy (NATO 2007a: 1-2, 2-1). Looking at cases of classic counterinsurgency, the mere fact that the majority of all historical campaigns have been implemented by a unitary actor has to a large extent eliminated the challenge of unity. However, in campaigns such as the first and second wars in Chechnya, the Russians had to work hard for unity in particular because of the different national security services involved in the campaign. The same can be said with reference to the US engagement in Vietnam, where true unity of command was probably never achieved either (Hope 2008: 5-6). Also, the British learned from the Malaya experience that unity between the military, civilian and

economic components is crucial for effective counterinsurgency operations (Metz 1995: 5).

When reviewing past lessons, it is, as David H. Ucko emphasises, important to acknowledge that counterinsurgency operations – as with conflicts in general – are not fully comparable:

It is sufficient to consider the sharp contrasts between the British campaign in Malaya, the American experiences in Vietnam, and its later engagement in Iraq to realize that nominally similar campaigns often share few commonalities. Not only is each campaign marked by its specific circumstances and context, but each is also uniquely shaped by its political essence. (Ucko 2009: 11)

Nonetheless Ucko continues to identify a conventional set of broad principles that can be derived from the historic campaigns of counterinsurgency. They are: i) a nuanced political understanding, ii) a unified command, iii) intelligence-guided operations, iv) isolating insurgents from the population, using a minimum of force, and v) assuring and maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of the population (Ucko 2009: 11). These principles have been identified from historical campaigns such as Indochina, Malaya, Algeria, Vietnam and Northern Ireland from the 1950s to the 1970s.<sup>48</sup> In particular, the importance of assuring that the counterinsurgent – that is, both the international and national actors involved in the struggle – was perceived as a legitimate actor by the local population became a crucial lesson, as did the realization that a lack of such legitimacy will often result in a prolonged insurgency (Galula 1964, Maloney 2008, Metz and Millen 2004, Pirnie and O’Connell 2008).

In talking about legitimacy, two elements are stressed: the legitimacy of the national government or host nation, and the legitimacy of the counterinsurgency security

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<sup>48</sup> See also, e.g., Galula (1964), Thompson (1966), and Metz (1995).

force. A legitimate government can often be compared to an entity that has the capacity to provide basic services for the population – services such as jobs, education, health care and especially security. If the government does not provide these services, an insurgency will enjoy extremely favourable conditions. And if the local population regards the government as corrupt and as lacking the ability to provide basic security, their incentive to support the government against the insurgents will be undermined. As Steven Metz notes, ‘In essence, insurgent strategists had two tasks: first, strip legitimacy from the regime, and, second, seize it themselves’ (Metz 1995: 4). Or, as a recent RAND study argues: ‘Any government that fails to provide for its citizens’ safety will be unworthy in their eyes and that much more vulnerable to insurgency.’ (RAND 2008: xxxii). Consequently, the provision of basic services and the creation of stable and sustainable national security forces – military and police – are pivotal in winning the support of the population. If the local population cannot see a legitimate alternative to the international security presence and an alternative to intimidation by the insurgents, they will not openly support the government (Metz and Millen 2004: 11). Thus, the success of any counterinsurgency campaign depends ultimately on the ability of the host government to provide accessible, affordable and corruption-free basic services and security for its population.

Although sometimes neglected in contemporary counterinsurgency literature, the establishment of efficient national security forces has been central to the Afghan campaign.<sup>49</sup> The emphasis on national security forces has recently been reproduced in some of the newest doctrines, such as the US Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3-24, which stresses that ‘Developing effective HN [Host Nation] security forces—including military, police, and paramilitary forces—is one of the highest priority

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. the British-led police programme in Malaya and the build-up of the host nation’s military by the US in Vietnam. For more on the use of advisors in this regard in counterinsurgencies, see Ucko (2009): 36-9.

COIN [counterinsurgency] tasks’ (US 2007: 6-22). Several empirical lessons based on classic counterinsurgency campaigns support this point, as Marcus Skinner has observed. First, the establishment of security and the rule of law to win the support of the local population are crucial. Secondly, the national security forces, and especially the police, ‘provide a vital connection to the people...’. Finally, the provision of security is a precondition for the state’s survival (Skinner 2008: 292). Thus, the importance of incorporating this focus into the campaign plan early in the engagement is emphasised.

As the focus of this study is on the efforts of the international military, I will not be dealing with the process of and progress in enhancing the legitimacy of either the Afghan government or the local Afghan security forces. However, I will focus on the external counterinsurgents’ efforts, as a crucial military task, to build the Afghan security forces – because of their importance in creating legitimacy – and in the publications on the sub-types of security sector reform and the comprehensive approach, the legitimacy of the Afghan government has been included (see figure 3.6 and 3.7 below). To cover the sub-type on counterinsurgency, one article has been written focusing on the insurgency – with the understanding that a counterinsurgency strategy can only be developed through an in-depth understanding of the opponent. And one other article focuses on the internal dynamics of the counterinsurgent, namely NATO operations in southern Afghanistan. In Figure 3.5 below, the measurement criteria used in the field studies on counterinsurgency are listed. All the criteria have been derived from the literature described above and the literature addressed in the articles.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Measurement criteria</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>The insurgent</b>		
Knowledge	PMESII – Political, Military,	This dimension is characterised by a

development	Economic, Social, Infrastructure and Information	need to fully understand the opponent of the counterinsurgent. It builds on the understanding that only holistic analysis covering all elements of the opponent has to be conducted for a thoroughly understood and derived strategy to be formulated.
<b>The counterinsurgent</b>		
Leadership	Unity of effort and command	This dimension is characterised by the need for all actors and their instruments to work in accordance with an overall holistic strategic understanding. The initial objectives and ultimately end state must be shared for mission success to be within reach.
Strategic and tactical coherence	Host nation security forces	This dimension is characterised by the surge to create a legitimate alternative to the external counterinsurgency force. Without coherence towards this task, the possibility of the insurgency being prolonged and strengthened is overwhelming.

Figure 3.5: Measurement criteria on counterinsurgency.<sup>50</sup>

My contribution to the field lies primarily within two areas: a study of counterinsurgency conducted by an alliance, and a study of the rebuilding of national security forces in a counterinsurgency context. The former is important because it provides new empirical evidence together with a critical analysis of the merits of

<sup>50</sup> See: Thompson (1966), Smith and MacFarland (2007), Nissen (2008), NATO (2008), and NATO (2007b).

alliances within this field and the ultimate importance of coherence. Afghanistan being the first counterinsurgency campaign to be fought by an alliance, the study is able to offer both new practical and theoretical knowledge of the prospects of this kind of engagement. Basically the reach of alliances fighting a counterinsurgency campaign will be identified from this study, for coming engagements to learn from by not repeating the same mistakes. The latter contribution focusing on the national security forces provides a thorough account of the role and challenges of building these forces in a cooperative and sustainable manner. This element of counterinsurgency has generally been under-studied, even though it is recognised by most as one of the crucial elements of such a campaign. In addition to the above, the analysis of the insurgency in southern Afghanistan contributes to the existing debate and the constant endeavour to understand both the Taliban and insurgencies per se, and thus to the much needed process of knowledge development.

### ***3.4.3 Security sector reform***

The field research and the analysis on security sector reform (SSR) have been designed on the basis of a literature review focusing on the development of SSR from the early 1990s to the 2000s, when both the debate and conduct changed markedly. Because of the contested environment in Afghanistan, the analysis has been coupled with some of the overall criteria for counterinsurgency (as described in section 3.4.2 above). This has been made necessary because the principles for SSR proper are not fully applicable in this environment, but rather focused on the process following the insurgency. Dealing with both security provision in a counterinsurgency environment and SSR, the role of the international military forces is directly linked to the concept of nation-building as understood in this study. When the local population (the bottom-up perspective) becomes a crucial element for the overall project, the provision of security and the SSR programme must be focused on citizens'

perceptions of security and their image of a basic level of security (as opposed to security defined by the international military) and legitimate host nation forces.

The term ‘security sector reform’ as we know it today originates from the debate in the 1990s on security issues related to donor activities, especially the Cold War-era military assistance programmes that focused solely on training and equipping the security forces without paying attention to political oversight and democratic governance (Brzoska 2003: 3-4; Hendrickson and Karkoszka 2005: 21-2; Hendrickson 2009). This was at a time when the whole area of post-conflict peace-building was developing rapidly and when the earlier and more visible clear cut between development and security was beginning to evaporate, largely because it was recognised that the security institutions of the country involved had to be made part of the solution (Ball 2004: 2; Smith 2001: 6-13). The concept developed rapidly into an instrument to be used by the variety of actors involved in peace-building missions ranging from Bosnia and Kosovo in the mid- to late 1990s to the current missions in Iraq and Afghanistan (Collette and Muggah 2009: 427).<sup>51</sup> In the early missions to Bosnia and Kosovo, the concept was implemented in its more original sense to reform or rebuild the security sector of the country in order to create new institutions in which the population could regain trust and which was controlled by a legitimate government. Basically this was built on the idea that ‘an unreformed security sector represents a decisive obstacle to the promotion of sustainable development, democracy and peace’ (Bryden and Hänggi (eds.) 2005: 23). Today it is widely acknowledged that security sector reform is a vital element of any stabilisation effort in a post-conflict environment.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For an example of SSR in the countries mentioned, see Vetschera and Damian (2006), Heinemann-Grüder and Grebenschikov (2006), and Schnable and Ehrhart (eds.) (2005).

<sup>52</sup> See e.g.: United Nations Security Council, S/PRST/2005/30, 12 July, 2005: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/4930062.59202957.html>

In the purer post-conflict environment – the overall permissive one – SSR programmes will be able to follow criteria built on the principles developed by OECD, who define four overarching objectives that should guide the main actors:

- i) Establishment of effective governance, oversight and accountability in the security system.
- ii) Improved delivery of security and justice services.
- iii) Development of local leadership and ownership of the reform process.
- iv) The sustainability of justice and security service delivery (OECD 2007: 21).<sup>53</sup>

These four objectives are very much in line with the three objectives that Michael Brzoska identifies from practices in the field. He points first of all to ‘the provision of security’, second to ‘ensuring the prevalence of certain norms in the delivery of security’, and third to the need for the ‘security sector institutions to perform effectively and efficiently’ (Brzoska 2006: 2-3). Dylan Hendrikson and Andrzej Karkoszka are even more concrete in their listing of seven priorities when international actors are assisting SSR programmes: professional security forces, capable and responsible civil authorities, a high priority on human rights protection, a capable and responsible civil society, transparency, conformity with international and internal law, and regional approaches (Hendrikson and Karkoszka 2005: 25).

In a non-permissive environment, however, many of these elements will conflict with the realities on the ground and with the interests of both national and international actors. The focus on ‘the provision of security’ or ‘security services delivery’ will be prioritised to a degree where it will surpass the longer term objectives of SSR. Of the overarching objectives, derived elements such as the idea only to build proportional

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<sup>53</sup> Similar criteria are mentioned by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 42/ According to Decision No. 2007/11 of the Secretary-General’s Policy Committee.

security forces reflecting both the needs of a country at peace and the economic foundations of that country will not be part of the SSR agenda in the pursuit of initial stabilisation.<sup>54</sup> In the stabilisation environment, the provision of security will be the main focus, regardless of economic sustainability or peacetime stability.<sup>55</sup> The challenge therefore becomes one of connecting the short-term gains with the long-term sustainable objectives so that the contradictory needs of the non-permissive and permissive environments will not complicate implementation, often resulting in fragile, stand-alone solutions (Goodhand and Walton 2009: 306-7).

A number of scholars have identified four overall interlinked dimensions that should be subject to security sector reform: the political dimension, the institutional dimension, the economic dimension and the social dimension (Wulf 2000). All four dimensions must be objects of reform, including within the counterinsurgency context. This is, however, not fully possible in the initial phase of stabilisation in a non-permissive environment such as Afghanistan. Here the long-term objectives of, for example, good governance and civilian oversight will not develop as rapidly as the short-term aspects of building the institutional dimension of the security structures and training personnel. In the figure below, the four dimensions have been supplemented with measurement criteria derived from the earlier mentioned objectives and additional literature of the field.<sup>56</sup>

Dimension	Measurement criteria	Characteristics
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civilian oversight</li> <li>• Good governance</li> <li>• Accountability</li> </ul>	The political dimension is characterised by civilian oversight and good governance. An important

<sup>54</sup> Mentioned as security sector stabilisation in the article by Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (in review): ‘Security Sector Stabilisation and Reform in Counterinsurgency Operations: Case Afghanistan’, *Conflict, Security & Development*

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Elliott (2007).

<sup>56</sup> See: Hendrickson (1999): 24-9, Chanaa (2002): 28-30, Wulf (2004): 4-5, Ball (2004): 6-8, Simonsen (2007): 573-4, Hendrickson and Karkoszka (2005): 24-6, Hänggi (2005): 11-4.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul>	<p>focus here is to develop the local capacity to exercise oversight and control of the security sector. This includes accountability and transparent structures for control.</p>
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of security</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> <li>• Clear division of labour</li> <li>• Rule of law</li> </ul>	<p>The institutional dimension is characterised by the provision of security. This should be driven by professionalism and a reorientation of tasks, transparent structures, a clear division of labour between the elements of the sector, and the establishment of rule of law institutions.</p>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent consumption and allocation of resources</li> <li>• Economic sustainability</li> <li>• Proportional security sector</li> <li>• Anti-corruption</li> </ul>	<p>The economic dimension is characterised by the transparent consumption and allocation of resources and their sustainability. This includes building a proportional security sector in relation to the economic foundations of the country and non-corrupt political control of the budget.</p>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security guarantee</li> <li>• Legitimacy</li> <li>• Non-governmental oversight</li> </ul>	<p>The social dimension is characterised by the provision of a legitimate security guarantee provided to the local population by the government. Both the civilian perception of the security sector and access for independent organisations are important in this dimension.</p>

Figure 3.6: Measurement criteria on security sector reform.<sup>57</sup>

My contribution to the literature on SSR can be identified especially in the article on security sector stabilisation and on the Afghan National Police through the merger of SSR and counterinsurgency. As shown in the articles, the strong focus on security in a counterinsurgency campaign often conflicts with the long-term objectives of traditional SSR, resulting in a process in which each undermines the other. Through my articles I contribute by presenting a model that incorporates both a short-term and a long-term focus to create a fusion between SSR and counterinsurgency, or more concretely what I call the relationship between initial security sector stabilisation and the security sector reform that follows it. Using this approach, I reject the argument that SSR should not be an element of counterinsurgency. By contrast I argue that it indeed is a crucial element of exactly that and that this has to be understood, so that the counterinsurgency campaign is not decoupled from SSR, thus creating a grey zone for nobody to handle. In addition I contribute with an analysis of SSR in one of the most complex contemporary cases. Through field studies – all the way from the political centre in Kabul to combat operations in Helmand Province – I have collected data for the wider academic field to use through my articles, thereby presenting new empirical evidence on SSR in practice. Thus, I use this data and analysis to advance the field of SSR so that it can also be of use in a counterinsurgency context, and not only be seen as an element that is used on the overall political levels following or de-linked from the efforts during the non-permissive phase of the mission – something quite essential for mission progress.

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<sup>57</sup> The interview guide to accompany the data collection on the field trip covering this sub-type have been built around these four dimensions. Each dimension is covered by an overall research question supplemented by additional underlying case-specific aspects. See Appendix 2 on the Afghan national army.

### ***3.4.4 Comprehensive approach***

Since the mid-1990s, use of the military instrument by governments has widened to include much more than traditional military tasks to cover their wider use within the sphere of humanitarian interests (Wheeler and Harmer (eds.) 2006: 7). This wider use of the military instrument was frequently seen in the Balkans in the early 1990s, where the military was used to escort humanitarian relief supplies and where the use of what are often called civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) officers and teams were implementing the more humanitarian tasks of supporting the local population with basic services with the aim of securing their own presence (enhanced force protection).<sup>58</sup> In the early 2000s, the label ‘comprehensive approach’ began to appear in line with the growing understanding of the complexities of post-conflict peace-building.<sup>59</sup> It was understood that the military actor could not work in a vacuum detached from the other actors in the mission or vice versa, and that not only should the military instrument be deployed to an operation, but that political, civilian and economic instruments had to follow too (Schnaubelt (ed.) 2009; Jakobsen 2008: 9-10). In a UN Security Council Presidential Statement from 2001, it is stated that:

The Security Council further reaffirms that a comprehensive and integrated strategy in peace-building must involve all the relevant actors in this field, taking into account the unique circumstances of each conflict situation. The Council emphasizes that a well-planned and coordinated peace-building strategy can play a significant role in conflict prevention. In this connection, the Council underlines that international efforts in peace-building must complement and not supplant the essential role of the country concerned.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., Goulding (1993): 458, and Spence (2002).

<sup>59</sup> While demonstrating this development, I fully recognise that the idea of applying more than the military instrument to the conflict and post-conflict aspects could rightly be traced back to the period following the Second World War. For more on this, see Alderson (2009).

<sup>60</sup> See: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/256/24/PDF/N0125624.pdf?OpenElement> Today the UN refers to Integrated Approach. For more on the UN development of the integrated approach in de Coning (2008).

The idea of a comprehensive approach was developed further, and in 2004 the concept was also placed on the NATO agenda.<sup>61</sup> Later in November 2006 at the NATO summit in Riga the work was formalised, and it was decided to work on an action plan for the incorporation of the comprehensive approach into the work of the alliance (Petersen and Binnendijk 2007). The UN also continued to work on the comprehensive approach, and in 2008 the UN Secretary-General issued a decision for all UN components to ‘operate in a coherent and mutually supportive manner in close collaboration with other partners’ (de Coning 2008: 10). In the decision, it is stated that the country-level management of all missions should include: ‘(i) a shared vision of the UN’s strategic objectives, (ii) closely aligned or integrated planning, (iii) a set of agreed results, and (iv) agreed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation’ (UN SG 2008). In this way, the UN placed a strengthened focus on cooperation and integration at the strategic level in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Research on and the development of the comprehensive approach are still very much work in progress. The field is still at an early stage, and the accumulated lessons from recent field experiences in such diverse cases as the DR Congo, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan still have to be collected and analysed. Summing up recent developments in the comprehensive approach, Julian Brett has identified five themes that have dominated the current literature on the subject:<sup>62</sup>

- The consequences for the security of the civil population.
- Strategic coordination.
- Coherence<sup>63</sup> between security, humanitarian, state-building and other objectives.

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<sup>61</sup> For more on this process, see Jakobsen (2008).

<sup>62</sup> These themes are very much in line with those identified by Friis and de Coning (2008).

<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed account of coherence, see Picciotto (2005).

- The relationship between military and civil actors.
- The formulation and monitoring of goals and results (Brett 2009: 9).

In this study, compromises have had to be made when applying the overall themes for comprehensive approach to the empirical case. With a focus on the non-permissive environment – testing the comprehensive approach in southern Afghanistan – the challenge of coordination and cooperation between non-governmental organisations and the military has not been the focus. As mentioned in the introduction to the publication on ‘Implementing the Comprehensive Approach in Helmand – within the Context of Counterinsurgency’ (Thruelsen 2008b), only a small number of non-governmental organisations with a minimum capacity for implementation were available in the mission area when the field study was conducted. This meant that their role in the local environment was minimal. As a consequence, the focus will more be on the military and other state actors within the frame of a comprehensive approach. Also, the often highly contested role assumed by the military when filling the gap from military implementation to the stage when a strong and broad civilian presence has been established will be dealt with from a perspective of necessity. This means that the needs of the local population in a non-permissive and counterinsurgency environment and the fulfilment of these needs through the delivery of services will be the focus, not who the ‘right’ actor is to facilitate such implementation. A debate on the rights and wrongs of assuming this role is beyond the scope of this project.<sup>64</sup>

Figure 3.7 below lists a number of measurement criteria distributed along four dimensions of actors and measures of the comprehensive approach. The criteria have

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<sup>64</sup> For more on the criticism of the civilian role of the military in this environment, see, e.g., Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et.al. (2008), Wheeler and Harmer (eds.) (2006), and Jakobsen (2008).

been derived from the developments described above and are based on literature covering both the comprehensive approach and counterinsurgency.<sup>65</sup>

Dimension	Measurement criteria	Characteristics
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coherent and flexible political-level set up</li> <li>• Close cross-ministerial cooperation</li> <li>• Holistic understanding</li> <li>• Cross-ministerial support capacity</li> </ul>	<p>The national political set up and support should be cross-ministerial, holistic, and flexible in support of mission implementation (coherence). The focus should be both short-term and long-term, and on civilian and military resources.</p>
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic understanding (both tactical security needs and long-term sustainability)</li> <li>• Local capacity-building (both military and civilian)</li> <li>• Capacity to interact, support and lead programmes in connection with the civilian element</li> </ul>	<p>Sufficient military resources should be available to support and capacity-build the host government at de-central level. It must support and implement elements within the area of operations that will provide the population with basic security. The military planning should be integrated with the civilian one.</p>
Civilian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic understanding (both in support of military gains and long-term reconstruction and development)</li> <li>• Local capacity-building (local governance)</li> <li>• Capacity to interact, support and lead programmes in connection with the military element</li> </ul>	<p>Sufficient civilian resources should be available to support and capacity-build the host government at central and provincial levels. It must be available to support and implement elements within the area of operations that will provide the population with legitimate government. The civilian efforts should be integrated with the military planning.</p>

<sup>65</sup> See: Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al. (2008), Brett (2009), Spence (2002), Schnaubelt (ed.) (2009), Friis and Jarmyr (eds.) (2008), Galula (1964), Pirnie and O'Connell (2008), Mackinlay and Al-Baddawy (2008), and Teuten (2007).

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible and holistic resource allocation</li> <li>• Both short-term and long-term resource allocation</li> </ul>	Sufficient and flexible economic resources should be available to support the military and civilian efforts to capacity build the host government at central and provincial level and to support the civilian and military programmes.
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Figure 3.7: Measurement criteria on comprehensive approach.

My contribution to the field of the comprehensive approach can be seen through my field studies in Afghanistan, where the comprehensive approach has been applied most recently. Here I have merged the comprehensive approach with the literature on counterinsurgency and analysed it in an environment in which both the tools and the connected way of thinking are highly contested. Through a thorough examination of the local context of implementation in southern Afghanistan, I show the clear need for comprehensive thinking in an environment in which it is predominantly state actors that are present. By bringing the comprehensive approach into this environment, I clearly demonstrate – again by using this difficult case – the limits of the comprehensive approach and provide evidence for the utility of the concept through analysis of a case where a failure to fully support and implement the concept has actually had severe consequences. This is in stark contrast to implementation in a permissive environment, where an approach of ‘trial and error’ has fewer consequences for the progress of the mission. In doing so, I am widening the reach and necessity of comprehensive thinking to include a merger of the sub-tactical or local level in theatre with the national strategic political level by showing how the two levels are highly connected. By using this approach, I challenge the accustomed understanding of the comprehensive approach when theoretical understanding meets the real world, that is, the political and bureaucratic national willingness for a genuine implementation of the comprehensive approach.

## **4. Analysing the findings from the sub-types**

Building on the four sub-types identified in Chapter 3 representing the role of the military in nation-building and the operationalisation of these to measurement criteria, this chapter will analyse the work carried out within each sub-type (the articles written to support the findings as listed in Section 1.4). It will identify the findings from each sub-type by analysing these across the articles, covering each sub-type with the aim of providing overall conclusions connected with each sub-type. While doing this, the extent of my contribution to the existing literature on the four sub-types will be clearly presented. In the next chapter, these findings will then be used to produce further conclusions across the individual sub-types within the overall focus of nation-building in Afghanistan and finally beyond nation-building in Afghanistan for more generic lessons to be identified.

### **4.1 Peace Support Operations<sup>66</sup>**

The analysis within this sub-type was carried out in 2006-07. At this particular time, the governments and military establishments involved were beginning to realise that the ISAF mission in Afghanistan had developed (without many people noticing it) from a more traditional peace-support operation into a very challenging counterinsurgency campaign. Daily fighting was (and still is) ongoing, and western politicians and their military apparatus were struggling to establish what was happening, calm the general public, and deploy a suitable strategy and subsequent military approach to deal with the challenge. Because of the context, the point of departure for this sub-type was NATO's own principles on peace support operations. The principles were chosen because neither NATO nor the British (who were leading the efforts in southern Afghanistan especially) had developed their own manuals on counterinsurgency, which meant that no new, updated doctrine was available. It was

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<sup>66</sup> Based on Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2007): 'NATO in Afghanistan: what lessons are we learning, and are we willing to adjust?', *DIIS Report 2007:14*, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen.

also chosen because the principles of peace support had been the basis of operations in the country until then (and still are largely in northern and western Afghanistan) and because many of the principles are directly applicable to both types of operation (peace support and counterinsurgency). As seen in the analysis for this sub-type, the elements of counterinsurgency, security sector reform and the comprehensive approach are all present.

The findings of the analysis can be summarised as follows:

the findings suggest that the ISAF mission suffers from the lack of an overall coherent political strategic understanding of the mission, its tasks and the strategy(ies) used. The implication seems to be one of a mission being implemented with a lack of civilian resources, holistic strategy, interagency coordination and lack of appreciation for the context and importance of mission success – there is a need here for an overall political-military strategic campaign plan. That said, success is still within reach, but a serious discussion of the international commitment, the desired end state and the way ahead is both urgent and important. (Thruelsen 2007: 8)

At the level of political strategy, the analysis showed very clearly that the international military were in deep, with only minimal support from the other strands of influence: civil, economic and genuine political commitment. What was investigated in the sub-type on the ‘comprehensive approach’ was almost non-existent, and most of the strategic plans were to be carried through by ISAF as the main and often the sole actor. Especially when deciding in the summer of 2006 on the ‘Afghan development zone’ strategy (also called the ‘ink-spot’ strategy), it was clear that ISAF, and even ‘coalitions’ within ISAF, were designing and implementing a strategy that the political level did not understand the implications of (Thruelsen 2007: 11-13).

Unity of effort and command at the overall level, and especially when looking at the security sector reform efforts and the actual allocation of forces to the mission, were and still are major problems (as also seen in the counterinsurgency sub-type). The two concepts are not new to NATO doctrine, and the challenges to attaining unity are not new either, though they are exposed at a new and higher level whenever a mission enters a phase of constant fighting. Unity of effort is being undermined by national agendas overruling the joint strategies. This is very visible when looking at, for example, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) concept.<sup>67</sup> Here different national priorities identified in western capitals guide the work in the PRTs, and joint ISAF strategies are only followed if these can be aligned with national priorities (Thruelsen 2007: 29-33). Full unity of command will never be possible in a mission such as that in Afghanistan, and unity of effort probably won't be either. Only when one nation is leading and when this nation has the political capital both to lead and to allocate resources is there unity. This is something that NATO has to be aware of and include in its strategy when engaging in missions of the complexity of that in Afghanistan. In particular, the myriad of caveats – both official and unofficial – have proved to be a major problem for the mission, and even with many high-level political declarations issued to handle the problem, it is still there exposing the challenges of fighting a war by alliance: 'A force needs to be deployed as a genuine addition and support to the whole operation, not just as a political courtesy' (Thruelsen 2007: 22).

Many of the problems facing ISAF became especially visible during the first large-scale operation in the south in September 2006. During this operation – Operation Medusa – the lack of an understanding of the Afghan environment, the military approach and resource allocations became obvious problems. The operation was planned as a traditional military operation where an enemy is overcome and, this

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<sup>67</sup> For more on the role and work of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, see Thruelsen (2007): 29-33.

over, everybody would be happy. Most of the follow-on elements of the operation that were to 'win' the population back to the area by convincing them that ISAF and the Afghan government were the better alternative to the Taliban were never put in place, and those that were came too late and were too little involved in the operational design to influence the phase following the combat operations (which in many instances is the most crucial part). By the end of 2006 insurgents had infiltrated the area again, and many of the gains of Operation Medusa were lost (Thruelsen 2007: 20-2). In 2010 another major operation was launched to retake the area. This scenario replicated itself several times during 2006 through 2008 because of the many entrenched problems of the mission. It was not until 2008 that a more fully comprehensive approach was applied to the mission in the south, though still with many resource constraints (military, civilian and political) attached.

At the more tactical level of the mission, the importance of internal and external communications has also been exposed by ISAF as an element in dire need of an upgrade. The mission communicates on different levels using different concepts, and at the time of writing on this sub-type (2007), ISAF in general was reporting successes and failures related to ongoing operations very openly. However, ISAF has also reported figures for insurgents killed, which is not viewed as having had a positive impact on the local Afghan level, and when the 'robust' rules of engagement have resulted in civilians being killed, communication has often been focused on the number killed and on who is to blame, not on apologising or trying to minimize the damage. It was not until summer 2009 that this approach was changed and 'the blame game', which alienates the locals, abandoned (Thruelsen 2007: 34-6).

#### ***4.1.1 Analytical contributions on the sub-type***

The analysis of the sub-type on peace support operations conducted in 2007 exposed many flaws in the approach to the mission. A large gap was identified between the politically defined end state of the mission and the resources allocated to reach this end state. By this point in the mission it was clear that the international military was almost the sole actor in charge of implementation, and even though ISAF argued for more resources and political will, the genuine commitment to understanding the mission and allocating the required resources was not there. This created a situation of operations being conducted without the proper strategy and without there being sufficient resources available to follow it. When a military machine of this size is 'let loose' in this environment without the proper strategy, resources or counterparts, it will not pause and wait, but will implement its strategy with the means available, trying to fill the vacuum traditionally filled by, for example, civilian institutions. Being one of several actors implementing nation-building in what is a complex task is not a desirable situation because the gains may not be sustainable, applicable or synchronised with the overall project; they might even be counterproductive. Through its contribution to the field, the present analysis shows that many of the lessons from past missions have not been learned. Interestingly, we are not talking about new lessons being identified, but rather saying that old ones have not been learned and applied to this difficult case. The analysis thus shows that the earlier lessons are still valid in this complex environment (e.g. unity of command and efforts), but that the understanding at the political level still has not matured to a degree that will enable these lessons to guide new missions. Alternatively the principles may have been deliberately ignored to make room for the national interests of the individual states engaged in Afghanistan at the expense of mission progress.

## 4.2 Counterinsurgency Warfare<sup>68</sup>

I have written two articles to analyse this sub-type, one on the insurgents and one on the counterinsurgents. This has been done to analyse and understand how the two operate and how they both adapt to and counter each other's initiatives. Without knowing one's opponent, it is not possible to analyse and identify flaws in the current strategy to counter him. The data for the analysis on the Taliban in southern Afghanistan were collected at the end of 2008, those for the analysis of the counterinsurgency campaign mainly in 2009. As can also be seen in the article on peace support operations, clear lines connecting all of the sub-types are visible in the counterinsurgency analysis.

### 4.2.1 *Analysing the insurgent*

The analysis of the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan shows that the insurgents are not losing the fight. On the contrary, they seem to be gaining momentum by constantly adapting their tactics to counter the international forces. What is also shown is that the Taliban – this being the preferred name for the insurgents – should not be seen as a unitary actor acting under central guidance and pursuing a single cause. As the article concludes:

the insurgency in southern Afghanistan is highly localised in nature, being to a large extent driven by local commanders and local area networks often centred on individual commanders themselves. [...] the driver or cause behind the insurgency differs for the local Afghan Taliban and the foreign Pakistani fighters respectively. The nature of the southern insurgency, with the local Taliban commanders working through local knowledge networks with a locally determined cause, implies that a strategic-level 'peace deal' with Tier I of the strategic Taliban leadership will not create the desired

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<sup>68</sup> Based on the following: Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2010b): 'The Taliban in Southern Afghanistan: a localised insurgency with a local objective', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 21, No. 2; and Ringsmose, Jens, and Peter Dahl Thruelsen (2010): 'NATO's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Afghanistan: Are the Classical Doctrines Suitable for Alliances?', *UNISCI Discussion paper*, No.22.

effect of ending the insurgency – there will not be an overall domino effect in these parts of the country. (Thruelsen 2010b: 259)

Even though the analysis of the Taliban operations identifies the local dynamics as being characterised as a localised insurgency working through local knowledge networks, a political level can be identified. The political level is not to be understood as providing the strategic leadership to control all operations, but more as a level which provides strategic political guidance and which is leading the overall structures of the organisation. The lower-level commanders, however, are those who lead the day-to-day fighting. The strategic leadership is focusing especially on the internal management of the top levels of the organisation and on filling the contested vacuum in governance throughout the country. Here the leadership has been particularly focused on filling the judicial vacuum which the Afghan state has not been able to fill, thereby providing an essential service demanded by the population (Thruelsen 2010b: 264-5).

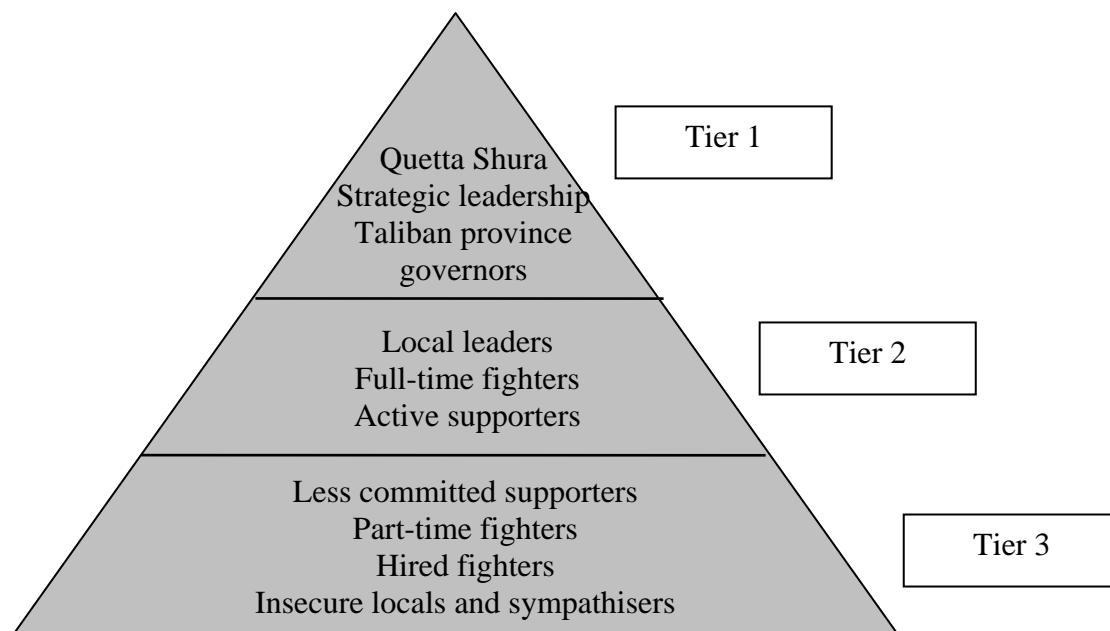


Figure 4.1: Levels of Taliban actors.

The analysis shows that, whereas the political strategy level (Tier 1) seems to be driven by a higher cause, the lower-level commanders and fighters (Tiers 2 and 3) of the Taliban appear to be motivated by a variety of interests. At the lower levels, some commanders and fighters are driven by, for example, resentment towards central control, government corruption, a lack of trust and confidence in the central administration, a history of self-determination, external interference, or simply survival (being on the winning side). It is important and crucial to identify these drivers when trying to tackle the different local commanders. As can be seen in the article, Danish officers operating in Helmand Province have been able to identify these different drivers by assessing the level of activity: ‘Experiences in the province showed that, by leaving the local Afghan Taliban alone, they kept to themselves and did not seek to initiate new fighting. Conversely, when the foreign Taliban were left alone, they continued to seek out the international and local forces to initiate new fighting’ (Thruelsen 2010: 270) The analysis thus indicates that the counterinsurgency strategy should rely on an approach in which the insurgent is expected to react to the progress of the counterinsurgent and not the other way around, as is most often seen. In this strategy, the insurgent driven by a higher cause will seek out the counterinsurgent, and those fighting on the basis of one of the reasons mentioned above will be left alone.

Early signs of such an approach were seen by ISAF in 2008. At that time, ISAF was launching a plan focused on some of the major towns and cities in southern Afghanistan to create an economic corridor connected by the ring road. The idea was (and still is) driven by an understanding that, if security, development and prosperity could be accelerated within this corridor, the population would reject the insurgents in favour of the counterinsurgents. However, as can be seen through the analysis, since the insurgency in Afghanistan is based in rural areas (as opposed to that in Iraq), when ISAF applied its urban strategy, the insurgents adapted and began

striking asymmetrically from their rural base into the urban areas (Thruelsen 2010b: 265-7). The concern now is whether ISAF will be able to protect the urban population while at the same time not losing the rural population to the insurgents.

Through the specific analysis of the Taliban-led insurgency in southern Afghanistan, the analysis concludes by stating that an approach focusing on strategic-level peace deals will not work in Afghanistan. The insurgents in this conflict area operate on many levels, are motivated by a variety of interests and are more localised in nature than is often perceived. These characteristics imply that the counterinsurgency strategy must work on an equal number of levels, apply an equal number of approaches, and most importantly, decentralise the initiative from being a military one to one that also genuinely includes the political components.

#### ***4.2.2 Analysing the counterinsurgent***

The analysis of the counterinsurgent starts with identifying the classics of the field by listing earlier practices and recommendations, and asks the question whether an alliance like NATO can conduct a classic counterinsurgency campaign such as that in Afghanistan when there is apparently no clear leadership. The article concludes its analysis by saying that:

in the absence of unambiguous leadership, conducting traditional counterinsurgency by alliance is intrinsically problematic. Without a clearly discernible leading nation, a collective actor seeking to employ a classical counterinsurgency recipe is destined to be faced with all sorts of collective action problems, including free-riding, inconsistent threat perceptions, and difficulties of coordination. [...] To be sure, prevailing against a weak but determined irregular opponent in an ill-defined conflict is no easy feat for any actor. The NATO-led campaign has shown that there is a clear lack of unity within the mission and that the only solution to the challenge seems to be the emerging US takeover that is currently underway. (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010: 56)

To be able to handle an insurgency, leadership and unity combined with the wider toolbox (i.e. civilian, political and economic aspects) is a minimal requirement. As shown in the analysis of the counterinsurgent, when fighting a war against a weak opponent where the direct threat to the survival of one's own state is not overwhelming, the glue that should unify the counterinsurgents will be weak. This creates a situation in which collective actions are in danger of being diluted by a lack of burden-sharing (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010: 63). In such a situation, the unity of the mission will be hard to establish. As the analysis shows, in the mission in Afghanistan, this challenge is predominantly materialised in national restrictions – so-called caveats – which have created a situation in which large parts of the mission (including the most challenging ones) are being managed by a coalition of willing nations within ISAF. This is especially the case in southern Afghanistan, where the US and a handful of other nations are leading the counterinsurgency efforts. Proper unity, however, is only identified in its truest form at the task-force level, where only one nation (maybe supported by small external contingents) is leading (e.g. the British in Helmand Province) (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010: 64-5, 67-8). Thus, with the US coming in as the predominant actor and bringing the US version of unity – that is, do as we do, or we will take lead – the analysis shows that the new challenge for NATO in Afghanistan is to maintain involvement at a level that allows for influence, so that the US will not implement a counterinsurgency strategy detached from the overall nation-building project, nor do so at a pace that no one else can follow.

The ultimate test of unity can be seen in the cornerstone of the counterinsurgency strategy that is currently being implemented. With the new influx of US forces, the building of national security forces has become the main focus of the counterinsurgents. The approach exploits the lessons of past counterinsurgencies and builds on the idea that an alternative legitimate security provider should be presented

to the local population as early as possible. This will help convince the population that security can be provided for them after the counterinsurgents have left the country. Without this guarantee the population will not reject the insurgents, thus prolonging the struggle and making it impossible for the counterinsurgents to prevail. However, this cannot be said to be widely accepted by the other participants in the mission. When one moves away from the political rhetoric supporting the mission, it becomes clear through the analysis that ISAF is having a hard time coming up with a sufficient number of mentors and trainers for these new security forces. Therefore ISAF constantly lacks large numbers of training teams, undermining the core element of what should have been a common strategy (discussed further in the next sub-type on security sector reform) (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010: 72-6). This problem could be seen both as a symptom of not having a common narrative within NATO legitimising the mission, and as the result of there being too many perceptions of the mission and thus priorities. Even within the coalition of countries that (almost) share a common narrative of the mission and thus a shared understanding of being involved in a counterinsurgency campaign, the shared doctrinal understanding of how to design counterinsurgency operations differs markedly. As a consequence, many different solutions to the task at hand are constantly in competition and the often changing commands are undermining the deeper understanding of the mission and consequently the proposed solutions (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010: 69-72).

#### ***4.2.3 Analytical contributions on the sub-type***

Contributing to the ‘new’ field of ‘counterinsurgency by alliances’, the conclusions of the analysis show that the lack of unity within the ISAF mission is hampering the possibility of effectively gaining the initiative (as understood in a counterinsurgency context) and countering the insurgents. The analysis shows that alliances – here exemplified through NATO – will only be capable of leading such extremely

complex efforts if unity is applied to the mission. The analysis therefore envisages that counterinsurgency by alliances will only work if strong leadership is provided to the mission. In the case of NATO conducting counterinsurgency, it seems that only a small number of states have this capacity in a context where the glue of the mission is weak or missing. In the case of Afghanistan, this leaves a single actor (namely the US) supported by a handful of states to lead the alliance through the struggle, whereby the efficiency of the alliance is reduced to being a provider of strategic legitimacy.

By providing new empirical knowledge to the constant endeavour to understand the local complexities of insurgencies, the study shows that the insurgents work at all levels of the hierarchy, from the lowest tactical level to the highest level of political strategy. The counterinsurgent must do the same, and in so doing, the efforts from top to bottom must be closely coordinated through a common strategy and doctrinal understanding, as this is also identified by the lessons of the past. Another lesson from the past is the need to provide good governance and to embark on a population-centric approach. However, it can be concluded that without unity in implementing a common strategy and with no common narrative surrounding the mission, the population-centric approach will be hard to follow in all areas of the operation. Especially when this approach can be seen as more dangerous for their own troops, many nations have been reluctant to commit themselves fully to the strategy.

Also, as shown by the analysis on the insurgency, the possibility of driving a wedge between the strategic and local levels of insurgent activity and applying a population-centric approach will become more difficult now that the US seems to be the only actor with the political capital and resources available for full-scale implementation. As argued in the article on counterinsurgency, 'Collective action problems, inconsistent threat perceptions, free-riding, and an unwillingness to subjugate narrow

national interests to the need for tight coordination all work to the detriment of the effective implementation of a traditional counterinsurgency approach' (Ringsmose and Thruelsen 2010: 76) and do not help the joint effort. On the other hand, it is also shown that there are two important factors that call for NATO to stay committed: first, to keep providing legitimacy to the mission, and secondly, to balance the US when the latter becomes so focused on achieving rapid progress that it loses sight of the overall nation-building project and the sustainable end state. When the latter happens, the situation of late 2007 will be repeated (as concluded in the sub-type on peace support operations). The military will implement the strategy – this time with sufficient military resources – but the other actors who provide the other legs of the strategy will not be able to follow at the same pace.

#### **4.3 Security Sector Reform<sup>69</sup>**

I have written two articles and a short monograph to support the analysis of this sub-type on security sector reform (SSR). This has been done to enable in-depth analysis of a highly complex element of the programme in Afghanistan and to create a more thorough understanding of the concept in order to improve the practice of the field and to merge the concept with that of counterinsurgency – the latter with the aim of filling the gap between the two. The latest article on security sector stabilisation in a counterinsurgency was not part of the original analytical plan to cover this sub-type. However, having been overtaken by events on the ground in Afghanistan, I felt there was a need to investigate the subject once more in connection with this new development. In particular, the newly discovered interest of the US in Afghanistan, the presentation of a new strategic approach, the influx of US soldiers and the explicit use of the national security forces as a crucial element of the exit strategy motivated

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<sup>69</sup> Based on the following: Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (under review): 'Security Sector Stabilisation and Reform in Counterinsurgency Operations: Case Afghanistan', *Conflict, Security & Development*, Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2010): 'Striking the Right Balance: How to Build the Afghan National Police', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 17, No. 1., and Younossi, Obaid and Peter Dahl Thruelsen (2009): *The Long March - Building an Afghan National Army*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica.

this last article. As President Obama stated on 27 March 2009 when he announced the new US commitment to Afghanistan:

...we will shift the emphasis of our mission to training and increasing the size of Afghan security forces, so that they can eventually take the lead in securing their country. That's how we will prepare Afghans to take responsibility for their security, and how we will ultimately be able to bring our own troops home.<sup>70</sup>

As was also seen earlier in this chapter, the other sub-types are closely connected to security sector reform, which is why the elements of counterinsurgency and the comprehensive approach will appear frequently in this section. Through the analysis of security sector reform covering all the individual studies of this sub-type, three combined analytical themes have emerged representing the combined findings: lead nation and unity of effort; security sector stabilisation versus security sector reform; and transfer of authority. These three themes will be analysed individually below.

#### ***4.3.1 Lead-nation and unity of efforts***

This analysis begins with the overall structural layout of the security sector reform in Afghanistan. The programme was implemented using a lead-nation approach. This means that five nations were each in charge of one of the five main elements of the SSR programme (see Figure 4.2 below).

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<sup>70</sup> 'Prepared Remarks of President Barack Obama: A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan', Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, March 27, 2009: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/03/27/A-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/>

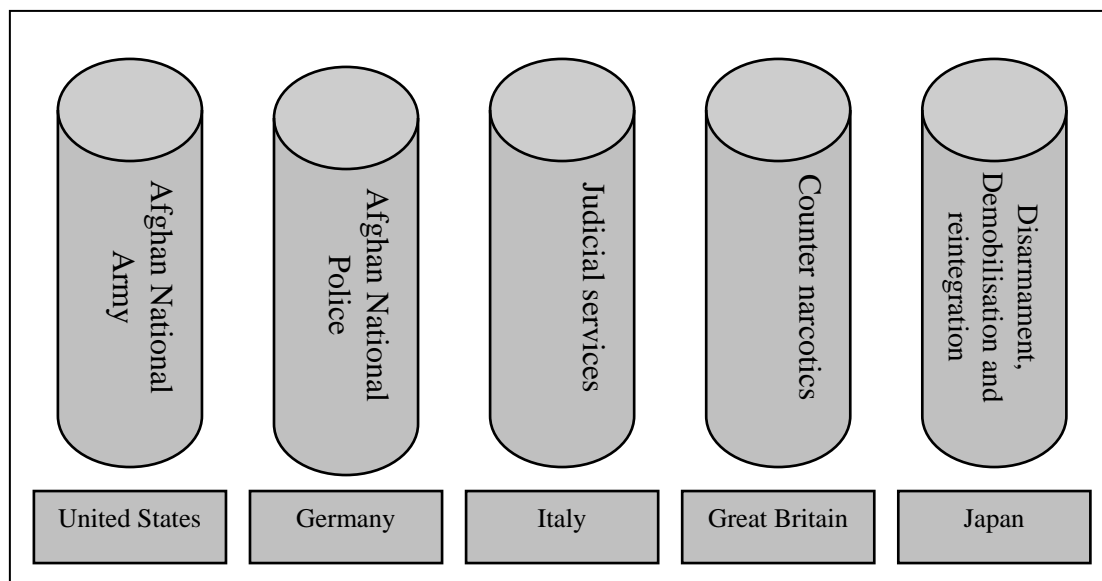


Figure 4.2: SSR and lead-nations in Afghanistan.<sup>71</sup>

The lead for each element of the programme was decided during conferences in 2002 and was to a large extent driven by the understanding that appointing specific nations to lead each element would create a clear responsibility and consequently sufficient political determination and resource allocation for the element to succeed in implementation. However, as shown by the analysis, this was soon identified as a miscalculation, and the five elements of the programme began to develop at unequal rates and in different directions early in the process (Thruelsen 2010a: 82-3).

Analysing the programmes of the Afghan national police and Afghan national army, two quite different approaches are clearly detectable.<sup>72</sup> The German lead of the police programme was primarily characterised by a light approach, with only a minimal presence of German police instructors in Kabul who were mandated to rebuild and develop the police academy. The focus was on building a sustainable programme of officer education equal to a large extent to that of a western police academy. More

<sup>71</sup> Today this division of labour has changed, and other actors such as NATO (army and police programme) and the EU (police and judicial programme) are now also involved. The US has also taken on much of the responsibility for the police programme.

<sup>72</sup> As identified in Chapter 3, I will only discuss the police and army programme in this part of this study.

tactical level programmes to rebuild and reorganise the police working in the countryside and the larger villages were not prioritised. Because of this the US began to involve itself in the police programme, and in 2005 almost took over the German lead. While Germany continued to focus on the police academy, the US took control of the tactical-level training and education programmes. Even though Germany was the lead and kept this role until summer 2007, the resources allocated to the programme were far fewer than the amount spent by the US on the same programme. From 2002 to 2008, Germany spend the equivalent of US\$ 170 million on the police programme, in stark contrast to the US\$ 6.2 billion the US spent on the same programme in the same period (Thruelsen 2010a: 83).

As shown by the analysis in the publications, the US-led army programme forms a stark contrast to the police programme. Several thousand trainers and billions of US\$ were allocated to it, and right from the beginning it was highly prioritised. The US placed a primary tactical-level focus on the programme, concentrating on training soldiers and building a ministry to support this focus, constantly adapting the organisational set up to support this and enabling the programme to counter the deteriorating security environment in the country. The major obstacle to the programme was the lack of burden-sharing and unity between the other nations involved in the ISAF mission and their willingness to support the US in minor ways (Younossi and Thruelsen 2009: 40-2). For the US to free resources to take on the police training as well as the army programme, ISAF needed to become more involved in the army mentoring programme. In May 2006 the first non-US country became involved in this activity when the British introduced their Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) for the Afghan army brigade in Helmand. The British commitment proved to be a strong one, but when the US asked for more mentors from other NATO countries involved in the mission, support only emerged slowly (Younossi and Thruelsen 2009: 34-40). In January 2008 more than half the mentor

teams required were still lacking, and even in the more benign parts of the country the commitment was minimal. In January 2010 the situation was even worse: 21 teams for the army and more than 100 for the police had still not been committed, figures that did not include the new higher numbers of national security personal that were to be trained, which meant that even more mentors were needed (Thruelsen (under review): 20-1).

#### ***4.3.2 Stabilisation versus reform***

Analysing the dilemma of how to balance the short- and long-term programmes, the connection between security sector stabilisation and security sector reform will be considered next. As identified in the analysis, from the very beginning the US programmes have been clearly focused on stabilisation efforts to counter the insurgency and to train as many national security forces as possible to get them into the fight. This can be seen in the approach towards both the police and the army programme. The challenge therefore becomes one of linking this short-term and tactically focused programme with a long-term, sustainable one. In particular, connecting the executive branches of the new security sector to the political level by creating the right level of control and oversight has not been given equal priority. Implementing a stabilisation programme cannot lead to a sustainable exit: only a comprehensive reform programme can do that. In the article on stabilisation, I conclude that:

tactical considerations to turn the campaign around are crucial, but the short-term focus must not become a strategic end state for external states or alliances engaged in the campaign. When this happens, the long-term goals will be undermined and the possibility of a security structure being created that takes on a life of its own within the country becomes urgent. An early transition of security responsibility in this political environment would be risky and needs to be anchored in more long-term programmes offered as part of the SSR package. Otherwise one might simply end up creating more

informally empowered structures that fill the vacuum left by the departure of the international forces, but which are accountable to neither the Afghan population nor the government. (Thruelsen (under review): 26-7)

This means that a clear connection between the security sector stabilisation programme and the security sector reform programme must be properly established and that the former must be guided by the strategy of the latter. As shown in the article, this will create a clear and holistic connection that will help ensure that the short-term initiatives are not implemented in such a way that the possibility of long-term sustainability will eventually be undermined.

The main element missing in the connection between the two is identical to the challenges identified in the sub-type on peace support operations and counterinsurgency – the political component. By this is meant that, without equally supporting and developing a strong host nation governance capacity, progress within this sub-type will be disconnected from the overall nation-building programme and eventually be at risk of undermining the total efforts. The surge for stability will eventually undermine the long-term perspectives. A strong and detached security sector within the framework of a growing but weak government will weigh the balance in favour of creating an end state with the security sector as the strongest component. As shown in Chapter 3, this is far from the long reaching objectives of a nation-building programme.

#### ***4.3.3 Transfer of authority***

The last theme to be analysed relating to security sector reform is when to transfer authority back to the host nation. This development has, to put it mildly, been slow. With much of the process of building the army and police being focused on visible progress, the elements of mentoring and building national capacity have been more

concerned with leading and controlling the national elements. As shown in the analysis, this has had severe consequences for the sustainable progress of the security sector. As I write in the article on the police programme, many of the people involved knew the principles of mentoring and capacity-building, but most felt that there was no time for genuine mentoring because of the constant need to show tactical progress and to minimise flaws in the national handling of current tasks. In addition, a number of the mentors interviewed were often guided by western standards rather than by the criteria that would fulfil the needs of the Afghan population and state (Thruelsen 2010a: 88-9).

Through the analysis it becomes clear that the dilemma of not leading in accordance with western politics and standards but with respect to the national context is a constant challenge when trying to balance the concept of mentoring against the strategic impatience of both the Afghan government and the international community. It was only in the summer of 2008 that the national security forces were handed security responsibility for the capital, Kabul. In the more benign areas of the country in the north, west and central regions, by contrast, the international forces have clung to their role of being a security provider. In doing so, they have not realised that handing security responsibility over to the national security forces would probably enhance their effectiveness if at the same time the latter were thoroughly mentored, and that this would also improve local perceptions of whether the Afghan state will be capable of handling its own security challenges after an international exit (Thruelsen 2010a: 21; Younossi and Thruelsen 2009: 7, 46). As shown in the analysis, however, this has not been the case, which shows a lack of understanding of both security sector stabilisation and reform in a counterinsurgency environment within the context of nation-building.

#### ***4.3.4 Analytical contributions on the sub-type***

Through the analysis and publications within this subtype, the elements of security sector reform with the concept of counterinsurgency have been merged, thereby filling a less studied field of the literature in both fields. More concretely, the relationship between initial security sector stabilisation and the security sector reform that should be followed is identified and to a certain extent filled (Thruelsen (under review)). In addition this subtype has contributed with an analysis of SSR in one of the most complex contemporary cases. As the analysis shows, the major differences to the approaches chosen by Germany and the US respectively could be seen as different perceptions of the task at hand. The US was focusing on creating national tactical elements to join the counterinsurgency fighting, while Germany was more concerned to create a strong corps of police officers as part of a traditional security sector reform process within a post-conflict nation-building setting. Or, to put in military terms, Germany was conducting peace support, the US was conducting counterinsurgency – implying that both actors were driven by different perceptions of the needs and of the task at hand in the country, and were using the instrument of security sector reform in isolation to support their own efforts. Both approaches could arguably be right, however the problem is the lack of a link between the two programmes merging the short-term focus with long-term sustainability, thereby bridging the gap in between. No actor or programme was focused on filling this gap left between the programmes. The above combined with the lack of genuine commitment by the majority of ISAF members greatly weakened the progress of the programmes. Eventually, progress within this sub-type will be disconnected from the overall nation-building programme and eventually be at risk of undermining the total effort.

The model presented in the articles covering this sub-type should be seen as an instrument to follow in order to prevent the two different approaches undermining

each other. By investigating this complexity in the most recent and complex case, a gap in the current literature has been identified for more work to continue (Thruelsen (under review)).

#### **4.4 Comprehensive Approach**<sup>73</sup>

The analysis and conclusions within this sub-type have been reached in two articles and a report on the comprehensive approach in Afghanistan in 2008. The analytical focus has been on the national (Danish) strategic level, the theatre strategic and operational level (Kabul), and the tactical level of implementation (Helmand Province). This approach has provided a more thorough understanding of the perceptions dominating the different levels and the implementation priorities derived from it. Through the analysis, it is shown that the findings within this sub-type can be categorised into two overall themes: unaccompanied implementation of the comprehensive approach, and the national setting and back-up. The two themes will be dealt with below.

##### ***4.4.1 Unaccompanied implementation of the comprehensive approach***

As shown through the analysis of the sub-types on peace support and counterinsurgency, the mission in Afghanistan has to a large extent been characterised by a military actor leading the strategic implementation, and different civil and political actors trying to keep pace. In analysing the comprehensive approach, this dynamic is clearly underlined. Many of the challenges in the local environment identified in the articles on the comprehensive approach entail a non-

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<sup>73</sup> Based on the following: Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2009): 'The Comprehensive Approach in Helmand Province: from a Military Perspective', in Splidsboel Hansen, Flemming (ed.): *The Comprehensive Approach: Challenges and Prospects*, The Royal Danish Defence College, Copenhagen; Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2008): *Implementing the Comprehensive Approach in Helmand Within the Context of Counterinsurgency*, Royal Danish Defence College, Report, Copenhagen; and Thruelsen, Peter Dahl (2008): 'Counterinsurgency and a Comprehensive Approach: Helmand Province, Afghanistan', *Small Wars Journal*. However, it should be said that the two articles have been written on the basis of the data contained in the report.

military solution which should be supported by a comprehensive political strategy. This means that the wider arsenal of actors – political, economic and developmental – is needed from early implementation to counterbalance the military actor and to support and anchor initial progress in the most fragile phase of the mission. This is indeed a challenge in a counterinsurgency context, where more traditional actors like non-governmental organisations are not present, and those that are often do not possess the capacity to exert a greater impact on the development. This is why the analysis shows that a wide range of government actors must be engaged in this context, especially if the military is not to implement a one-legged strategy focusing primarily on the military instrument (Thruelsen 2008a: 9; Thruelsen 2008b: 5-7).

In the early phase of a nation-building programme in a non-permissive environment, knowledge development is especially essential for programme implementation and when designing the proper strategy. As shown by the articles on this sub-type, the local complexity and operational environment require more than just the military actor to identify the challenges and implement the programmes to overcome these challenges (Thruelsen 2008b: 18-22).

As identified through the field studies in Helmand Province – a province in which the local dynamics should not be understood as unique in Afghanistan – the variety of challenges and local stakeholders that have to be dealt with are vast. When local power-brokers (both official and unofficial), militias (some employed by the international forces), weak government representation and administrative capacity, a large black-market economy, fragile national security forces, and a complex web of ethnic and tribal actors are all active in the local environment, the presence of a wide range of actors down to the lowest level of implementation becomes vital for progress and ultimately success. As shown in the analysis, the main insurgent elements in a given area are not always the key challenge when stabilising an area in the midst of

an insurgency (Thruelsen 2008b: 21-2). On the contrary, the non-insurgent-affiliated spoilers and power-brokers and the local population should be the main focus of attention, and comprehensive plans to address these must lead the effort. More or less all the above challenges must be addressed or at least analysed, and this is obviously not a job for the military alone, nor even for the military to lead. As the former commander of ISAF, General Sir David Richards, remarked, the military will often be powerless to implement the full strategy when engaged in a counterinsurgency operation.<sup>74</sup> I reach a similar conclusion through the analysis of the process in Helmand province: ‘In counterinsurgency warfare there is a limit as to how far the military assets can sustain a positive development if this is not expanded by other assets such as civilian ones’ (Thruelsen 2009a: 38). In particular, the crucial and overarching elements of the local and national capacity-building of government officials (often framed as good governance programmes) will be out of the hands of the military actor, but crucial for success in a counterinsurgency context. Without this element the mere number of troops becomes irrelevant, because progress for the locals will be assessed not only by the provision of security, but also by what comes after. The military therefore becomes reliant on the civilian actors to implement these tasks, thus advancing the process of transforming initial gains into sustainable progress. As I conclude in the article published in *Small Wars Journal*:

When implementing CA [Comprehensive Approach] as the desired approach in the context of counterinsurgency [...] CA is about combining military, political and developmental actors to create stability and especially to capacity-build local authorities to perform governance tasks in the area, thereby supporting the overall strategic goal in Afghanistan. [...] The capacity must be developed by international civilian resources working alongside military actors. So, the main aim in developing an integrated approach between counterinsurgency and CA is to foster a development that will create a national and indeed local host nation administrative capacity, capable

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Full Interview: General David Richards’, the Guardian (22 January 2007): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jan/22/afghanistan.afghanistantimeline1>

of providing security and basic needs and services in a manner which is perceived as legitimate by the local population. (Thruelsen 2008a: 9)

#### ***4.4.2 The national setting and back-up***

As concluded from the analysis conducted within this sub-type, the need for a wide number of actors is crucial. But this need can only be fulfilled if an international and independent national set-up is developed by the countries that want to engage in these kinds of complex operations. As shown through the Helmand experience, this set up has to be flexibly structured and prioritised, so that a wide palette of instruments can be made available from early implementation. As identified in the analysis, this is the only way to overcome the challenges of operating in a constantly changing environment and to counter situations such as that in Gereshk in central Helmand, where military progress on security provisions gained momentum, but where this progress was not foreseen and therefore could not be followed up by a wider set of initiatives that could satisfy the highly expectant local population (Thruelsen 2008b: 29-30).

Today it seems logical to most people working on the Afghan mission that the military is not capable of creating the desired progress without the close support and ultimately the lead of civilian actors. This connects fully with the number of independent variables that occur when operationalising the comprehensive approach within a counterinsurgency environment (see Figure 3.7). These variables are diverse and illustrate the diversity of instruments that have to be made available in this complex environment. They illustrate the immense challenge of the environment, but they also stress that engaging in warfare as traditionally understood has passed. Of course, working closely together in providing the necessary assets and implementing them in a coherent manner is a challenge for both military and civilian actors, whether working in or out of the environment. The institutional cultures and working

processes within two such different actors will often collide, and their respective self-images can especially prove to be an overwhelming hurdle. As the analysis shows, close cooperation is not just something to be seen in the mission: at national level also, close inter-agency cooperation must be established and formalised. As concluded through the analysis, the tasks to perform at the national level will be to provide the much needed real-time reach-back that a mission depends on, especially when deploying personnel for only six months at a time. With such limited time available in the mission, lesson-acquisition, local knowledge development and basically how to understand the local context will be minimal and very fragile to sudden rotations, shifts in personnel etc. (Thruelsen 2008b: 36 ;Thruelsen 2009a: 34-9).

The analytical findings therefore point to the need for a national set-up to be structured to support in-mission development with a flexible and permanent institutional set-up for this reach-back capacity. Thus, the comprehensive approach should work at all levels – strategic, operational and tactical – and fill a wide range of tasks, ranging from mere coordination to factual implementation in trying to improve the efficiency and impact of the mission. Implementation with the military as the main player will not provide mission progress or sustainability, nor ultimately acceptable success.

#### ***4.4.3 Analytical contributions on the sub-type***

As shown through the analytical work on the comprehensive approach, this thesis contributes with important empirical evidence and conclusions to this still nascent field of study. By bringing the comprehensive approach into the counterinsurgency environment, this study has demonstrated the limits of the comprehensive approach and provided evidence for the utility of the concept in this environment. This stands

in stark contrast to implementation in a permissive environment, where an approach of ‘trial and error’ has fewer consequences for the progress of the mission. In particular, the application of the comprehensive approach in a context of counterinsurgency clearly provides the ultimate test of the reach of the concept when implemented in a non-permissive environment. As seen in Chapter 3, the development of and debate on the comprehensive approach have been dominated by developments in the 1990s and the more strategic policy level in both NATO and national capitals. Developments in the 1990s have been important, but they can largely be seen as a test tube in a protected environment. This means that whereas the interdependence between the political ambitions of the comprehensive approach and the realities on the ground are ultimately tested in a non-permissive environment, the two realities have to merge otherwise the mission will fail. In the benign environment of the 1990s, the consequences of not merging the two together were relatively minimal. In Afghanistan the comprehensive approach has come up against the hard reality of conflict, and thus the crucial challenge when a strong military actor engaged in a counterinsurgency campaign led to a large extent by military goals is leading the efforts. In this environment, the merger of the counterinsurgency environment with the comprehensive approach has tested the national political will and understanding as to how far the national political motivation and reach go when providing the necessary resources for successful implementation. By showing this, the debate on the field can include the political strategies behind the comprehensive approach by coupling the theoretical national understanding to that of the real world. In doing so, the ‘real’ reach of the comprehensive approach might be found.

## 5. Conclusion

*How can the strategy and effectiveness of the military contribution to nation-building be enhanced? A study of the international military involvement in nation-building in Afghanistan.*

This study set out to investigate the apparent lack of progress in the mission in Afghanistan and the widely accepted fact that the involvement of the international military in the nation-building project was far from optimal and that the many interacting actors were in fact not that interacting – neither supportive of nor supported by each other. As outlined in Chapter 1, this study set out to answer the above overall research question through three parallel and interconnected phases: 1) identifying the dilemmas involved in the approach chosen by the military actor; 2) identifying the reasons for the lack of progress in Afghanistan; and 3) drawing conclusions from the lessons derived from the study. The study's conclusions will be presented covering three levels: 1) conclusions within each sub-type (covered in Chapter 4); 2) conclusions cross-referencing the findings of each sub-type by connecting and relating them to each other and to the overall theme of nation-building; and finally 3) conclusions beyond the specific case of Afghanistan.

Before commencing with the presentation of the conclusions, I will highlight the context in which the mission in Afghanistan is being implemented. The engagement in Afghanistan cannot be placed along the traditional continuum of a conflict cycle into conflict and post-conflict phases. Rather it falls in between, with characteristics of both the conflict and the post-conflict environments, so that the engagement becomes dominated by actors with a high level of expertise covering tools applicable to only one of these environments. This means that although the tools of both types of engagement are in place in the mission in Afghanistan, the strategies are following

diverse and not aligned logics, with a post-conflict nation-building strategy being dominated by the international civilian actors present in Kabul and the main regional cities, and a conflict strategy being implemented by the international military forces. Because the latter is the largest and most highly resourced actor, as well as the one on which most of the international political impatience is focused, it predominates in the choice of main strategic focus.

This raises important dilemmas that have been identified throughout the study: are post-conflict tools at all applicable in a conflict setting, and will a strong military counterinsurgency campaign undermine overall long-term nation-building efforts when it is implemented by a military component that is stronger than its civilian counterpart? The answer to both dilemmas is yes. First, post-conflict tools are applicable in a conflict setting. However, they need to be prioritised and managed by an equally strong counterpart to the international military actor. Secondly, there is no doubt that a strong military counterinsurgency campaign implemented in a politically impatient environment will undermine long-term nation-building objectives. This will especially be the case when the military-led mission is tasked with guiding the majority of the international efforts without the latter being adequately prioritised. These conclusions will be explored further below.

### **5.1 Concluding on the methodology**

Before proceeding to the conclusions of the study, a brief conclusion on its methodology will be made. The study methodology used to uncover this complex field has been built up by using a single-case qualitative research design, mainly following the theories of George and Bennett (2005) and Adcock and Collier (2001). The study methodology and its explanatory nature has no doubt been a challenge to implement, but for the most part it has delivered the data it set out to uncover. The

two main challenges involved in using this study design have been firstly, access (broadly speaking regarding both individuals and settings), and secondly, the ability to triangulate the validity and representative value of the data received. These two challenges are interrelated.

The challenge of obtaining access to both individuals and settings in Afghanistan has been overcome through the use of my close connections as a member of the Danish defence forces. This approach has in turn complicated my wide access to the international and national civilian community in Afghanistan. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I have had a certain amount of access to this community (both local and international actors), but I also have to recognise that access could have been improved had I not relied on my military connections as an inbuilt element of my research design. Also, data-gathering involving the Afghan civil community has in this regard been complicated by my attachment to the military and by the security situation on the ground. A stronger connection to the 'third party' within the individual sub-types could have offered alternative views and expertise on these subjects that would have enriched the overall findings of the study. However, in its turn that would have limited access to my primary research objective, namely the international military. The inherited limitations of the setting have induced a more pragmatic approach to defining field study success. For each field study carried out, an accessibility margin to informants of 75% has been regarded as acceptable. As it turned out, however, on average around 90% of the planned interviews were carried out. This was only possible due to very flexible research programmes.

In addition, the overall choice of undertaking a single case study has challenged the extent of my conclusions and raised the question of whether it is at all possible to draw any conclusions beyond the confines of this case. If the study can only reach conclusions specific to this case, the possibility of filling the gap identified in the

literature will be extremely limited. While this was not the intention, the research design has been thoroughly developed and strictly followed precisely to make possible a certain level of generic conclusions reaching beyond the four sub-types of the study. Focusing on the more generic level, the study provides conclusions on three levels – sub-type, across sub-types and beyond – which to a large extent are applicable beyond Afghanistan.

The research design, created to fill the gap in the literature identified in Chapter 1 has proved to be a success. In Chapter 1 two overall categories dealing with the role of the international military in nation-building are identified: firstly, the ‘political’ level research, which focuses entirely on the overall elements of nation-building and the complexity and more philosophical debates on the meaning of the term; and secondly, the ‘technical’ level research, which thoroughly investigates individual sub-elements of nation-building, often divided into civilian and military-led focuses. At this ‘technical’ level, singled-stringed studies of individual themes predominate, where ‘lessons learned’ are presented often detached from the surrounding context. By presenting a unique research design that bridges these two approaches (see Figure 1.2), this PhD project situates itself as filling a gap in the literature that enables cross-sectored conclusions to be drawn within an overall context. Thus, this study provides an in-depth focus on especially the military activities – that is, the ‘technical’ level – within the context of nation-building, that is, the ‘political’ level.

To bridge the two categories, the research design as presented is based on the assumption that nation-building will only be successful when the four sub-types are implemented fully coordinated and interlinked without these pointing in separate and not aligned directions. As can be seen in the articles published as part of this study and in the combined conclusions of this framework description (Chapter 4 and 5), many of the identified failures of Afghanistan can very much be attributed to the

missing amalgamation of the identified four elements of the military role in nation-building. Therefore, by merging the individual sub-types, the gain of using this research design is the formation of a new level of findings.

In the next two sections, the study's conclusions are divided into two levels: conclusions across the four sub-types, and conclusions reaching beyond Afghanistan.

## **5.2 Conclusions across the four sub-types**

Supported by each other, the sections below will draw conclusions across the individual sub-types. Based on the findings of Chapter 4, this will be done by connecting all the themes to each other and to the overall framework of nation-building. Through this manoeuvre, the value added by the research design will become visible when it is shown how the individual sub-types and their earlier identified strengths and weaknesses are linked to the other sub-types.

Combining the sub-types will show that the identified principle of nation-building – on which conclusions are drawn below through the themes of the missing narrative and the missing counterpart – are only followed in close connection to each theme and narrowly defined by the implementing actor. But as seen in Chapter 3 in the section on nation-building, programmes to rebuild the Afghan state must build on the collective idea of the state as perceived by its citizens, not as perceived by the international community, nor the Kabul government. Legitimacy derives from the collective idea, and thus the latter, when identified and integrated into the nation-building programme, defines and provides legitimacy on both the horizontal and vertical levels. Building on the framework of nation-building therefore has to guide the individual programmes, that is, the sub-types. As shown in Chapter 4, if the constant striving for legitimacy as an incorporated element of the counterinsurgency

campaign, the peace support operation, the security sector reform or the comprehensive approach does not depart from the collective idea, the understanding of this legitimacy will point in very different directions based instead on the perceptions of the individual implementing actors. Thus the individual programmes will not collectively support the overall nation-building efforts, but rather undermine them.

This means that, following a counterinsurgency strategy that builds on legitimacy generated through the tactical-level interaction of the national security forces, a security sector reform that builds on legitimacy through a western-inspired police force or a comprehensive approach that builds on legitimacy through, for example, an improved educational sector or strong governmental institutions, the efforts made will be fragmented and not fully supportive of the overall nation-building programme. Especially in the context of Afghanistan, where the international military actor is the strongest, bypassing all the other actors in terms of the pace of implementation, this becomes a major challenge. Below two overall themes of ‘the missing narrative’ and ‘the missing counterpart’ will capture this complexity.

### ***5.2.1 The missing narrative***

As shown through the analysis of peace support operations in Chapter 4, the mission in Afghanistan has lacked the clear level of broad political understanding which is needed to support such a complex endeavour. The operations planned in southern Afghanistan in early to mid-2006 were ‘stand-alone’ military operations, meaning that the other elements of security sector stabilisation and reform and the comprehensive approach were not built into the plans. Fundamentals such as the national security forces and civilian developmental and governance expertise were not integrated elements of the implementation, and the deeper understanding of the

dynamics of counterinsurgency dominating the terrain through local civilian support had still not developed. Many of the plans developed and presented at this early phase of the counterinsurgency engagement involved especially the civilian development and governance elements in support of the military campaign, but often these elements were only present on paper. When actual implementation started, the international military acted alone.

One of the main reasons for the low level of toolbox integration – especially security sector reform and the comprehensive approach – was made aware to me during a field trip in 2009. One of the two political advisors to the commander of ISAF explained that when he received high-level visitors from the troop-contributing countries, he spent most of his time explaining what the mission was about and how commander ISAF saw it, that is, as a counterinsurgency mission that was an element in building a stable state. He very clearly stated that one of the major problems in fighting a counterinsurgency by an alliance was the lack of the common strategic narrative that is needed to frame the mission. His story underlined the findings of this project. Without a common narrative and derived understanding of (at a minimum) the essence of the task, the resource allocation of participating states will not support the strategic goals but rather create unbalanced and separate interim national footprints. A similar experience of the diverse deeper understanding of the mission was seen in early 2010 at ISAF regional command south. During an office call between the commander of regional command south and the development minister of a NATO country, discussions centred on the lack of electricity in Kandahar city. Everybody at the meeting acknowledged the importance of improving the delivery of power to the citizens of Kandahar, but when the regional commander suggested using generators as an intermediate answer to the problem, the surprised minister replied, ‘But what about the ozone layer?’. A political advisor promptly answered, ‘We’ll close the hole in the ozone layer after we’ve won the war’. Nobody laughed.

These stories illustrate the challenges of the mission in Afghanistan, identified by combining the sub-types of this study. When the common narrative is missing, the framing of the mission will differ between anything from high-intensity conflict to peacetime post-conflict nation-building, without these being connected. This impacts on the resources allocated to the mission and from there eventually on the prospects for mission progress, that is, on collectively advancing the mission from initial counterinsurgency to nation-building proper. For example, the importance of having a comprehensive approach to the mission is recognised by most of the main actors. However, implementing the comprehensive approach in a non-permissive counterinsurgency environment differs markedly from implementation in a benign post-conflict environment. As seen in Chapter 4 on the comprehensive approach, the counterinsurgency environment clearly challenges the national political will and understanding of how far the national political motivation and reach go when providing the necessary resources for successful implementation. The ‘civilian’ side of the comprehensive approach often builds on more traditional developmental and overall nation-building principles, which are fully applicable in a benign post-conflict environment. In a counterinsurgency environment, however, these principles will not support the underlying need for faster and more visible initial results to materialise and advance the tactical military gains. On the other hand, the tactical counterinsurgency focus needs to be plugged into these overall nation-building principles so that it does not undermine eventual sustainability. In particular, the principles identified in Chapter 3, of building on the collective idea and the closely connected principles of legitimacy are often lost.

Also, in a post-conflict environment the rebuilding of the national security forces will not be led by a strong tactical focus – getting national forces into the fight as part of a security sector stabilisation programme – but rather be controlled and resourced in

support of the overall security sector reform principle of long-term sustainability. The latter example was clearly illustrated by the articles on security sector reform published as part of this study, in which it is shown how the initial post-conflict focus dominating the Afghan national police build up has undermined the counterinsurgency efforts, visualising a build up that could not support the military progress and operational momentum (basically support to the 'hold' phase of the counterinsurgency campaign). But the articles also show that, when the counterinsurgency narrative becomes the dominant theme, the uneven balance shifts to such an extent that it undermines the long-term effort. This could be seen through the Afghan military build up, which to a large extent was characterised by the opposite approach. The national military program that eventually became an incorporated part of the counterinsurgency campaign was decoupled from the overall security sector reform because of the strong focus on getting the national army into the fight. This is exactly the opposite problem to that identified regarding the police programme.

These examples illustrate that, when one talks about stabilisation vs. reconstruction and development, or security sector stabilisation vs. security sector reform, this evokes different implementing strategies, different perceptions from different actors (national or international, military or civilian), and most crucially a large gap between the implementing strategies. These findings can be traced through the analysis of all the four sub-types.

The findings point to a situation in which there is no common framework for the engagement: conflict and post-conflict instruments are both being implemented but not synchronized. Examples include the allocation of soldiers who are not expected to fight (peace support operations vs. counterinsurgency), development policy not adapted to a conflict situation (comprehensive approach vs. counterinsurgency), high-

intensity military operations with the proper civilian counterpart (counterinsurgency vs. comprehensive approach), international politicians not recognising the seriousness of the situation (peace-support operations vs. counterinsurgency), police reform not adapted to the current environment (security-sector reform vs. counterinsurgency), army reform not focusing on sustainability (counterinsurgency vs. security sector reform) and a lack of will for reintegration (counterinsurgency vs. peace-support operations), etc. A unanimous narrative – one that frames the overall perceptions of the environment and the local collective idea of the Afghan state – is crucial if the strategy is not to escape reality. Optimally the narrative should frame both the long-term mission goal of nation-building, as defined in Chapter 3, and the short-term context of insurgency, bridging the two and thus bringing the political ambitions of the project together.

### ***5.2.2 The missing counterpart***

Through the analysis of the four sub-types, one overall deviated effect of the missing strategic narrative takes the form of the missing counterpart that is needed to balance and prolong the durability of the reach of the mission. A counterpart is needed, working at all levels that can suspend or pause the planned development and relate this to the objectives of the overall nation-building programme. In the analyses of both peace support operations and counterinsurgency, it was revealed that the military actor was implementing a strategy that for the most part was only supported (in concrete action) by itself. In both sub-types, this meant that a two-legged strategy was being implemented with only the military leg available. The elements of security sector reform and the comprehensive approach were to a large extent not an integrated or coordinated element of the mission in Afghanistan. To grasp the complications of this, it is important to understand the culture of the ‘military machine’. When a military machine the size of that in Afghanistan is ‘let loose’ in

this environment without a properly aligned and supported strategy, resources and especially a strong counterpart, it will not pause and wait, but will proceed to implementation with the means available by trying to fill the vacuum traditionally filled by, for example, multilateral or bilateral civilian organs. In a complex setting of implementing nation-building during an insurgency, the military being the only actor among several potential actors is not a desirable situation because the gains may not be sustainable or applicable to the overall project – they might, in fact, be counterproductive.

When the counterpart to the military actor is not available, the military will fill the vacuum in order not to stall the pace of operations. Working in the context of conflict in Afghanistan, where the local national capacity can only be considered minimal, the host nation will not be able to follow the pace of the international military. It simply places excessively high demands on the host nation when the international military actor is implementing programmes at a pace that the host nation cannot keep up with. In such a situation, a strong international counterpart to the international military actor, resourced to counterbalance military progress with elements such as governance, capacity-building, the rule of law and such has to be in place (for more on this, see section 5.3.1). Basically this counterpart must be empowered to halt the momentum in order to synchronise the development of mutual support. For example, the analysis of the comprehensive approach and counterinsurgency in Chapter 4 emphasises the need to fill the contested political space that is so crucial for progress. In a situation in which the military actor is unable to fill the governance vacuum as part of the counterinsurgency strategy, the strategy will be implemented without having all the enablers in place. The counterinsurgent being half-resourced tries to create this capacity from within its own structures, but without the sufficient resources, capacity, knowledge or priority to do so. At the tactical level, the British

PRT in Helmand Province has to some extent been able to fill this role but this of course does not cover the needs of the mission as such.

In this context, the comprehensive approach becomes a matter of counterbalancing the international military actor. In particular, the crucial and over-arching elements of the local and national capacity-building of governmental officials to enable provision of the basic needs of the local population will be out of the hands of the military actor. Without this element the mere number of troops becomes irrelevant, because progress for the locals will not only be assessed by the provision of security, as well as through their perceptions of the idea of the state, that is, what comes after security. The military therefore becomes reliant on the civilian actors to implement these tasks and by doing so advances the process of transforming the initial gains into sustainable progress. However, without the equally strong counterpart this progress will be undermined. Thus, the comprehensive approach should work on all levels – strategic, operational and tactical – in support of both the counterinsurgency operation and the security sector reform programme, filling a wide range of tasks, from mere coordination to factual implementation, and trying to improve the efficiency and impact of the mission.

The findings show that this complexity can also be identified through the lead nation principle, which, combined with the missing narrative identified above and the external actor's idea of the state, to a large extent has proved a failure. When two main actors or lead nations are driven by two different perceptions of the mission, they will not develop their individual areas of responsibility in support of each other, and the overall objective of nation-building will then cease to work as a viable counterpart. Therefore, as seen in the study, the concept of a lead nation will not work as long as the main actors lead through stovepipes that are not synchronised to support others' efforts and work as competitors rather than as counterparts balancing

each other. The result has to a large extent been visible to the international and national Afghan community through the low level of unity of effort, which eventually peaked with the US progressively taking over the elements of the mission that they saw as unsupportive of their efforts.

### **5.3 Conclusions beyond Afghanistan**

In a context with a high level of political surveillance from the capitals of the force-contributing countries, the dilemma of a lack of strategic patience seems overwhelming. In this political environment, the lack of strategic patience often creates a mismatch between the political ambitions and actual implementation on the ground. Politically unrealistic ambitions of the reach of the mission are listed to provide domestic legitimacy for the engagement. These ambitions often collide with the actual time, resources and political back up required to reach this level. This divergence influences the military implementation focus negatively, making the campaign too tactically result-oriented and thus undermining the long-term sustainable objectives of nation-building. In such a scenario the link between the military strategy and the greater nation-building programme will disappear, leaving a contested vacuum to be filled between the tools of conflict and post-conflict management. In the two sections below, the conclusions of this study will take us beyond the confines of the Afghan scenario. This will be done by bridging the gap between the different actors and their objectives and by drawing conclusions about the limitations of full-spectrum operations by an alliance.

#### ***5.3.1 Bridging the gap***

In taking the conclusions to a higher level beyond the empirical confines of this study, namely the engagement in Afghanistan, this section will build a great deal on the dilemmas mentioned earlier and identified throughout the study. Based on these

the findings, I suggest that there is a need for an element that has the strength to counterbalance the military engagement. Obviously, in the context of this study, the external military will be the most highly resourced and manned actor in theatre, but having overall objectives of the engagement that reach far beyond the military focus of bringing stability, a counterbalancing actor has to be in place to ensure that the initial military objectives are merged with the long-term nation-building ones. This is especially the case because the international military forces will have left theatre long before the civilian and political actors have turned the country into a sustainable entity. Without this counterbalancing actor, the prospects of long-term sustainability are at great risk of being undermined by short-term, military-defined end states.

On the other hand, it must also be recognised that the military actor thrives in this environment and that the military instrument is designed to being engaged in exactly this kind of complex situation, so whether the military should be counterbalanced from within its own organisation or externally by a strong counterpart will be mission-specific. By this I mean that the counterbalancing elements could be an incorporated part of the military mission and could feed into it at all levels of command, or else the military mission could be counterbalanced externally by a multilayer civilian equivalent. It could be argued that in similar engagements to those in Iraq and Afghanistan, an internal counterpart could be established focusing on the main aim of the mission, namely nation-building. With such a strong and highly resourced military commitment, it will be hard to influence the military actor from a distance. In this case, an internal counterpart focusing on the long-term sustainability of institution-building, governance, legitimacy (vertically and horizontally), local participation, etc. will be able to strengthen the long-term focus on the strategic military approach.

Especially in the context of nation-building, where the main focus should be on bridging the top-down drivers with the bottom-up idea of the state to strengthen vertical legitimacy between the nation(s) and the state, while at the same time facilitating an equally high horizontal legitimacy between the nations themselves, connecting the strong military drive to the long-term objectives is of crucial importance. If the external military is to make an overall nation-building process possible, its strategy has to be connected with exactly that process. This is where the counterpart of the military comes in, and where the concept and indeed the limits of the comprehensive approach are ultimately tested. As discussed in Chapter 3, building state structures that reflect the collective idea of the citizens is a challenge, but in the end it is the only element that will result in sustainability in the aftermath of post-conflict nation-building. Thus, to bridge the gap between the military and civilian components and their goals, the ‘military machine’ should be balanced by an equally influential counterpart.

### ***5.3.2 The limited operational reach of an alliance***

Taking an analytical finding of this project to the limits of the research design, I will argue that conducting counterinsurgency operations (with all the interconnected elements seen in this study) as part of NATO’s *raison d’être* is a bridge too far. The combined findings of this study point to a conclusion reaching further than the case of Afghanistan, namely that fighting an insurgency with NATO at the end of the table is beyond the capacity of the alliance. The genuine element of burden-sharing exemplified in the willingness not only to take risks, but also to allocate resources to support the combined efforts, have proved to be extremely limited in the Afghan case. As I show through the articles on burden-sharing in counterinsurgency operations, most often cooperation, coordination and resource allocation regarding security sector stabilisation and reform and the comprehensive approach at best

follows national guidelines, while at worst not even its own ambitions are fulfilled. There are countries committed to supporting the full programme, but these are also limited in their reach when they seek to implement or support this variety of complex tasks. As a consequence the US has gradually taken over command of the mission, and as of summer 2010 US troops were stationed in all the areas of the country where heavy fighting was expected to take place. But as shown in this study, since an alliance fighting an insurgency is a new phenomenon, it should come as no surprise that this cannot be done when both unity of command and efforts are minimal. Unity of command only exists at the single-state or task-force level, and unity of effort crossing the line between counterinsurgency and nation-building and filling the gap between the two is almost non-existent.

Currently in ISAF headquarters, ISAF Joint Command (IJC), NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), Special Operations Forces, Regional Command East, Regional Command South West, and by autumn 2010 Regional Command South are all be under US command. In addition, US forces have been deployed to both western and northern Afghanistan to tackle the insurgent threat that the NATO forces originally stationed there have not been willing to deal with or have lacked the capacity to deal with. Within these US-led regional commands, force-generation is conducted bilaterally between the willing country and the US. In Regional Command South this development has even been taken to the extreme where a group of countries, all significantly involved in the fighting, are meeting regularly at ministry level to plan progress there – this without ISAF headquarters being present.<sup>75</sup> This development has to a large extent led to a scenario in which the US and a coalition of willing states are doing the hard work, with NATO as an overall arena providing legitimacy in support of the efforts.

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<sup>75</sup> The current (as of June 2010) participating countries are Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Rumania, the UK and the US. NATO headquarters (not ISAF) and the UN also participate.

In building on the Afghan experience, are we witnessing the limit of NATO's out-of-area development that began when US Senator Richard Lugar famously said 'out of area or out of business'? It would be going too far for this study to offer full conclusions on that question. What this study can do, however, is to offer conclusions on NATO's conduct of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. In this respect the mission cannot be characterised as a bridge too far in terms of geography, but I would argue that it has proved to be a bridge too far in terms of campaign theme (i.e. counterinsurgency), that is, the campaign themes applied by NATO that extend from peacetime military engagement through peace support and counterinsurgency to major combat operations. Of course NATO might not be willing to accept this development, but in light of the experience of being in deep in a mission that lacks the glue to unify all the actors involved, a logical limitation or adaptation would be to retreat to types of operation on which the 'NATO family' can more easily find a broad political consensus. Examples would be operations such as peacetime military engagements (e.g. operations such as in Haiti in 2010 following the earthquake or the 2005-06 NATO assistance to Pakistan), peace support operations (e.g. the Balkans in the 1990s and 2000s) and anti-piracy operations (e.g. off the Horn of Africa). When the more extreme scenarios of counterinsurgency operations need to be conducted, NATO can provide the overall and much coveted legitimacy and strategic guidance (e.g. plugging the campaign into the overall nation-building project) by approving and monitoring the mission through the North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO's supreme political body. However, actual implementation and the crucial leadership needed would then best be provided and led by one or several strong states supported by a case-specific coalition of the willing. Following this reasoning, Afghanistan does not represent the limit of NATO's out-of-area but a limit regarding what to do out-of-area.

# Appendix 1. Peace support

## Data collection matrix for field study on peace support. Interview guide for Afghan government and local authorities

### Introduction

- Please state your name and position/function
- Describe your primary area of expertise
- Can you give your overall view on the peace support operation in the country?

### Political/Strategic

#### Objective and Mandate

- In your view, were clearly stated and attainable objectives or an 'end state' incorporated into the mandate?
- In your view, were lessons learned by the military component incorporated into the review of the mandate and peace building strategy? (concerning e.g. who, how and when)
- In your view, were clear 'end state' and transition strategies defined and established prior to implementation?

#### Perseverance

- In your view, was the political 'end state' achieved? (patient, resolute and persistent pursuit of objectives)
- To your knowledge, has a peace building strategy been formulated subsequent the signing of the mandate?
- In your view, was the military contribution to the conflict sufficiently incorporated into documents concerning the overall peace building strategy?

#### Unity of Effort

- In your view, has there been sufficient coordination between the military and international/national components in relation to the peace building objectives? And do you think that the objectives support each other? (working towards the same goals/conflicting)

### Operational

#### Unity of Command

- In your view, was a unity of command established for all the military components of the intervening force? (Do you view the forces as being under the same command)
- In your view, are the different military components (if any) of force perceived as identical?

#### Credibility

- How do you perceive the ability of the military force to carry out the mandate and to reach the 'end state'?
- In your view, is the military force seen as a positive contributor to the overall peace process by the belligerent parties?
- In your view, what was anything done to improve and sustain the credibility of the force? (And did it succeed?)

#### Transparency of Operations

- In your view, were the concept of operation and mandates communicated to the civilian population and the parties of the conflict in a sufficient way? (How)(prior and during)
- In your view, are the tasks of the military force obvious to the international and local population?

#### Protection

- Do you think that the military force is proportional equipped and sized for them to carry out the mandate and to cope with the different tasks?

#### Flexibility

- In your view, was the military forces sufficiently trained to cope with the variety of tasks in a PSO?
- In your view, has the Joint Force Commander been able to direct the forces in order to cope with upcoming situations?

#### Promotion of Cooperation and Consent

- In your view, how has the military facilitated cooperation and consent with local authorities, local population and NGOs?
- In your view, has an effective civil and military coordination system/method been established?
- In your view, has an effective local military and international military coordination system/method been established?

#### **Tactical**

##### Use of Force - Rules of Engagement

- In your view, were the Rules of Engagement formulated according to the principles of proportional and minimum use of force and are the rules of engagement identical throughout the force?
- How do you perceive the use of force by the peacekeeping forces? (including non lethal measures)

##### Mutual Respect and Impartiality - Legitimacy

- In your view, does the military force treat the civil population with proper respect?
- In your view, what kind of precautions does the military force take in relation to respect the national laws and local customs?
- In what way do you perceive the military force? (As impartial or not)
- Do you think that the peacekeepers have been sufficiently trained in understanding national law and local customs?

#### **Sum up**

- In your view on the top of your head, what is the primary lesson learned on peacekeeping regarding ISAF?

## Appendix 2. The Afghan National Army

### Data collection matrix for field study on security sector reform. Interview guide for Afghan National Army

#### 1. Overall level

##### Describe the overall strategy and benchmarks of the Security Sector Reform concept for the rebuilding of Afghan National Army

- Division of labour (US, UK, France and NATO on both strategic, operational and tactical level)
- Number of international instructors and advisors
- Number of units and type of
- Number of recruits
- Largest challenges

#### 2. Political dimension

##### Describe the overall setup of the new Afghan National Army, with focus on the long term development and sustainability including the parliamentary/democratic setup

- Sustainability without third party involvement - training, logistics, command and control structure
- Workable MOD
- Parliamentary roll and control
- Transparency within the system
- National Military Strategy (2004)
- Operational control with the army
- Operational roll of the army (territorial, national defence, internal security)
- A clear division of labour within the security sector (the roll of the army vs. the police)
- End State - how large and sustainable should the army be?

#### 3. Institutional dimension

##### Describe the institutional setup of Afghan National Army regarding the education and the operational roll

- The course of education (duration and build-up)
- Function specific education (different tasks and functions)
- The operational purpose of the education (traditional defence, counter insurgency)
- Norms for education (humanitarian law, practice, doctrine)
- Technical modernisation of the army (weapons, vehicle, communication)
- Equipment needs
- Describe Afghan National Army's operational skills and there operational security function - roll (PSO, territorial defence vs. policing)
- Visibility throughout the country (regional barracks and deployments)
- Transparency within the recruiting system - criteria, ethnicity, capacity, earlier warring factions within army

#### 4. Economic dimension

**Do you regard the allocation of funds to MOD and ANA as controlled by the parliament, and is it a transparent system?**

- Functional differentiating
- Parliamentary control
- Transparency
- Allocation of funds
- Afghan National Army size vs. sustainable funding

**5. Societal dimension**

**Characterize the relationship between the Afghan National Army and the civilian population regarding security and national identity**

- Can Afghan National Army and the MOD be regarded as multiethnic and neutral?
- Is Afghan National Army filling out the security vacuum throughout the country?
- Is Afghan National Army contributing to the development of a national identity throughout the country?
- Can you identify a national ownership towards the army?

**6. Other related issues**

- Is language and culture an element of special attention?
- Discipline
- Is Afghan National Army becoming weaker because of attrition (the use in operations in the south and east)?
- Desertion and dropout rate (Why? - ethnicity - treatment)
- Corruption vs. salary
- Embedded US/UK/Canadian advisers in operational units
- War criminals
- The war against terror (command structure and sustainability)
- Infiltration
- External financial donor support (needs)

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