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# **The Utility of Coercion Theory in the Afghan Conflict**

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PhD**

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis examines the utility of coercion theory in complex contemporary conflicts through a study of the Afghan conflict as it unfolded in the provinces of Faryab and Kunduz from 2005 to 2012. The last two decades have produced ample examples of incidents where the UN, international alliances or states have found it necessary to use force in order to coerce states or armed groups to stop unacceptable activities or change their behaviour. However, the potential of military force to induce behavioural change in such conflicts is understudied and poorly understood.

In the Afghan conflict the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) together with the Afghan security forces applied force in order to influence the Taliban and other groups who violently opposed the elected government to change their behaviour. Although neither ISAF nor the participating nations had articulated a coercive strategy, force was used consistent with coercion theory on a number of occasions. Coercion theory consists of a number of assumptions and presuppositions, the existence of which should be present on the ground for theory to have utility. This thesis argues that these were generally not, or only to a limited degree present in the Afghan conflict. It further argues that in the cases where ISAF and its Afghan allies applied force consistent with theory, it did generally not translate to the desired outcomes, in particular when coercion represented the dominant effort.

This thesis consequently argues that coercion theory is not well suited to provide explanatory power to or predict outcomes in conflicts that are comparable to the conflict in Afghanistan. In particular, theory's presumption of unitary actors, the rationality presumption and the notion of the credible threat is insufficient. Theory's notion of coercive mechanisms also assumes a connection between human behaviour and what may influence it that is overly simplistic. This consequently proposes a revised set of assumptions and presuppositions as well as a revised understanding of mechanisms that acknowledges that coercion alone is rarely sufficient to instil sustainable change.

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## Glossary and acronyms

Acronym	Explanation
ABP	Afghan Border Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces. Including the Army (ANA), the Police (ANP), the Border Police (ABP) and the National Intelligence and Security Police (NDS)
AOO	Area of Operations
AOR	Area of Responsibility
CHOD	Chief of Defence.
CIDNE	Combined Information Data Network Exchange
COIN	Counter Insurgency. The military doctrine or concept aimed at dealing with insurgent warfare.
COMISAF	Commander ISAF. This includes the individual that holds the position as commander of ISAF, but also the office of the commander-in-chief.
CoP	Chief of Police.
DCOP	District Chief of Police
DG	District Governor
DoD	Department of Defence
FM	Field manual. US Army document
FOA	Freedom of Action
FOM	Freedom of Movement
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HQ	Military Headquarters
INS	Insurgent. Individuals or groups
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JFCB	Joint Force Command Brunsum. The NATO headquarter responsible for the ISAF operation
LOO	Lines of Operation. Reflecting the ISAF mandate to oversee and partly deal with issues of Security, Governance and Reconstruction and Development
LPB	Local Power Broker. The ISAF term for actors that exerted excess influence through either their access to arms and militias, or through their access to material resources or contacts

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MOLT	Military Observation and Liason Team. The German equivalent to the MOT, but usually more robust
MOT	Military Observation Team. The backbone of the PRT operations doing intelligence and approaching the local Afghan communities. Normally 7-8 soldiers in two light vehicles and including an interpreter
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDRE	Norwegian Defence Research Establishment
NDS	National Directorate of Security
PAK	Pakistan
PCOP	Provincial Chief of Police
PG	Provincial Governor
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team. An ISAF unit that was allocated a geographical responsibility to conduct the ISAF mission
RC N	The ISAF Regional Command North, situated outside Masar-e-Sharif in Balkh province
RC W	The ISAF Regional Command West, situated outside the city of Herat
Shura	Traditional Afghan meeting to discuss and decide matters of interest to the community
SOF	Special Operation Forces
TIC	Troops in contact. Used in those instances where ISAF units were engaged or ambushed by insurgents
TU	Task Unit. The manoeuvre element of the PRT in Maimana. The TU was a reduced company size mechanised infantry unit of about 65 soldiers
UNAMA	United Nations Mission in Afghanistan
USAID	United States Aid organisation. Subordinated to the Foreign Office



## 1. Introduction

*Through my missions in Afghanistan, having travelled the Afghan North extensively in helicopters or armoured cars, I often found myself wondering whether I understood what I observed. Afghanistan, as it appeared from inside the relative safety of a German armoured car, looked indeed strange to me. How could I plan the use of force within a society of which I understood very little?*

Ltc Steinar Skaar, Chief Plans and Policy Branch, ISAF RC N 2008-2009 and 2010-2011

### 1.1. The Coercive Use of force in Contemporary Conflicts

The last two decades have produced ample examples of incidents where the UN, international alliances or states have found it necessary to use force in order to compel states or armed groups to stop unacceptable activities or change their behaviour. The US efforts to compel Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait in 1990, NATO's use of air power in the Balkans in the 90's, various conflicts in Africa and not least the still ongoing war in Afghanistan all offer examples of the coercive use of force (Art, 2003; Bin, 1998; Graham-Brown, 1999; Henriksen, 2007; Lowther, 2007). Whereas force in some instances has been used mainly in a deterrent or self-defence posture, it has also been used as a game changer; a political tool the purpose of which was to induce change, either by compelling states to alter their behaviour or non-state actors to refrain from violence. The most prominent example after the end of the Cold War may be the use of air power to compel the Serb president Milosevic to abstain from ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and to accept the conditions of the Rambouillet agreement. Arguably, the development of failed states, armed non-state groups, terrorism and complex conflicts has fuelled the notion that military force has a role outside mere defence of territory or state interest.

The classical argument that embraces the use of force outside the paradigm of self-defence is that it possesses a powerful property; it can induce elements of pain and suffering to which the opponent must react in order to avoid it. As Schelling argues, "the power to hurt can be counted among the most impressive attributes of military force" (Schelling, 1966, p. 2). The power to hurt provides military force with a tool to induce behavioural change and to instil compliance; through accommodation the opponent can reduce or avoid suffering. The capacity of military force to raise costs through its inherent capacity to induce suffering is usually referred to as coercion. Coercion means making someone do what they would otherwise not have done through the use of threats or force ("The New Oxford Dictionary of English," 1998). Military coercion is discussed in a wide range of literature ranging from the classical works of Schelling and George to various contemporary studies. The study of

coercion has led to a set of assumptions, presuppositions and methods of when, why and how military force can be a useful tool to persuade an opponent to comply with demands and change behaviour. These assumptions, presuppositions and methods are here referred to as coercion theory.

The potential of military force to influence behaviour has been well known throughout history. Thucydides' tales of the Peloponnesian wars provide ample examples of coercive use of force (Lebow, 2007). However, the study of coercion, as it appears in literature, focus predominantly on international conflicts in which the actors are states and states' governments. Literature is far less concerned with the particularities that arise from contemporary complex conflicts which are characterised by multiple non-state actors and the issues at stake fluctuate and are difficult to determine. Although non-state actors are not a new phenomenon, their appearance and impact have received far more attention since the end of the Cold War. The conceptual point of departure for this thesis is that contemporary conflicts, like the conflict in Afghanistan, entail certain characteristics that distinguish them from the dominant types of conflicts addressed in coercion theory.<sup>1</sup> The actors are often a mix of state and non-state, the issues at stake deviate from those related to international conflicts and state interest and the root causes fuelling the conflict are indeed complex. Emile Simpson argues that such conflicts are not political in the Clausewitzian sense; that is, the means-ends relationship and the notion of polarised parties is blurred (Simpson, 2012).

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the utility of coercion theory in scenarios that are not well covered by theory. It will discuss the utility of theory through examining the coercive use of force in two provinces in Northern Afghanistan; the cases of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz. Both nations led a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and provided robust military capacities through the Norwegian Task Unit and, from 2010, the German Task Forces. The PRTs were the dominant ISAF entities in the North of Afghanistan. They were responsible for a defined geographical area in which they executed the ISAF military policy and projected force on a substantial level. The German Task Forces that arrived in 2010 allowed Germany to use force in an offensive capacity on a level that was novel to the Bundeswehr. Norway and Germany deployed their respective militaries to a

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between the conventional conflicts and the conflicts that appeared after the termination of the Cold War is framed in a range of literature discussing the changing character of war, and in particular through Gen Sir Rupert Smith's articulation of "war amongst the people" (Haug, 2011; Smith, 2005; Strachan, 2011).

faraway area in, in which they did not share a common language or have cultural or societal preferences similar to the domestic population. They were also nations that had a track record of being restrictive with respect to using force outside the context of an existential threat or within the paradigm of self-defence. As such, both countries represented the way force has come to be used in an expeditionary capacity by a whole range of states. ISAF consisted at its peak of more than 40 nations, of which many led PRT's or contributed to manoeuvre forces.

The use of force in an expeditionary capacity to induce change is not the invention of the post-Cold War international society, but it has traditionally been done by the major military powers; in the West mainly by the US, the UK and France. Neither Norway nor Germany had much experience with such operations before their deployment to Afghanistan, but they soon became involved in an intense insurgency in which both nations applied force on a level unprecedented since the Second World War.

## **1.2. The case of Afghanistan**

The 11/9 attacks that prompted the US lead invasion in Afghanistan in October 2001 was the beginning of what became one of the most profiled conflicts of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It started as limited military operation, Operation Enduring Freedom, involving a relatively small number of ground forces and a substantial amount of airpower. By the end of the decade, it had evolved into a multinational operation in which more than 40 nations and more than 130 000 foreign soldiers participated under the ISAF umbrella. Although the main military contribution came from the US, many European nations participated, with relatively large contributions relative to the size of their armed forces. The Afghan conflict attracted enormous political interest and attention from the media. It substantially impacted western nations because of their military contributions, but it was also the first conflict in which a number of nations experienced substantial casualties.

The Afghan conflict included most aspects of military force, including the heavy use of airpower, Special Forces operations, battalion size manoeuvre forces that included armour and artillery, a range of infantry type operations and information and psychological operations intended to influence the general population as well as the insurgency. With a possible exception for the conflict in Iraq from March 2003, no other conflict can compare to the Afghan with respect to type and magnitude of military operations and use of force. It was also a conflict in which the opponents was characterised by complex and fluid actor structures and the issues at stake could not easily be determined. It was a conflict that to quote Rupert Smith,

“occurred amongst the people” (Smith, 2005). As this thesis will illustrate, it entailed a range of elements that characterises what the University of Oxford Leverhulme Programme has framed through “the Changing Character of War” programme (Strachan, 2011). The Afghan conflict thus offers an opportunity to study the coercive use of force in a conflict that embodies the characteristics of contemporary conflicts with respect to actor structures and issues, and at the same time involved ample amounts of military force. At the time of writing, no other conflict could illustrate the complexity of the coercive use of force as much as the Afghan case.

Most literature on coercion is highly US centric and focuses almost entirely on US experiences (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Freedman, 1998; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994). In those relatively few cases discussed in literature that do not focus on the US, it is usually in cases of colonial warfare or other conflicts involving states with a colonial background, such as France and the UK. However, as the Afghan conflict illustrates, contemporary conflicts may include other nations as well. Nations like Germany, Norway, Denmark and Sweden had little experience with such conflicts, but soon found themselves engaged in, and fighting, intense counterinsurgency campaigns. It has therefore been the ambition of this thesis to make a contribution to coercion theory by discussing instances of coercive use of force by nations other than the US. This seems particularly relevant because there is a tendency in out of area operations to put together alliances of different nations to provide the operations with international legitimacy.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that in the future, European nations will be called upon to participate in out of area operations in which force will be used to influence the behaviour of domestic opponents.

The cases of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz are selected because they each represent European nations with limited experience with the use of force that became the case in Afghanistan. Neither nation had applied force on this scale since World War Two, and the political and military situation in both nations justify a closer scrutiny with respect to the way they applied force. Norway officially distanced itself from the Comprehensive Approach, and claimed that it “did not do COIN”. Germany, with its particular history, was extremely careful in how it framed the conflict and its units were under a highly restrictive regime with respect to Rules of Engagement and the direct control of the German domestic authorities. In addition, the selection of cases is based on a degree of pragmatism. Since the author is a

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<sup>2</sup> The tendency to form ad-hoc alliances “of the willing” was obvious during the 2003 war against Iraq and in the current western engagement in Syria and Iraq.

serving officer within the Norwegian military with substantial experience from a German lead unit in Afghanistan (the Regional Command North in Mazar-e-Sharif), it made the access to Norwegian and German sources relatively manageable.

### **1.3. The research question**

It is axiomatically clear that the threat, or use, of force influences behaviour. As such, coercion undoubtedly works. However, as the 1999 Kosovo air campaign suggests, the actual impact of force cannot be easily determined. Presumably, the air campaign put substantial pressure on the Milosevic regime, but the actual impact of military force compared to the diplomacy of the EU and the US, the Russian effort or other types of influence remains unclear (Henriksen, 2007). The full range of reasons that eventually brought Milosevic to withdraw his forces has not yet been fully discerned.

There are indeed historical examples in which coercion worked as anticipated, the Cuban Missile Crise being probably the most commonly used example (Allison, 1971; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996). However, the German Blitz against London, the later allied bombing of German cities or the US bombing campaigns against North-Vietnam did not cause the desired breakdown in morale and fighting spirit presupposed by military and political leaders (Freedman, 1998; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996). It is also generally recognised that changing behaviour through coercive measures is harder than just maintaining the status quo (Jakobsen, 2011).

In Afghanistan, ISAF used various tools to influence or convince individuals or groups opposing the GIRoA to change their behaviour and refrain from violence. Although ISAF developed three lines of operation – 1) Security, 2) Governance and 3) Reconstruction and Development - it was predominantly a military organisation that applied military means to achieve its objectives. Arguably, therefore, it is intuitive to assume that ISAF applied military force in order to influence its opponents. The mere presence of ISAF can be perceived as a coercive vehicle because it represented an implied threat, but ISAF also engaged in a range of offensive military operations aimed at achieving political effects. Arguably therefore, a key purpose of the international military presence was to influence its opponents to change their behaviour consistent with the wishes of the GIRoA and ISAF.

The conceptual point of departure of this thesis is coercion theory in its present stage, as it appears through the articulations, assumptions and presuppositions in the prevailing literature. What the thesis aims to explore is the utility of theory in a conflict that is

qualitatively different from the conflicts that have formed the basis for its development, broadly being assessed to be interstate conflicts in which the actors are states and states' governments.

Theory can in principle serve two purposes, either explanatory or predictive (Høiback & Ydstebø, 2012, p. 55). An explanatory theory will serve the purpose of explaining actions and outcomes of past incidents for example by answering the question; why did Napoleon win at the battle of Jena? A predictive theory will serve the purpose of rendering probable the outcome of an action if that action is based on or applied consistent with theory's assumptions. A predictive theory can be illustrated by for example Pape's denial theory of coercion or George's 5 contextual variables and 9 conditions favouring success (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996). Coercion theory generally, but not conclusively, falls in the latter category; it aims to predict outcomes in cases where force is applied consistent with theory. By examining coercion theory and coercion in the Afghan conflict, this thesis aims to develop the understanding of how theory can develop in order to be better equipped to predict outcomes in contemporary conflicts.

This thesis thus aims to answer three questions. First, as its conceptual point of departure is that coercion theory predominantly addresses conventional and interstate conflicts, it is of considerable interest to examine whether force was applied in Afghanistan consistent with the assumptions and presuppositions of theory. Arguably, there is a coercive element to most applications of military force. However, insofar theory argues that military coercion is not any use of force, but a way of applying force specifically designed to influence the behaviour of the opponent through a particular set of mechanisms, the question justifies a closer examination. As will be discussed later, there is a distinction between the use of military force with the purpose of self-defence, brute force, deterrence and coercion. The first question this thesis aims to answer is consequently:

*Was force used consistent with coercion theory in Northern Afghanistan?*

Second, insofar coercion theory is based on a set of assumptions and presuppositions; its predictive potential is dependent on the presence of these elements in the conflict in question. If the assumptions and presuppositions were not sufficiently present in the Afghan conflict, it reduces the predictive potential of theory, but also suggest that there is a potential for revising its underpinning assumptions.

The second question this thesis aims to answer is consequently:

*To what extent were the basic assumptions and presuppositions of coercion theory present and relevant in the Afghan conflict?*

Third, the Afghan conflict is assumed to be representative of a body of conflicts that are qualitatively different than the international and interstate conflicts from which the assumptions and presuppositions of coercion theory has been derived. If this is the case, it suggests that theory should be revised and updated in order to have utility in such conflicts. The third question this thesis aims to answer is consequently:

*How can the Afghan conflict inform the development of coercion theory?*

#### **1.4. The thesis structure and content**

This paragraph outlines the structure and content of the thesis through the following chronology:

1. Initially, it frames the Afghan conflict and the ISAF mission in the remaining part of the introduction.
2. Chapter two discusses and frames coercion theory.
3. Chapter three addresses the methodological challenges and choices.
4. Chapter four presents the cases of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz.
5. Chapter five presents the findings of the thesis and discusses the utility of coercion theory in Afghanistan.
6. Chapter six presents the analysis and potential consequences of the thesis findings.

##### **1.4.1. Chapter one, introduction and context**

The remaining part of the introductory chapter will present the overarching contextual elements of the Afghan conflict assumed to be most relevant to the study of coercion, most notably the impact of the Soviet occupation, and the ISAF mission. If it is the case, as this thesis argues, that coercion theory is based on and thus predominantly have a predictive potential for a special type of conflicts; international conflicts in which the actors are states,



the issue of context is relevant and of importance. The purpose of revisiting the Afghan conflict and the ISAF mission is to provide the reader with the necessary background for the later analysis of coercion theory in Afghanistan. It is a general consensus among scholars of Afghanistan that the situation that led to the US invasion in 2001 and the conflict that followed can be traced back to the unrest of the late 70s and the Soviet occupation of the 80s (Barfield, 2010; R. Johnson, 2011; Rubin, 2002; Tomsen, 2011). Afghanistan has always been a society with complex social structures and tension between centre and periphery, but the Soviet occupation and the civil war that followed influenced actor structures and the distribution of power in ways that should be understood in order to assess the utility and efficacy of coercion. More than any other factor, the Soviet occupation set the scene for the issues that haunt contemporary Afghanistan.

Included in this section will be a brief description of the initial rise of the Taliban and the reasons why the movement gained traction. The distinct characteristics of the Taliban will also be addressed later in the thesis. Second, I will revisit the presence and operations of ISAF in Afghanistan. The ISAF operation started in 2002/3 as a multinational effort to provide security to the capital of Kabul and its immediate surroundings. From its groping start in 2002/3, ISAF developed to be a gigantic military operation that was represented in all parts of Afghanistan, included more than 130,000 soldiers at its peak, and participated in a violent counterinsurgency conflict against the Taliban and other insurgent formations. Norway and Germany participated in the ISAF operation with, compared to the size of their national militaries, substantial contributions. It is of relevance to the later analysis that the organisational and operational context in which Norway and Germany contributed is known to the reader.

#### **1.4.2. Chapter two, coercion theory**

In chapter two, coercion theory will be framed in order to allow for the later analysis of its utility in the Afghan conflict. Coercion theory is here understood as the theoretical universe that examines the potential of military force to induce behavioural change of an opponent.

Section 2.2 defines military coercion for the purpose of this thesis. There is a certain variation in how coercion is defined in literature, and framing the term more precisely is required in order to allow for the later analysis.



Section 2.3 discusses the purpose of coercion. Coercion theory generally assumes that successful coercion is dependent on a military advantage: the coercer is the military superior part. The purpose of coercion is then to make clear to the opponent that continued resistance will not serve his interests; hence coercion implies a superior-inferior relationship. However, Zartman's theory of the mutually hurting stalemate provides an interesting contrast to coercion theory's notion of purpose. Zartman argues that the situation that is most likely to result in fruitful negotiations is not that one side is assumed to be militarily superior, but rather that the parties are locked in the so-called mutually hurting stalemate. Zartman thus challenges the superior-inferior presupposition of coercion theory.

Section 2.4 reviews the relevant literature and research field. It argues that the terminology used to comprehend coercion for most practical purposes originate from the works of Thomas Schelling and Alexander George. Most authors that have published on coercion have framed coercion within the context of international conflicts in which actors equal states. Coercion theory has thus developed a set of assumptions, presuppositions and suggestions that in general is based on such conflicts. This is of relevance to this thesis because conflicts like the Afghan are characterised by complex actor structures and power dynamics that influences decision making processes in ways which are invariably different from those of states and states' governments.

The section further examines other fields of research and literature that may contribute to the comprehension of the coercive use of force. It argues that in particular the literature on counter insurgencies are of relevance since it addresses the use of force in Afghan type conflicts. Finally it includes a sub-section on military doctrines since they represent the conceptual framework that guides the application of military force of most states. The way in which Norway and Germany applied force in Afghanistan was to a large degree a function of the concepts addressed in their doctrines.

Section 2.5 examines the central elements of coercion theory. It argues that coercion theory is based on a set of assumptions and presuppositions, the presence of which is necessary in order to either explain past incidents or predict future outcomes. In particular, it identifies the assumption of the unitary actor and the rationality presumption as core elements of coercion theory.

Section 2.6 examines what may constitute coercive success. It argues that the notion of success is dependent on the field of study, and that coercion theory entails no clear definition

of success that could easily be applied in conflict. It therefore argues that the definition of success should be arrived at through a combination of definitions from different fields of study; coercion theory, COIN literature and military doctrines and plans.

### **1.4.3. Chapter three, methodology**

Chapter three accounts for the methodological challenges and choices, the selection of cases, sources of evidence and the author's position as a researcher.

Section 3.2 identifies the theoretical challenge of connecting the coercive use of force to particular and identifiable behavioural changes. The complex relationships between cause and effect is, as amongst other Elster and Kurki argues, difficult to determine (Elster, 2015; Kurki, 2008).

Section 3.3 presents and accounts for the methodological choices. It positions the thesis within the tradition of qualitative research and argues that a case study strategy is the method best suited to address the research questions.

Section 3.4, presents and accounts for the selection of the Norwegian and German cases. It argues that the Norwegian and German participation in the Afghan conflict represents instances of coercive use of force that are well suited to inform the development of theory.

Section 3.5 discusses the sources of evidence. The thesis is mainly based on four types of sources; interviews with observers with relevant experience from the Afghan field, written primary sources, quantitative data from surveys and academic literature. The width and depth of sources allowed for a comprehensive study of the coercive use of force in the Afghan conflict.

Finally, section 3.6 presents some reflections of the author's position as a researcher. This was assumed necessary since the author had operational experience from Afghanistan through three missions at the Regional Command North in Masar-e-Sharif from May 2007 to March 2011. As such, the author had been a party to the conflict, and some measures were required to ensure academic distance to the field of study.

### **1.4.4. Chapter four, the cases**

Chapter Four examines the cases of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz. The purpose of the case studies is to provide the reader with the necessary insights in the Afghan

context, the way in which the Norwegian and German missions were organised, led and the way they planned and conducted operations. The responsibility to lead a PRT type of organisation in an out of area operation was novel to both nations, and neither had experience in or were doctrinally equipped to fight a COIN campaign as became the case in Afghanistan. Through examining the Norwegian and German missions to respectively Faryab and Kunduz provinces the case studies provides the factual basis that is required for answering the research questions.

#### **1.4.5. Chapter five, the Utility of Coercion Theory in the Afghan conflict.**

Chapter Five amalgamates the findings of the case studies with the assumptions of theory. In section 5.1 it discusses whether force was used by Norway and Germany consistent with coercion theory. It argues that if force was used consistent with theory, this would materialise through the articulations of the campaign plans, the way in which the Norwegian and German units demonstrated their presence and military potential in the local areas and finally through the operations that included the offensive use of force.

Section 5.2 connects the findings of the case studies with the assumptions of theory. Through a careful and in-depth discussion of the degree to which the central elements of coercion theory was present in the Afghan conflict, the thesis aims to demonstrate that theory has limited potential to explain past outcomes and predict future outcomes in contemporary conflicts that share some of the characteristics of the Afghan conflict.

Section 5.3 discusses the degree to which the identified instances of coercive use of force translated to success. The paragraph applies the notions of success provided by coercion theory, the notion of success in COIN literature, the notions of success in military doctrines and the articulations of objectives and endstates in the military plans. Through amalgamating the different fields of studies' notion of success and connecting them to the findings of the case studies, the thesis argues that in most cases, coercion did not deliver the desired outcomes.

#### **1.4.6. Chapter six, analysis and conclusion**

Chapter six pulls together the findings of the previous chapters. Initially, in paragraph 6.2, it presents a short summary of the thesis findings.

Section 6.3 discusses four factors that may explain the relative absence of success: resources, interaction, the military inclination to seek battle and whether there were inherit

characteristics of Afghanistan that prevented success. First, the lack of resources is discussed. In particular the section argues that the international military and the ANSF were never equipped or resourced for meeting the COIN dogma of 1:50 ratio between security forces and population.

Second, it discusses whether the interaction and communication between the international military and the Afghan population could potentially justify the use of violence by the insurgency or local Afghans in its own right. It suggest that if this was the case, a potential explanation could be the so-called “flypaper theory of behaviour. The “flypaper theory” suggests that the international military represented a welcome target for insurgent groups in order to engage them for reasons of legitimacy and to prove their cause. The “flypaper theory” suggests that attacking ISAF was perceived to be a good in its own right outside systemic or structural reasons as for example the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate.

Third, it discusses whether there is an inclination within the western militaries to seek battle, and that the “battle orientation” obscured the potential for success. The notion of the battle orientation is broadly consistent national doctrines, prior training and operational concepts. Neither Norway nor Germany had developed national COIN doctrines, and the conceptual foundation for both armies was manoeuvre theory that emphasised the battle or engagement as the focal point of the military endeavour.

Fourth and finally, it discusses whether there were inherent characteristics of the Afghan society that suggests that the international engagement was a “mission impossible” from the outset. In particular, it discusses whether there are distinct characteristics with the Afghan conflict that is framed in the notion of the “graveyard of empires” and the so-called “fierce warrior culture” of Afghans.

Section 6.4 explores the degree to which the Afghan conflict is representative of contemporary conflicts. If the conflict was an anomaly, obviously it would limit the potential of the findings of this thesis to inform the development of coercion theory. If however, as this thesis argues, that the Afghan conflict was indeed representative for a particular type of conflicts, it suggest that the thesis’ findings is relevant to develop coercion theory.

Section 6.5 addresses the need to update coercion theory in light of this thesis. It argues that in particular theory’s current notion of the unitary actor, the rationality

presumption and the notion of the credible threat does not correspond to the realities on the ground and suggest that there is a requirement for updating theory. The paragraph continues to discuss theories notion of mechanisms, and argues that a more comprehensive view on the processes that may instil sustainable change is required. In particular it argues that elements of influence theory could potentially strengthen coercion theory's notion of mechanisms.

Acknowledging the relative absence of coercive success in Afghanistan and the findings of this thesis, section 6.6 presents five recommendations on how coercive use of force can be used more efficiently in future conflicts: 1) the inherent difficulties of coercion, 2) the consequences of complex actor structures, 3) the deficiencies of coercion theory's notion of mechanisms, 4) the requirement for holistic approaches and 5) the importance of knowledge.

### **1.5. Preview of findings**

The thesis' main findings can be summarised as follows:

1. Norway and Germany used force consistent with coercion theory
2. The central elements of coercion theory were not, or only to a limited degree present in the Afghan conflict.
3. Coercion delivered promising outcomes only when applied in conjunction with non-military efforts.
4. Coercion theory should be updated with respect to its notion of unitary actors, the rationality presumption, the credible threat and its notion of mechanisms

First, the degree to which force was used consistent with theory would materialise through articulations in the operational plans and through the way in which operations and activities were conducted. The operational plans included wordings like disrupt, contain and neutralise, and the way in which intentions were articulated suggest that it was the intention of ISAF to influence the behaviour of the Taliban. However, although the articulations of the operational plans suggest a coercive intention, neither ISAF nor the contributing nations explicitly articulated a coercive strategy or intent.

The daily operations, most notably conducted by the MOT/MOLT teams, signalled an implied threat because they could draw on theatre resources and as such functioned as a

reminder that ISAF always possessed the potential to apply force if required. Whereas the MOT/MOLT operations represented coercion in a mild and subtle form, the major and focused operations were explicit and unambiguous coercive instruments. As such, both Norway and Germany applied force consistent with coercion theory.

Second, coercion theory is based on the presence of five elements: the unitary actor, the rationality presumption, the credible threat, the element of demands and the element of choice. The explanatory and predictive potential of theory rests on the relative presence of these elements in the conflict in question. Absent these elements, theory is of limited utility to predict future outcomes. This thesis argue that the central elements of coercion theory were not, or only to a limited degree present in the Afghan conflict. This pertains in particular to the notion of the unitary actor, the rationality presumption and the credible threat. The relative absence of these elements suggest that coercion theory in its present stage is of limited value to predict future outcomes in the Afghan and comparable conflicts.

Third, the thesis argues that coercion theory may have utility if force is applied consistent with theory and outcomes are in accordance with the coercer's wishes. The examination of the coercive use of force in respectively Faryab and Kunduz provinces suggest that coercion were in most cases not sufficient to deliver the desired outcomes. This pertains in particular to the major operations that were limited in time and space. These operations did not result in the desired reduction of violence nor was the Taliban ousted form the area for a prolonged time. However, in cases where coercive use of force was applied as part of a long term commitment and coordinated and concerted with local Afghan authorities and security forces the results were more promising. This thesis thus suggest that coercion may have a potential to influence behaviour in Afghan type conflicts insofar it is combined with non-military efforts and emphasises local ownership.

Fourth and finally, the requirement to update coercion theory initially calls for an assessment of representativeness; was the Afghan conflict representative for a body of contemporary conflict or was it an anomaly? All conflicts entail a certain degree of uniqueness making direct comparison between different conflicts challenging. However, if it is possible to identify certain recurring characteristics and elements that are present along a spectrum of conflicts, the presence of these characteristics and elements suggest that the conflict in question is representative for the defined selection of conflicts. This is precisely the point of the so-called New Wars literature that argues that there are certain recurring

characteristics that separates the old wars from the new ones. This thesis argues that the Afghan conflict is representative for a particular category of conflicts; non-international conflicts, occurring inside the borders of a state in which the government is facing an ideologized insurgency. Although the conflict entailed certain distinct and unique characteristics, it was not an anomaly which would substantially have reduced its potential to inform theory. Arguably therefore the findings of this thesis are assessed to be relevant to develop coercion theory.

The development of theory pertains in particular to the notion of the unitary actor, the rationality presumption, the notion of the credible threat and coercion theory's notion of mechanisms:

First, theory's notion of the unitary actor has limited relevance in such conflicts. The implication of the complex actor structures that characterises such conflicts is that the binary and polarised notion of friend or foe should be abandoned in favour of more nuanced actor perspectives.

Second, coercion theory assumes that classical rationality in terms of cost-benefit analysis in order to increase material gain and avoid cost is the most important driver for human behaviour. This thesis argues that the classical notion of rationality is insufficient to explain behaviour and that more comprehensive models are required that acknowledges that decisions and behaviour are based on a number of motivations as well as the actors position and interests within complex social structures.

Third, theory's notion of the credible threat implies the existence of a polarised coercer-coerced relationship. However, this thesis argues that theory's notion of threats as parts of a polarised contest should be abandoned in favour of an assumption of threats that are contextually based, limited in time and space and directed against specific targets for specific purposes.

Fourth, this thesis argues that coercion theory's notion of mechanisms are too simplistic to contribute to a real understanding on how decisions and behaviour can be influenced. A sustainable change in behaviour has little chance of succeeding if based on coercion alone. Rather, coercion has the best chance of succeeding if it is a part of a holistic strategy that also includes the processes of identification and internalisation. Absent these processes, the outcomes of coercion tend to be short lived.

## **1.6. The Afghan conflict revisited**

*Non-Afghans sometimes say “Oh, these people have been fighting one another for a thousand years”. Not true. Before the Soviet invasion, the country’s various ethnic, linguistic and religious subgroups were not at war much except during the reign of the Iron Amir (Ansary, 2012, p. 205).*

The Afghan conflict is a truly protracted conflict that has lasted nearly 40 years. Although there have been periods of stability and relative peace, the argument can be made that Afghanistan has been in a continuous state of conflict and war since the Soviet invasion of December 1979. Most Afghans have no personal recollection of times of peace and stability, making life in conflict, strife and instability normal and expected. It is intuitive, therefore, that the consequences of war and violence have impacted Afghans and Afghan society in ways that are relevant to their receptiveness to coercion.

It falls outside the scope of this paper to present an in-depth analysis of the Afghan conflict since 1979. However, there are some distinct characteristics of the conflict that must be assumed to inform Afghan society’s receptiveness to the coercive use of force. As will be discussed in the theory chapter, coercion theory entails a set of presumptions and propositions, the existence of which is required in order for theory to have utility. These are broadly defined as the presence of unitary actors, the rationality presumption, the credible threat, the function of demands and the issue of choice. Arguably, the conflict in Northern Afghanistan from 2005 and onwards cannot be disconnected from the formative experiences that predated the US invasion and the ousting of the Taliban regime. This section will briefly reflect on some of the recent experiences that are assumed to be of particular importance to the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict, most notably the Soviet occupation, the civil war of the 90’s and the Taliban take over and regime. The section will, however, emphasise the consequences of the Soviet occupation as this was the experience that more than any other laid the foundation for the post 2001 conflict.

### **1.6.1. The Soviet occupation and its consequences**

Since the creation of Ahmad Shah’s empire in 1747, Afghanistan has always experienced social tensions between centre and periphery, between urban elites and rural peasantry, between domestic rulers and foreign influence. Until the Soviet invasion, these tensions were more or less kept in check. Conflict, clashes and skirmishes certainly appeared within the context of tribal feuds and the quest for power and resources, but the web of



society remained largely intact. The assumed harmony of Afghanistan is portrayed in the travelogue by the Swedish author Jan Myrdal, “En afghansk resa”<sup>3</sup>, first published in 1960. In his book, Myrdal presents a narrative of Afghanistan as a poor, but friendly and highly hospitable country, with few if any signs of conflict (Myrdal, 2002). Although Myrdal probably presented a narrative that was politically biased (Myrdal later became an outspoken defender of extreme far left regimes like the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia), his book is not without merit. In the late 60’s Afghanistan - and in particular Kabul - became a much appreciated destination for the hippie movement on their way to India in search of cheap hashish and spiritual revelation (Ansary, 2012, p. 167).

But all this changed with the Soviet invasion and the war that followed. Most scholars agree that the traditional structures upholding the web of society became deeply damaged or even destroyed in the course of the war (Ansary, 2012; Barfield, 2010). There are at least five interlinked factors that contributed to this fragmentation: 1) the physical and mental trauma of war itself, 2) the factional infighting of the major warlords, 3) the creation of a new warrior class, 4) the refugee problem and 5) the establishment of almost entirely male societies.

First, war is for most people a traumatising experience. The extreme level of violence during the Soviet occupation contributed to traumatising an entire population. The Soviets entered Afghanistan with experience of East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the doctrines of the Cold War aimed at winning the monumental battles foreseen in the European theatre (Grau, 1996). These doctrines articulated the use of overwhelming firepower and manoeuvre as the main tools in which to subdue an enemy. The Soviets lacked a counterinsurgency doctrine, and broadly reduced the Mujahedeen to a military problem which could be dealt with through military means alone. In this process the Soviets laid waste villages, infrastructure and irrigation facilities and conducted indiscriminate killings on a large scale. It is true that the Soviets also invested large sums in infrastructure improvement and various development projects, the remnants of which can still be seen in Afghanistan, but generally, the notion of “winning hearts and minds” was not deeply rooted in the Soviet campaign (Dixon & Robinson, 2013). The indiscriminate use of firepower, the distribution of land mines and the often heavy-handed practice of Soviet units all contributed to the fragmentation and partial destruction of the Afghan societal web and the largest refugee situation since the Second World War (Ansary, 2012, pp. 198-199).

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<sup>3</sup> “Travels in Afghanistan”, first issued in 1961.

Second, the Mujahedeen was not a unified force. The organised opposition consisted of 7 recognised groups that were unevenly supported by the US and Saudi Arabia (Barfield, 2010; Coll, 2004). These groups were unified only by their opposition to the Soviets and, as documented by Coll and others, they were frequently involved in internal strife and conflicts. The consequences of the absence of unity became evident when the Soviets withdrew in 1989 and the factions of the Mujaheddin engaged in what became the period of civil war in the early 90's.

Third, the Soviet occupation resulted in the creation of a new warrior class (Barfield, 2010, p. 243). Afghan tribesmen have always taken pride in showing courage in war and violent clashes occurred frequently throughout history. Afghan fighters were usually empowered through the traditional structures of tribes, clans and villages and being subject to the societal control of Khans, Maliks and elders, thus becoming an integrated part of the societal web. These structures had a mitigating effect and reduced the potential for excessive violence. The Soviet occupation changed this. The brutal practices of the Soviet military instilled a grim resolve among rural Afghans "to fight this enemy to their last drop of blood" (Ansary, 2012, p. 199). With nearly 6 million refugees in Pakistan and Iran, those left were often those capable of fighting.

The Mujahedeen provided space for individuals that excelled in battle, and these individuals were not necessarily empowered through the traditional structures. Quite a few Mujaheds rose to the rather imprecise rank of commander, implying that they had at their disposal weapons and a group of men that would follow them in battle. When the Soviet occupation ended, these commanders often retained the loyalty of their men, but their place in Afghan society was difficult to determine. Since the Soviet occupation dramatically reduced the influence of the traditional society, few mitigating structures were in place to keep the new warrior class in check. And, since the access to men and weapons provided economic opportunities to people whose formative experiences had been fighting, the commanders often became warlords using their skills and resources to tax and exploit whatever economic means were available to them. The creation of the new warrior class haunted Afghanistan through the civil war period of the 90's, and quite a few found their way back to power after the 2001 US invasion.

Fourth, the refugee issue created a whole range of challenges of its own, apart from the humanitarian catastrophe it represented. The Soviet occupation resulted in a gigantic refugee

crisis, with more than 6 million Afghans taking refuge in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran (Ansary, 2012, pp. 198-199). Two issues were of particular importance with respect to the development of conflict and violence: 1) the education of young men in the refugee camps, and 2) the challenges that arose from the return of refugees.

Activating young people in the refugee camps, in this case young men, soon became a substantial challenge. The answer, supported by the Pakistani government, was the creation of religious schools, the madrassas. Hundreds of such schools were built, mostly by Pakistani clerics, and tens of thousands of young Afghan boys were educated there. Madrassas do not, as sometimes understood, contain an exclusively religious curriculum (Bilquist & Colbert, 2006). Their curriculum may vary due to local customs and the intentions and capacity of those running the school. So, a madrassa is not necessarily a radicalising institution (P. Bergen & Pandey, 2006). It remains a fact, though, that thousands of young Afghan boys got their education in Pakistani-funded madrassas, and that these schools became a fertile recruiting ground for the Taliban movement through the 90's and 2000's.

The second issue of importance in understanding the influence of the refugee issue on the Afghan conflict is the way in which refugees could return to Afghanistan. Most refugees had left something, for example a piece of land, and would naturally regain that piece of land after their return. However, as a result of war and the way in which ownership of land is formalised in Afghanistan, quite a few refugees found that their land had been occupied.<sup>4</sup> Landowner issues are still a source of local conflict throughout Afghanistan, and some of these conflicts are related to the consequences of the refugee problem.

Fifth, and finally, war, displacement and the break-up of families and social structures resulted in the creation of male dominant communities. The Mujahedeen movement was all male, as were the refugee camp madrassas. In addition, the adolescents of the Afghan refugee camps who got their education in the madrassas had little or no memory of old Afghanistan. Their image of Afghanistan was thus shaped within the realities of the refugee camp and the curriculum of the madrassa, which was often conservative (Bilquist & Colbert, 2006).

As Ansary notes (Ansary, 2012, p. 199):

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<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan has traditionally had no formal registers of land ownership, necessitating that landowners fence their land and visualise their claim. The system, or rather lack of a system, often creates land disputes.

“At the height of the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan became a country in which the tempering effects of men living as members of families, clans and communities dropped away. Millions of men went through years living solely in the company of other adult men in some of the toughest conditions imaginable. They were members of militias in a land devoid of women, children and elders”.

The mitigating effects of living in a traditional and mixed social structure thus went into decline through the Soviet occupation and continued to do so throughout the 90's. This reinforced the brutalisation of war and contributed to the predatory elements of Afghanistan, which are still very much present today.

The Soviets consequently left a fragmented society that was deeply traumatised by war. It was a society in which survival was closely connected to the ability of individuals and groups to connect to and be identified as a supporter of someone with power and influence. The mitigating effects of the traditional system were limited and access to men and weapons became the most important asset to ensure influence and power. In addition, the Najibullah administration left by the Soviets was incapable of controlling anything but the major cities and could survive only as long as it received Russian aid.

So, in terms of using force to influence behaviour, what are the contemporary consequences of the Soviet occupation? As discussed in the theory chapter, coercion theory argues that behaviour can be influenced by threats of, or the adapted use of, force. The founding assumption is that the opposing party to the conflict will analyse the possible gains and losses by yielding to the coercers' wishes or not. Afghan rulers, e.g. Abdur Rahman, successfully coerced their opponents throughout their reign in order to strengthen the central government's grip over the country. One substantial difference between Rahman's Afghanistan and the Afghanistan that resulted of the Soviet occupation was that the latter did not entail clearly identifiable parties. Rather, it was a game in which motivation, loyalties and allegiances frequently shifted and identifying parties that could be influenced became an increasingly difficult task from 2001 and beyond.

### **1.6.2. The civil war**

The civil war that followed the Soviet occupation will not be discussed in any detail, apart from merely establishing as a fact that the civil war was at least as damaging to Afghan society as the Soviet occupation (R. Johnson, 2011). Johnson argues that it may have been the case that Afghanistan was liberated from the Soviets, but in terms of preserving the Afghan

way of life the Mujahidin and the war of liberation had failed: “Afghanistan had been totally transformed and the civil war accelerated the social changes which the Islamic purists had most feared” (R. Johnson, 2011, p. 250). The city of Kabul, almost untouched during the occupation, was deeply damaged during the civil war period, and illegal taxation and other types of crime sky-rocketed. Of the main actors of the civil war, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Masud, only Masud is no longer a player in the Afghan theatre. He was assassinated 10 September 2001, but still has an almost mythical status in Northern Afghanistan. During my travels in Mazar-e-Sharif and Northern Afghanistan, I observed numerous posters depicting “The Lion of Pansjir” (Skaar, 2010).

Arguably therefore, the civil war accelerated the effects of the Soviet occupation by increasingly fragmenting Afghan society and maintaining an almost permanent situation of war in different parts of the country. The civil war thus prepared the ground for the Taliban take over.

### **1.6.3. The Taliban**

There may have been a range of reasons for the Taliban take-over and its initial success, but most authors agree that the turmoil and criminal practices of the civil war provided the basis for the organisation (Crews & Tarzi, 2008; R. Johnson, 2011; T. H. Johnson & Mason, 2007; Rashid, 2001; Zaeef, Strick van Linschoten, & Kuehn, 2010). The rise of the Taliban was possible mainly because Afghanistan had degenerated into a swamp of criminality, extortion and corruption as well as the permanent absence of peace and stability. It falls outside the purpose of this thesis to present a detailed description of the Taliban advance and take-over, but some reflections as to the nature of the Taliban movement are assumed necessary.

First, the idea of the Taliban was made possible because of the almost total absence of a legitimate and acknowledged state authority (R. Johnson, 2011, pp. 251-254; Rashid, 2001, pp. 17-30). The organisation’s initial success came about because a sufficient number of Afghans came to see the Taliban as an actor that had the potential to rid the country of the predatory practices of the warlords, not because they were overly sympathetic to the Taliban ideology. As noted by Rashid and others, many Afghans accepted the sometimes draconian practices of Sharia because it led to a sense of stability and predictability. The Taliban were able to provide judicial services that were generally accepted and perceived as legitimate by large parts of the population.

Second, the Taliban was an ideologised movement with strong ties to Deobandi style Islam and advocating a strict application of Sharia, but it was also a movement based on Pashtun nationalism. The appeal of the organisation was much greater in the Pashtun dominated areas than in the mainly Tadjik and Uzbek areas in the North. Although the Taliban aimed to distance itself from the image of being proponents of Pashtun nationalism, their impact in the North was far greater in the Pashtun dominated areas than within communities of other ethnicities. According to the Norwegian military, few villages in Faryab were ethnically diverse, and it was always clear which villages were Pashtun. The support for the Taliban was as a general rule much higher in these villages than in other areas.

Third, although most respondents interviewed for the purpose of this thesis downplayed the role of ideology and religion, the Taliban obviously hit an ideological chord that resonated well in segments of Afghan society. The division between the Islamic purists or traditionalists and the left wing modernists that first materialised in the late 60's and through the 70's and continued through the rule of the PDPA modernist's throughout the 80's and the early 90's, provided a fertile breeding ground for the Islamic purists that saw modernism as the main threat to society (Barfield, 2010; Rashid, 2001). Afghanistan was, and still is to a large extent, composed of rurally based subsistence farmers and their families who usually stay in their village all their lives and rarely travel. Their lives are still permeated with religion, tradition and, quite frequently, illiteracy. To quite a few of these Afghans, the notion of modernity, e.g. secular rule and women's rights, represented an unwanted and hostile break in continuity and the acknowledged way of life. The Taliban operatives were rarely city dwellers from Kabul or Mazar e-Sharif. Rather, they were deeply rooted in the Afghan countryside. It was in these communities that the Taliban found most support for their ideological message. The organisation was never strong in, nor did it properly understand the logic and dynamics of, modern city life. Thus, during their rule they effectively transformed the Afghan cities into their image of an Afghan village, only on a grander scale.

These three factors - the provision of acceptable judicial practices and stability, the connection to Pashtun nationalism and ideological appeal in the rural areas - were important reasons for the progress and credibility of the Taliban throughout the late 90's and remained so after the organisation started to re-establish itself in parts of the country in 2005/6.

#### **1.6.4. Conclusion, the Afghan conflict revisited**

This section has aimed to examine those formative Afghan experiences of conflict that are assumed to be most relevant to the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict. It argues that the Soviet occupation transformed Afghanistan into a fragmented and traumatised society in which lessons of positioning for the sake of survival became the most valuable. The civil war accelerated these developments, contributing to a society in which loyalties and allegiances could not be separated from individual and group interest.

The Taliban appeared as actors that, at least initially, provided answers to the most urgent matters: the prevention of the predatory practices of the warlords, the provision of legitimate and accepted judicial practices and an ideology that resonated well in the Pashtu dominated rural areas.

#### **1.7. The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan**

From 2003 onwards, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) became the dominant international coalition in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> From the early beginnings in 2002 until it was terminated in 2014, ISAF consisted of at most 130,000 soldiers and covered all the regions in Afghanistan. ISAF provided the coalition framework to which Norway and Germany deployed their military in Afghanistan. This section will first briefly examine the background and development of ISAF, then its presence in the North and, finally, a generic description of ISAF operations in the region.

ISAF was a consequence of the Bonn Conference of 2001 which facilitated the transfer of authority from the Taliban regime to the interim Afghan government and international support to Afghanistan (ISAF, 2009b). The mission was mandated through a series of UNSC resolutions starting with resolution 1386 which provided the initial mandate for the operation. Several resolutions were to follow as the mission developed and its area of responsibility increased. From the outset, ISAF was an international coalition led by an appointed nation, but from 11 August 2003, NATO took the lead as requested by the UN (NATO, 2015). It was a peace enforcement mission with a robust mandate that included an overarching and to some degree independent responsibility to facilitate and conduct stability and security operations in Afghanistan (ISAF, 2009b).

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<sup>5</sup> Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) existed in parallel with ISAF and was subordinated to the US CENTCOM. COMISAF rotated between the troop contributing nations, but from 2007, COMISAF was always a US general (Wikipedia, 2017b).



ISAF was initially intended to provide international military support and security to Kabul and its immediate surroundings, but through UNSC resolution 1510, the ISAF responsibility was enlarged to apply to areas outside Kabul as well. NATO/ISAF planned for a counter clockwise expansion, starting with the North in 2003/4, proceeding to the West in February 2005 and to the South in December 2005 (NATO, 2015). By 2006, ISAF was represented in all the regions of Afghanistan, but its main focus was on the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the South and East. In the early stages of the operation the Northern region was considered to be an area with relative peace and stability, thus in military terms it was assumed to be a so-called economy of force area. In practice, therefore, units with limited capabilities were allocated to the North, most notably the PRTs, and the region was devoid of robust manoeuvre forces until the US initiated the surge in 2010.

From the outset, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were the backbone of the ISAF presence in the North (Chiari, 2014; Eronen, 2008a). Whereas the South and East soon saw the influx of robust combat units, this was not the case in the North. Apart from the Norwegian Quick Reaction Force deployed to Camp Marmal outside Mazar-e-Sharif, the early phases of the operation in the North did not entail robust combat forces.

The PRTs were hybrid military structures aimed at combining different tools, military as well as non-military, to resolve the complexities of the Afghan conflicts. Originally, the PRT was a US innovation developed for the particularities of the Afghan and later Iraqi theatres: “The primary purpose of creating these outposts was political, but PRTs were also seen as a means for dealing with the causes of Afghanistan’s instability: terrorism, warlords, unemployment, and grinding poverty” (Perito, 2005).

The mission of the PRTs was based on the ISAF mandate and the way in which ISAF would assume its responsibility throughout Afghanistan. According to the ISAF PRT handbook of 2010, the PRTs were to (ISAF, 2010b):

“.... assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction efforts.”

However, in real terms the PRTs differed from nation to nation, leaving no generally acknowledged way to run a PRT, neither organisationally nor with respect to which functions it should cover (Jackson & Gordon, 2007). Eronen identified 5 generic PRT models: the American, British, German, Nordic and Turkish (Eronen, 2008a). The model proposed by



Eronen does indeed have merit, but insofar as most nations would not wholeheartedly transfer the control of their PRTs to COMISAF and the local context in which they functioned, it differed substantially from area to area. All PRTs were in reality unique structures. However, the PRTs were an integrated part of the ISAF command structure; hence, formally they received their tasks and orders through the ISAF chain of command; in the North, for all practical purposes, from the ISAF Regional Command North (RC N) in Mazar-e-Sharif. Due to the portion of national control most nations exercised over their “own” PRTs, each PRT tended to apply a national flavour to issues of command and control. The Norwegian Joint HQ made clear to the Norwegian PRT commanders that “Norway does not do COIN”, and the German PRT in Kunduz frequently experienced a micromanagement approach from the German operations command in Potsdam (GE04, 28 Oct 2015; Huse, 10 April 2014). Also, as noted by the Norwegian PRT commanders, they enjoyed substantial autonomy on how to conduct operations, and in effect had to independently develop their *modus operandi*. It was therefore the case that the way the PRTs conducted business varied from one contingent to the next, depending on the respective commanders’ priorities.

Although Norway and Germany strengthened their PRTs from 2008 onwards with units that were able to participate in larger scale operations, the big shift in the ISAF presence came about in 2010 as a consequence of the US surge and the deployment of two German task forces. The US contribution was made up by a brigade of the US 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and the US 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade equipped with around 50 helicopters. The German task forces consisted of two battalion size units that were deployed to Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif, although their main focus became the provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan. Henceforth, from 2010 and onwards, ISAF in the North entailed substantial and robust military units able to project force on a far greater level than before.

It was customary to divide the ISAF operations into two distinct, but partly overlapping, types of operations: framework operations and focused operations (Skaar, 2010). A possible third category would be the operations carried out by the Special Operation Forces (SOF), but for the purpose of this thesis, I will treat them as a subset of focused operations. An example of the SOF operations would be the so-called Kill or Capture operations designed to neutralise (decapitate) mid-level Taliban commanders<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Decapitate is here used synonymously with Pape’s term decapitation, meaning the neutralisation of leadership elements (Pape, 1996). The ISAF kill or capture operations were usually conducted by US Special Forces and their Afghan counterparts, particularly directed

Framework operations would typically be the everyday work of the PRT, including but not limited to intelligence gathering, meetings with Afghan formal and semi-formal structures, liaising and mentoring of ANSF structures and other more or less routine activities that followed from the three lines of operation: security, governance and reconstruction and development.<sup>7</sup> Framework operations would usually not be kinetic unless in self-defence, nor would they be conducted in a way that signalled an implied threat. As reported by some MOT squad leaders, one always tried to uphold a low threat posture with the particular aim of not being assessed to be a potential threat (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014). As such, framework operations were generally not designed to be coercive.

Focused operations on the other hand usually had the potential of becoming kinetic and quite frequently did. Focused operations would normally be military operations conducted by ISAF units in close cooperation with Afghan units. These operations would be planned either at the RC N level or by the PRT staff, and they would be limited in scope, time and space. Focused operations were usually designed and executed to reduce insurgent capabilities by reducing their combat effectiveness, recruiting potential and motivation to fight. Most of these operations would draw on RC N provided theatre resources as well as being conducted in close cooperation with ANSF. A typical focused operation would have an active phase of one to two weeks; thereafter the main force would withdraw to their basing areas, leaving only minor if any forces behind.

A graphic visualisation of the principles of ISAF operations in the North is provided in fig 1.1 below. It should be noted that from 2010, neither the German task forces nor the US units were subordinated to the PRTs, but directly subordinated to the RC N.

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against the local commanders of the Taliban. Not much is known about these operations due to their high classification, but Clark's article illuminates the issue (Clark, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Semi-formal is here used for those elements of Afghan society that belong to the traditional power structures but are not part of the GIRoA. They would typically include village elders, village shuras, but also local strong men and warlords.

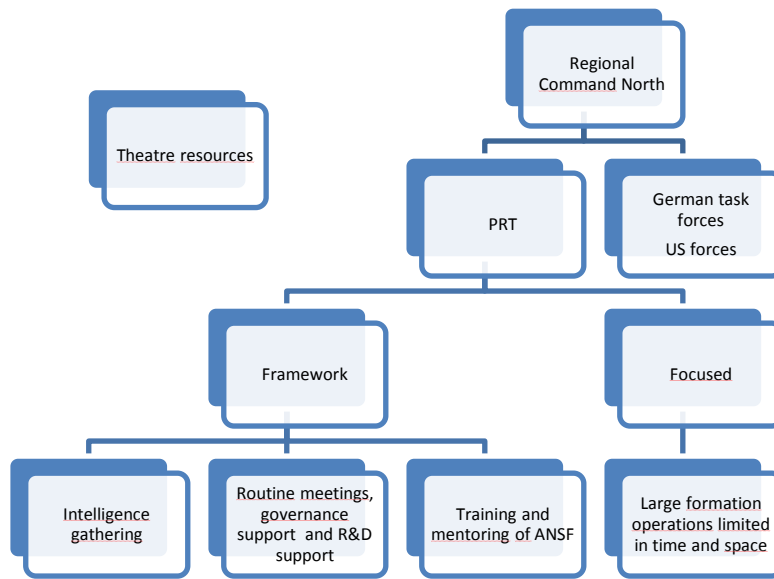


Fig 1.1, generic description of ISAF operation

## 2. Explaining coercion theory

### 2.1. Introduction

In Book One, Chapter Two of “On War”, Clausewitz refers to the purpose of war as forcing the opponent to do our will: “if war is an act of violence meant to force the enemy to do our will, its aim would have always and solely to be to overcome the enemy and disarm him” (Clausewitz, 1984, p. 90). Clausewitz thus provides the fundamental rationale for the use of military force outside the paradigm of self-defence: to force the opponent to do our will. The potential of military force to persuade the opponent to stop or undo undesired activities provides the conceptual basis and rationale for most uses of military force. According to coercion theorist Robert Pape: “the universe of coercion includes nearly all attempts by states to accept a change in status quo, including virtually all wars” (Pape, 1996, p. 12).

However, as Clausewitz also notes, war cannot be violent clashes all the time due to the role of friction, passion and politics. The conflict in Afghanistan retains strong aspects of being a social phenomenon or, as noted by Emile Simpson, being apolitical (Simpson, 2012). The war in Afghanistan, Simpson argues, is about a range of issues that does not easily correspond to the notion of war as a continuation of policy in the Clausewitzian sense. This paradox is the point of departure for revisiting the current stage of coercion theory.

This chapter will contain four sections. First, I will define coercion for the purpose of this thesis. Although there is a precise meaning of the term coercion, different authors have proposed different definitions for military coercion; hence a definitional effort is required. Since the publication of Schelling’s *Arms and Influence*, a wide range of scholars have aimed to encapsulate its conceptual core, in order to provide it with a predictive function (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 3-10; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996; Schelling, 1966). Through developing either a hypothetical-deductive argument (e.g. Schelling and Pape) or a case-study based inductive argument (e.g. George), it has been the aim of coercion theorists to inform the development of policy in the face of potential or actual conflict (Jakobsen, 2011). However, as Bratton argues, there exists a lack of conceptual clarity as to the definition of coercion (Bratton, 2003).

Second, I will frame the current state of affairs by reviewing the relevant literature. Coercion theory places itself within a scholarly and historical position that is of significance with respect to its relevance in the Afghan conflict. The Schelling or George schools of

thought have formed the thinking of later theorists and have resulted in a range of books and academic articles that discuss coercion theoretically and empirically.

Third, I will discuss the basic concepts and central elements of coercion theory. Theory rests on a number of assumptions and presuppositions, the existence of which is necessary to provide it with explanatory power in conflict.

Fourth, coercion theory argues that threats of, or the adapted use of, force have the contingent value of influencing the opponent's behaviour or persuading them to do something that they would otherwise not have done. Success then translates into behavioural changes consistent with the wishes of the coercer. However, as will be shown, there is a lack of conceptual clarity as to what constitutes success. This is particularly true in complex contemporary conflicts like the Afghan one, in which effects cannot easily be framed in linear either/or outcomes. Consequently, the notion of coercive success in such conflicts will be addressed.

## **2.2. Defining military coercion**

Contrary to other theories of political science - such as, for example, the theory of the democratic peace - coercion theory is not "a theory". Rather, it is a set empirical studies, analysis, propositions and presuppositions that deal with the potential of military force to change the behaviour of an opponent. The basis for modern coercion theory is generally acknowledged to be the works of Schelling and George which founded two separate schools or approaches to the theme (Freedman, 1998, p. 1; Alexander L. George, Hall, & Simons, 1971; Jakobsen, 2011; Schelling, 1966).

Thomas Schelling argued that military force has two basic functions: coercion or brute force (Schelling, 1966). Brute force, Schelling argued, was the application of force to achieve the complete military victory, to render the opponents' actions or wishes irrelevant, as illustrated by the complete and unbiased military victories of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan in 1945. The complete military victory as a consequence of brute force is of limited interest in the context of complex contemporary conflicts, hence the Scellingian term of coercion will be the focus of this thesis. Schelling divided coercion into two subgroups: compellence and deterrence. The former alludes to the potential of military force to change the status quo, to make the opponent do what they would otherwise not have done, whereas deterrence alludes to the potential of military force to maintain the status quo. The former requires the opponent to actually do something, whereas the latter requires that the opponent

does not depart from the already established path. The focus of this thesis is the contingent value of force to induce change, in Schelling's terminology compellence. However, since other authors have confused the distinction between compellence and coercion, this thesis will hereafter use coercion to equal Schelling's compellence.

*The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines coerce as: "persuade (an unwilling person) to do something by the use of force or threats" ("The New Oxford Dictionary of English," 1998). This basic understanding of coercion is reflected throughout the literature, i.e. coercion revolves around making someone do something they would otherwise not have done, persuaded to do so by some kind of threat or forceful external influence.

Acknowledging that the central element of coercion is to "persuade an unwilling person or actor to do something by the use of force or threats", various theorists have introduced different elements and explanations to arrive at a precise definition of military coercion. Central to Schelling was the notion that coercion is fundamentally about bargaining (Schelling, 1966, pp. 1-10). Coercion enables the coercer to manipulate the costs and benefits of the opponent in order to gain a better situation for achieving their own objectives. Although Schelling mentions the benefit part, he is mostly concerned with cost, which in Schelling's terminology translates to the potential for or the infliction of pain and suffering. Pape similarly argues that the purpose of coercion is to "affect the behaviour of the opponent by manipulating costs and benefits" (Pape, 1996, p. 12). The cost-benefit relation is central to most theorists, including George, Byman and Waxman (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994).

Freedman offers the following definition of strategic coercion: "compellence is inducing his withdrawal or his acquiescence, or his collaboration by an action that threatens to hurt, often one that could not forcibly accomplish its aim but that, nevertheless, can hurt enough to induce compliance" (Freedman, 1998, p. 19).<sup>8</sup> Freedman also emphasises the reciprocal function of coercion; it is rare to find cases in which there is a coercer and a coerced. Rather, the parties will be engaged in a system of coercion and counter-coercion that will clearly influence their actions and objectives. Byman and Waxman propose a similar definition by defining coercion as "the use of threatened force, and at times the limited use of actual force to back up the threat, to induce an adversary to change its behaviour" (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 1).

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<sup>8</sup> Freedman uses the Schellingian term compellence, which for the purpose of this thesis equals coercion.

However, for the sake of simplicity and to allow for analytical clarity, the definition proposed by Jakobsen is assessed as the most useful for the purpose of this thesis. Jakobsen defines military coercion as “the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors” (Jakobsen, 2011). This definition provides the definitional point of departure for analysing the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict.

Having defined military coercion, two remarks on what coercion is not are appropriate. First, Schelling and others contrast coercion to brute force (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Freedman, 1998; Schelling, 1966). Brute force implies that the actions and desires of the opponent are irrelevant; they have, in reality, no choices as to current or future behaviour. Brute force, Schelling argues, “can only accomplish what requires no collaboration” (Schelling, 1966, p. 8). Clearly, coercive use of force may be brutal, but the distinction between coercion and brute force is defined, not by the intensity of fighting or the brutality of the conflict, but by its purpose. Brute force is understood as the use of military force in order to leave the opponent with no real choices; their actions will be made irrelevant, enabling the victor to do as they please (Pape, 1996, p. 13; Schelling, 1966, pp. 1-5). The outcome of brute force is the clear and unbiased military victory. Coercion, in contrast, will leave the opponent with a real choice, allowing them to analyse threats and consequences and, based on the analysis, decide whether they will yield to the coercer’s wishes or not (Byman & Waxman, 2002; A. George, 2003). Central to coercion is thus the issue of choice; the opponent can choose not to yield if they are ready to accept the consequences.

However, the distinction between brute force and coercion may not be as fine-tuned as assumed by theory. Jakobsen argues that the threshold between limited force and full scale brute force is difficult to determine, and may in many cases lie in the eyes of the beholder (Jakobsen, 2011, pp. 158-159). Pape also makes a distinction between coercion and war-fighting, the latter being equal to brute force, but he admits that there is a slippery slope in which coercion may turn into brute force in the absence of early coercive successes (Pape, 1996, pp. 14-15).

Second, coercion is frequently discussed in conjunction with the terms deterrence and compellence (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Jakobsen, 2011; Pape, 1996). George assumes coercion to be the overarching term that is then broken down into either compellence or deterrence, whereas Pape uses coercion in a manner similar to Schelling’s compellence.

For Schelling, deterrence implies maintaining the status quo, whereas compellence implies making someone change, i.e. altering the status quo. Pape, on the other hand, exchanges coercion for Schelling's compellence, whereas Jakobsen and Schaub use coercion as the overarching term, and then divide it into a deterrence part and a compellence part (Schaub in Freedman, 1998, pp. 37-41; Jakobsen, 2011, p. 155; Pape, 1996, p. 4). Fundamentally, deterrence is usually assumed to imply maintaining the status quo, i.e. doing nothing, whereas compellence or coercion implies an ambition to induce change, i.e. stop what someone is doing or make them do something else. If deterrence fails, compellent threats may soon be the next step. For the sake of analytical clarity I will use coercion as Pape does, interchangeably with Schelling's term compellence, but distinct from deterrence.

### **2.3. The purpose of coercion**

In the literature, the purpose of coercion is usually to put sufficient pressure on an opponent, notably a state, to make it act in ways consistent with the coercer's wishes or to provide the coercer with bargaining power (Schelling, 1966). Throughout the history of conflict, coercion has had different purposes. During the Cuban missile crisis the purpose of coercion was to make the Soviets dismantle their missiles and withdraw their nuclear capacity from Cuba. During the Vietnam War, the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign intended to force the North Vietnamese government to abstain from supporting the Vietcong, whereas the Linebacker campaigns aimed at persuading the North Vietnamese government to engage in negotiations in order to ensure a favourable agreement that allowed for US withdrawal (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996). During the 1999 Operation Allied Force, NATO aimed to persuade president Milosevic to stop ethnic cleansing and withdraw the Serb forces from Kosovo, although there was no clear strategy, let alone any consciousness of coercion (Henriksen, 2007). Arguably, therefore, coercion literature generally assumes that the purpose of coercion is to create a favourable situation in which the opponent perceives it to be in their best interest to engage in negotiations or accept the terms of the coercer.

It is generally agreed that threats or the use of force have the potential to influence behaviour. It may be the case that the target does not react according to the coercer's wishes, but the literature refers to few if any instances of indifference. What can be questioned, though, is not whether coercions have a behavioural impact or not, but what kind of impact. As illustrated by Cate Clark on the Takhar attacks, coercive use of force may result in outputs that are contrary to the coercer's intentions (Clark, 2011). As such, theory's assumption of the



capacity of military coercion to induce behavioural change is well documented and uncontroversial.

However, there is some theoretical controversy as to the capacity of military coercion to create favourable conditions for negotiations. The controversy revolves around whether negotiations are most likely to occur in situations where the coercer is perceived to be superior (coercion theory), or in situations of perceived, but fruitless equality (ripeness theory). The literature on coercion presents it as a universal phenomenon and in general terms, but with an emphasis on the coercive efforts of the US (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994). It is highly unlikely that the US would engage in a coercive contest without an assumption of being the superior party. But, also in the cases that do not include coercive efforts by the US, the coercer is still assumed to be the superior party (Freedman, 1998; Pape, 1996). The deduction that follows is that coercion theory assumes that negotiations are most likely to occur in a superior-inferior relationship. The purpose of coercion is therefore to create a perception in the opponent that since they are the inferior party, they will have the most to gain by complying with the coercer's wishes, i.e. engaging in negotiations and accepting the premises as articulated by the coercer.

This view is challenged, though, by Zartman's theory of the Mutually Hurting Stalemate or Ripeness theory (Pruitt, 2005; Zartman, 2015). Coercion represents in many ways a "wicked problem" by intending to influence a great number of people to change their behaviour (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The outcomes of wicked problems are difficult to determine. The mutually hurting stalemate alludes to the situation in which none of the parties assume a positive outcome to be likely. Whereas coercion theory argues that successful coercion requires a superior coercer, Zartman argues that a sense of perceived but deadlocked symmetry provides a better chance of negotiations. The opposing parties are most likely to engage in negotiations when they have a shared experience of stalemate and the acknowledgement that continuing the conflict will not lead to a better situation. Ripeness theory has been criticised for being too narrow in scope (Pruitt, 2005) and assuming questionable prerequisites, like unitary actors and a simplistic notion of conflict complexities, but these critiques are equally relevant to coercion theory.

The notion of the mutually hurting stalemate and ripeness theory offer a contrasting view to coercion theory. The deduction from Zartman's theory is that the superior versus inferior relationship is unlikely to lead to negotiations. Rather, as argued by Pruitt and others,

a sense of inferiority may develop militant ideologies in which the continued fight provides a sense of purpose on its own terms and negotiations are perceived as defeatist (Pruitt, 2005). The purpose of coercion will then not be to facilitate a superior starting point, as assumed by coercion theory, but rather to maintain military pressure on the opponent on a level and timescale sufficient for the opponent to assess that they will not prevail, even if they are not losing.

On the tactical level, the distinction between coercion theory and ripeness theory with respect to the purpose of coercion may not be of any particular significance. But, on the operational and strategic level, there is a significant difference in that coercion theory would favour operations and activities that would bring about negotiations on a short timescale, whereas a consequence of ripeness theory is an acceptance of the protracted nature of such conflicts. The point of departure of this thesis is coercion theory's notion of purpose. However, the contrasting view represented by ripeness theory may inform the development of coercion theory and needs to be tested through empirical studies.

#### **2.4. The research field: A review of the literature**

The main field of research relevant to this thesis is coercion theory. Since the publication of *Arms and Influence*, a range of books and articles have been published on various aspects of coercion. Coercion literature is, however, not the only field of research that is relevant to the study of the utility of coercion theory in Afghanistan. In 2008, ISAF acknowledged that the Afghan conflict was a COIN conflict. Throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there was renewed academic interest in the study of the use of force in COIN scenarios. Whereas coercion literature generally addresses international state versus state conflict, the utility of force in a conflict like the Afghan one is better addressed in the literature on insurgencies and counter insurgencies. Arguably, therefore, a review of the relevant literature on COIN is required. Finally, Norway and Germany deployed their military to Afghanistan equipped with a suite of prior military experiences, pre-mission training, national preferences and practices and, not least, a doctrinal basis. This thesis argues that the conceptual point of departure for most nations' application of force can be derived from the doctrines upon which their operations and activities rest. Doctrines are not a field of research per se, but in order to understand the way in which Norway and Germany applied military force they are intrinsically interesting. The third type of literature that will be addressed here is consequently the national and ISAF doctrines that formed the conceptual backdrop for the respective nations' application of force.

#### **2.4.1. The research on coercion**

Although Thucydides, in his account of the Peloponnesian wars, and Clausewitz in “On War” discuss coercive strategies, the starting point for modern research on coercion is the scholarly interest in deterrence and compellence that developed during the Cold War in the 60’s (Clausewitz, 1984; Jakobsen, 2011; Lebow, 2007). Scholars like Schelling and George found an interest in and tried to understand the function of force in international relations with respect to preventing major war, as well as to understand the functions of force short of major war. The terminology used since originates from this period and mainly from two books by the Nobel prize winner Thomas Schelling, respectively “the Strategy of Conflict” “Arms and Influence” and Alexander George’s “ The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy” (Alexander L. George et al., 1971; Schelling, 1960, 1966). Since Schelling’s and George’s seminal work, a wide range of scholars have published on the topic and it is now widely accepted as a research area of substantial importance to the understanding of the utility of force in international relations.

According to Jakobsen, research on coercion has occurred in either of two different schools of thought: a hypothetical-deductive school, as represented by Schelling, and an inductive case study based school as represented by George (Jakobsen, 2011). In “Arms and Influence”, Schelling leans on game theoretical models derived from the notion of unitary and utility optimising rational actors. Schelling’s book is almost entirely theoretical and abstract; in the relatively few instances when it includes empirical data it is only to illustrate the author’s argument. It applies a highly theoretical understanding of human behaviour that takes for granted the economically derived rational component of human decision making. Schelling’s starting point is that humans, by definition, will act to avoid pain and suffering, termed cost by Schelling, and consciously analyse and calculate how they can adjust their behaviour in order to avoid it. Schelling’s theories are indeed seductive but, as observed by George and noted by Jakobsen, it was not possible for Schelling (or anyone else) to operationalise his theories during the major conflict at the time - the Vietnam conflict (Jakobsen, 2011).

The challenge of operationalising the parsimonious theories of Schelling persuaded George to apply an inductive approach to the research on coercion (Jakobsen, 2011). First in 1971, and then in the revised edition in 1994, George relied on case study research to develop theory (Alexander L. George et al., 1971; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994). The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy has since been among the most cited books in the research on

coercion. Based on his originally 5, and in the revised version 7, case studies, George argued that the potential for coercive success depends heavily on the context in which it is applied. George thus argued that there are 5 contextual variables that were relevant with respect to predicting outcomes. These were:

1. The Global Strategic Environment
2. The type of provocation
3. The image of war
4. If coercion were part of unilateral or coalition efforts
5. The isolation of the adversary

George then identified 9 conditions that might favour success:

1. Clarity of objective
2. Strength of motivation
3. Asymmetry of motivation
4. Sense of urgency
5. Strong leadership
6. Domestic support
7. International support
8. The opponent's fear of unacceptable escalation
9. Clarity concerning the precise terms for settlement of the crisis

George concludes that coercion is difficult, but a viable approach to achieve political goals without having to resort to violence. The study of coercion has since broadly been divided between these schools, although the inductive approach of the efficacy of coercion as being context dependent and actor specific has been favoured by most scholars (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Freedman, 1998).

Since the publications of *Arms and Influence* and *The Limits*, a wide range of scholars have published on the subject. Robert Pape, in his widely cited *Bombing to Win*, studied 33 coercive air campaigns and concluded that, of four potential coercive strategies - punishment, risk, decapitation and denial - denial has the best chance of succeeding (Pape, 1996). By proposing that a particular type of coercive strategy had a better chance of success than others, Pape added a predictive ambition to coercion theory beyond the practices of earlier scholars. Bratton criticised Pape's conclusions and argued that "(1) he holds punishment strategies to a higher standard of success than denial strategies; and (2) he confuses

effectiveness with utility” (Bratton, 2003). Also, Cohen was critical and argued that Pape applied “An excessively narrow political science framework... [which] has led the author further than the evidence can take him” (E. A. Cohen, 1996). Although Pape’s conclusions were to some degree contested, Pape’s work on coercion stands out as one of the most comprehensive and empirically robust studies to be conducted.

Byman and Waxman explain and theorise on military coercion, and aim to put it in a contemporary context, although with an explicit US perspective (Byman & Waxman, 2002). The purpose of Byman and Waxman’s book is not so much to develop theory, but to explain the utility of coercion in different types of conflicts and contexts. Freedman’s starting point is the works of Schelling and George, but he aims to take the study of coercion further, not least by including cases that involve substantial non-state actors (Freedman, 1998). Freedman’s book thus includes cases entailing non-state actors and cases that are qualitatively different to the major conflicts that were the basis for Schelling’s theories, for example.

It is a challenge though, that the study of coercion is usually framed within the context of international conflicts; actors equal states. Schelling discussed actors generically, but there is little doubt that the actors relevant to Schelling’s thesis are states. Schelling wrote under the context of the Cold War, and his main research interest was the relationship between the dominant alliances and in particular between the US and the Soviet Union. Pape, in his widely referenced case study of coercive bombing campaigns, refers almost exclusively to state vs. state conflicts, as does George in *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996, pp. 49-52). Sechser, in his study of militarised compellent threats from 1918 to 2001, states that “A compellent threat must be made from one state to another. Threats against leaders of rebel organisations, terrorist groups, intergovernmental organisations and other non-state actors are not included”. Thus, he effectively leaves out of his study conflicts like the one in Afghanistan (“Insurgent Abuses against Afghan Civilians”, 2008). Military coercion has thus come to be synonymous with the efforts states make to influence the behaviour of other states through threats or the adapted use of military force. Frequently used illustrations of the coercive use of force are the Cuban Missile Crise, the US bombing campaigns in Vietnam, the war in Iraq in 1991 and the 1999 bombing campaign in Kosovo.

The existing literature is far poorer when discussing coercion within complex contemporary conflicts such as Afghanistan. Such conflicts depart from the logic of interstate

conflict by entailing a range of non-state actors whose motivations and allegiances do not easily translate into the nature and characteristics of inter-state conflict. Some scholarly efforts have been made, though; Byman and Waxman discuss coercion and non-state actors, Sayigh discusses coercion and the PLO in Lebanon in 1969-1976, and De Wijk touches upon the issue, although without coming to substantial conclusions (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 175-200; Sayigh in Freedman, 1998, pp. 212-248; Wijk, 2005, pp. 197-241). Some case studies discuss specific applications of force that had a coercive intention, like Kate Clark's paper on "The Takhar Attacks" (Clark, 2011). But generally the literature does not provide much clarity as to the utility of coercion theory in non-international conflicts in which actors and issues are fluid and unstable, therefore highlighting the original contribution made by this thesis.

#### **2.4.2. The research on Counter Insurgency (COIN)**

The research on insurgencies and counter insurgencies is rich and well-developed. Although both Clausewitz and Jomini addressed the characteristics of fighting guerrillas, the origin of modern studies on insurgencies and counterinsurgency can be traced back to the early writings on colonial warfare.<sup>9</sup> Beckett argues that, already in 1896, there was a division of concepts in the British Army between the traditional and "continentalist" school of thought and the British Imperial School of military thought (Beckett, 2007). The latter emphasised the challenges that derived from fighting natives throughout the British Empire, a type of fight that the Imperialists found to be qualitatively different from fighting the European armies.

The literature positions COIN within a wider framework of war studies. COIN is understood as a particular type of war in which the opponent is a non-state actor that, through violent means, aims to overthrow the in-place government or existing political order (Kilcullen, 2006). Whereas regular wars can be fought for a number of reasons, COIN is dependent on the existence of an insurgency, thus being reactive from the outset - if there are no insurgents, there is no counterinsurgency.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a continued interest in the characteristics of counterinsurgency warfare. Although the literature is extensive and covers a wide range of conflicts, there is a particular focus on some selected historical experiences, most notably the British Malayan experience, the US in Vietnam, the French in Algeria and, most recently, the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts (Corum, 2008; Greenhill & Staniland, 2007; Seth G Jones, 2009;

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<sup>9</sup> Both Clausewitz and Jomini discuss the French experiences with the Spanish guerrillas.

Nagl, 2002). There are numerous other conflicts to choose from, but the mentioned conflicts and a few others are the ones most frequently referred to in the literature. As noted by Greenhill et al., the Malayan experience is in many aspects the exemplary case of COIN success, whereas Vietnam is the ultimate failure (Greenhill & Staniland, 2007). Such notions, although potentially valuable, may lead to a universal approach to COIN that does not sufficiently include the distinct characteristics of the conflict in question, which may easily lead to unproductive approaches.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a renewed interest in COIN, not least because of the recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. In its overview on the COIN literature from 2010, The Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst lists a total of 788 publications, including books and academic articles, ranging from literature discussing the European colonial experiences up to contemporary conflicts (*Counterinsurgency - a bibliography*, 2010). The list has expanded considerably since 2010. The Sandhurst bibliography suggests that COIN literature can broadly be divided into three types: 1) general works discussing theory and doctrine, 2) works discussing particular aspects of COIN, e.g. airpower, legal and ethical aspects, measurements of effects and particular types of operations and 3) historical analysis of particular missions, like the British experience in Malaya and the US experience in Vietnam.

Initially, the literature on COIN can be divided into two distinct, but not mutually exclusive schools of thought: the enemy centric or the population centric (Kilcullen, 2009; Wörmer, 2012). In the enemy centric approach, the insurgents are usually framed within a normative and negative concept of being “the enemy” or “terrorists” (Corum, 2008; Kilcullen, 2006, 2009). They are rarely termed freedom fighters or just actors with legitimate interests. The enemy centric approach assumes the insurgency to be a military problem to which the answer is military means. The insurgents are defined as an enemy, and the solution to the problem is to find and hunt them down. This approach is reflected in the literature on the French campaigns in Indo-China in the early 50’s, the US in Vietnam and the USSR in Afghanistan (Beckett, 2007; Nagl, 2002). An illustration of the enemy centric appreciation was the Commander of the US Military Assistance Command to Vietnam (MACV), General Westmoreland. Westmoreland preferred the “search and destroy” tactic in which mobility and firepower were the key elements in contrast to the US Marine’s early attempts to apply the Combined Action Platoon Plan in which small units of Marines were deployed to villages to protect and support the population (Nagl, 2002, pp. 152-158).



The population centric school of thought argues that the aim of the COIN campaign is not the military defeat of the enemy, but to win the consent of the people (Duyvesteyn, 2011; Fitzsimmons, 2008; Gentile, 2011; Nagl, 2002; Plakoudas, 2015; Ucko & Egnell, 2013). “The people is the prize”, “hearts and minds” and a “comprehensive approach” were key elements of this school of thought (Ucko & Egnell, 2013, pp. 29-32). The “people is the prize” approach was also reflected in COMISAF COIN guidance (McChrystal, 2010). A founding notion within the “hearts and minds” literature is that there is a distinction between the population, whose hearts and minds are to be won, and the insurgents who may be targeted through military means. Through gaining the consent and understanding of the main bulk of the domestic population, theory suggests that there will be a wedge between them in which the insurgents will be marginalised and ripe for defeat. This approach, using Chairman Mao’s metaphor, assumes the insurgent to be the fish that swims in a sea of people. The purpose, then, is to make the sea an unwelcoming place for the insurgents, by ensuring the popular consent of the people regarding the counterinsurgent. At the core of the population centric approach is the notion of “hearts and minds”. The population centric approach is to some degree credited to the British campaign in Malaya, in which the British employed soft techniques to win the consent of the people, thus alienating the Chinese dominated insurgency (Dixon, 2009). However, as noted by Ucko and others, the British in Malaya made extensive use of force and drew on techniques such as, for example, population control that would be unthinkable today (Nagl, 2002, pp. 87-114; Ucko & Egnell, 2013, pp. 30-32).

The literature that emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is less prone to advocate either an enemy or a population centric approach. Rather, both approaches have been criticised, the enemy centric for being too narrow in scope and the population centric for missing out the importance of combating insurgent formations (Dixon, 2009; Gregg, 2009; Kilcullen, 2006; Ucko & Egnell, 2013). Contemporary literature also emphasises the importance of institution building. If winning hearts and minds should be meaningful to the population, it is not least through building institutions of governance that are perceived to be part of the solution, not the problem (Chin, 2007).

The argument can be made, then, that contrary to the literature on coercion theory, the literature on COIN acknowledges that there may be qualitative differences between interstate war and insurgencies that are relevant to coercion. In particular, the literature on COIN acknowledges that raising cost through the infliction of pain and suffering may have unintended consequences through the loss of popular support.



### **2.4.3. The military doctrines**

Military doctrines are here not understood as a research area. Doctrines function as the conceptual basis for the conduct of military operations, and will usually reflect the dominant thinking of the conduct of a nation's military operations. Rather than being transformational, the doctrines of Norway and Germany predominantly reflected the established practice on how to conduct military operations. Arguably, therefore, the national doctrines provide the conceptual basis for the units that deployed to Afghanistan. An overview of the relevant doctrinal documents is therefore required in the literature review.

The Afghan conflict represented a type of conflict that was qualitatively different from the notions of an international and symmetrical major war. It was a conflict that, in the legal sense, was classified as a non-international armed conflict; it occurred within the boundaries of a state and included a number of non-state actors (Bella, Giacca, & Casey-Maslen, 2011). Military doctrines have used many terms for such conflicts: Civilian War, Small Wars, Limited Conflicts, Asymmetrical warfare, Military Operations Other Than War and Counter Insurgency to mention just a few. Since the publishing of the United States Marine Corps Small Wars manual in 1940, states have produced a number of doctrines discussing the particularities of such conflicts (*Small Wars Manual*, 1940). This section will briefly discuss the relevant national doctrines and then the doctrinal basis of ISAF operations.

#### **Norwegian doctrines**

Norway has not developed a wide range of doctrines. Generally, it has produced a Joint Doctrine and a doctrine for respectively land, sea and air operations. They are kept quite general in form and substance, and do not usually - as, for example, with many US doctrines - engage in the conduct of special types of operations, or guide the development of tactics to any degree. Norway has, for example, not developed its own doctrines for peace support or peace enforcement operations, but tended to lean towards NATO or other allied publications for such purposes.

For the timeframe applicable for this thesis, three doctrines are assessed as relevant: the Norwegian Joint Operational Doctrine of 2000, the Joint Operational Doctrine of 2007 and the Doctrine for Land Operations of 2004 (*Forsvarets fellesoperative doktrine, del A Grunnlag*, 2000; *Forsvarets fellesoperative doktrine, del B operasjoner*, 2000; Forsvarsstaben, 2007).

A general feature of the Norwegian doctrines is their focus on what may be termed classical and symmetrical armed conflicts. In particular, they are based on manoeuvre theory and emphasizing the combination of mobility and firepower as the central elements that will ensure operational success. For example, in the doctrine of 2000, the operational core is defined as “the strike”, “the manoeuvre” and “the screen” (*Forsvarets fellesoperative doktrine, del B operasjoner*, 2000, pp. 149-151). Success is mainly defined in the tactical domain in terms of winning engagements or battles from which political success will derive.

None of the Norwegian doctrines discuss at any length the particular challenges that may arise from the distinct characteristics of the Afghan conflict. The comprehensive approach is briefly mentioned in the 2007 doctrine and, more generally, the doctrines state that different types of out-of-area operations are, and will continue to be, relevant for the Norwegian Armed forces. They emphasise, though, that such operations are most likely to occur within the framework of peace support, or potentially peace enforcement operations. Conducting a violent COIN campaign in a far away and culturally alien country was no part of the Norwegian doctrines.

The impact of doctrines can be questioned, and none of the Norwegian respondents mentioned the lack of valid doctrines as problematic. However, the doctrines tend to sum up the prevailing military thinking and concepts and, as such, the Norwegian doctrines strongly suggest that the army that deployed for Afghanistan was mentally conditioned for manoeuvre warfare. It was an army whose founding concepts were the idea of the decisive battle and the engagement, not the fine-tuned use of force presupposed by coercion theory. In short, the notion that force has a contingent value of manipulating costs and benefits had no place in the Norwegian doctrinal framework.

### **German doctrines**

The German doctrines were, like those of the Norwegians, mainly focused on symmetrical operations and based on manoeuvre theoretical approaches (GE08, 8 March 2016). Like Norway, Germany had not developed a counterinsurgency doctrine. However, as a consequence of the developments in Afghanistan, the German Army Office initiated the development of a German doctrine for the roles of land forces in counterinsurgency in 2010 (*Preliminary Basics for the Role of Land Forces in Counterinsurgency*, 2010). The first sentence in its foreword is: “The term “counterinsurgency”, COIN is an emotive subject in Germany”, thus underlining what Noetzel, Shreer and Münch have argued: the concept of

COIN was not well received in Germany (Münch, 2010; Noetzel & Schreer, 2008; Schreer, 2010). The “Preliminary basics” entail clear similarities with the US FM 3-24 (see below), as for example the Comprehensive Approach and the Clear-Hold-Build concept. However, according to German officers, it was never officially implemented in the Bundeswehr, and the degree to which it was influential on German military thinking and operations is questionable (GE02, 27 October 2015).

The interviews conducted with German officers generally confirm that the German army was, like the Norwegian army, conditioned for manoeuvre warfare against an enemy that shared most of the characteristics of the German army: being mobile, mechanised and able to apply substantial amounts of firepower. From the viewpoint of its doctrines, it was not conditioned to apply force consistent with the propositions and articulations of coercion theory.

### **ISAF doctrines**

The ISAF doctrines of relevance for the Afghan conflict were predominantly the US Field Manual 3-24 (Army, 2006). The 3-24 was not formally a doctrine, but its content and use were on most relevant aspects equal to the formal doctrines of the US. The 3-24 was developed with the purpose of transforming the US Army in Iraq into a tool that was capable of handling the rising insurgency in 2004/5.<sup>10</sup> It was heavily influenced by the US experiences in Vietnam and rests heavily on the counterinsurgency thinking of David Galula (Galula, 2006). It was the chief doctrinal reference for the conduct of COIN operations in Afghanistan and was, to the knowledge of the author, the only doctrinal reference to be used in the operational planning (Suich & Campbell, 2010).

The key issues of the 3-24 were the population centric and comprehensive approaches and the Shape-Clear-Hold-Build concept. Rather than perceiving the insurgency as a predominantly military problem to which the answer was military means, it advocated a population centric approach in which the purpose of the activities and operations was to gain the consent and support of the population to disintegrate the support to the Taliban. A central issue of the 3-24 was thus the development of functioning institutions of governance. According to the 3-24, COIN operations require (Army, 2006 p. 5-1): “synchronised application of military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions. Successful counterinsurgents support or develop local institutions with legitimacy and the ability to provide basic services, economic opportunity, public order, and security”.

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<sup>10</sup> This was the perception of David Kilcullen in a conversation with the author in 2010.

#### **2.4.4. Concluding remarks**

The review of the literature has discussed three distinct fields of research and types of literature: coercion literature, COIN literature and the relevant military doctrines. The literature on coercion generally emphasises coercion in international state vs state conflict and is to a large degree US-centric. The actors from the perspective of coercion literature are mainly states and states' governments. There is far less attention given to complex contemporary conflicts like the Afghan. The relative absence of attention to such conflicts suggest that there are lacunas in theory that limit its potential to provide explanatory power to the use of force in conflicts like the Afghan and also limit its predictive potential.

The literature on COIN acknowledges that combating an insurgency is qualitatively different from fighting a regular war. In particular, the COIN literature emphasises the importance of popular support, thus suggesting that forceful measures may have unintended consequences in ways that are not adequately addressed in the coercion literature.

Finally, both Norway and Germany left for Afghanistan doctrinally equipped with the emphasis on the tactical engagement and manoeuvre theory as the central elements of their military thinking. None of the nations had developed doctrines for COIN warfare and the notion of force as an instrument to influence behaviour consistent with coercion theory was absent from their respective doctrines. The language of coercion theory, for example Pape's division of coercive strategies as denial, punishment, risk and decapitation does not figure anywhere in the national doctrines (Pape, 1996). The actual impact of doctrines cannot be fully determined within the scope of this thesis, but the content of the Norwegian and German doctrines suggest that there was a limited conceptual attention to the distinct characteristics of the Afghan conflict and the utility of force in such conflicts prior to their deployment to Afghanistan. Finally, whereas the national doctrines of Norway and Germany did not address the Afghan type of conflicts in any depth, ISAF adopted the US FM 3-24 as its conceptual basis in 2008. The 3-24 was designed to provide proposals and solutions as to conduct COIN warfare, a type of warfare that Norway and Germany was doctrinally unprepared for. Arguably therefore, there was a discrepancy between the doctrinal basis of ISAF, and Norway and Germany, an issue that led to certain consequences with respect to the two nations' conduct of military operations.

## **2.5. The central elements of coercion theory**

This thesis aims to explore the degree to which coercion theory has utility in order to understand effects and outcomes as a function of the coercive use of force in two provinces in Northern Afghanistan from 2005 to 2012. The utility of theory depends on its potential to explain why something occurred and predict outcomes in similar situations. For the purpose of coercion theory this can be illustrated through George's identification of 5 contextual variables and 9 conditions favouring success, or Pape's argument that denial is the coercive mechanism that stands the best chance of success (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Jakobsen, 2011; Pape, 1996). Coercion theory is fundamentally a theory of what drives human decision making and behaviour and how these can be influenced through threats, or the adapted application, of force. In order for theory to make sense, the assumptions, suggestions, methods and prerequisites of theory must be present and valid.

A study of coercion literature suggests that theory rests on five assumptions and propositions that are particularly relevant to this thesis: 1) the unitary actor, 2) the rationality presumption, 3) the credible threat, 4) the function of demands and 5) the element of choice.

### **2.5.1. The assumption of unitary actors**

The first element central to coercion theory is the assumption of unitary and rational actors. Unitary alludes to both the type and composition of actors, whereas the latter alludes to the basis for the actors' decision making process. This thesis argues that "unitary" translates into three elements or factors: 1) actors are identifiable, 2) actors act united, coherent and predictable and 3) the number of actors is limited. First, the utility of coercion rests on the assumption that it is possible to identify and separate the actors the coercer wishes to influence from other actors. These actors are usually termed "the enemy" or "the adversary" (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 3-4). The adversary is not assumed to be a fluid entity; rather, they are recognisable and identifiable through organisational affiliation or membership. Actors are identified either through statehood, a state's military or a defined organisation, as for example the PLO or the KLA.<sup>11</sup> Since actors in coercion theory usually translate to states, identifiability is usually not a challenge, nor is identifying the opponent's military or even its population. In those relatively few cases where theory discusses non-state actors, actors are still treated as identifiable structures. Sayigh, for example, discusses the PLO in Lebanon between 1969 -1976, treating them as an identifiable actor representing the Palestinian people

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<sup>11</sup> PLO: Palestine Liberation Organisation, KLA: Kosovo Liberation Army

(Sayigh in Freedman, 1998). In their chapter discussing humanitarian coercion and non-state actors, Byman and Waxman include case-studies of a number of actors which were organisational entities, e.g. the Bosnian Serbs and the Somali National Alliance (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 175-200).

Second, theory presupposes that actors act in a united, coherent and predictable way because organisations, allegiances and motivations are reasonably stable. In most case studies, actors are referred to as a defined entity: the Soviet Union, the KLA, the PLO or the VC. It is this defined entity, its leadership and decision making processes that are the object of coercion. If coercion is to have utility it requires that the opponent demonstrates a degree of organisational unity and behavioural predictability. The coercer must assume that the organisation they are aiming to influence actually is an organisation, and intends to remain so for a prolonged timeframe. If, on the contrary, what appears to be an organisation is, in reality, a loose network of groups and individuals that act out of a number of reasons and motivations, influencing the organisation becomes inherently difficult. For example, during the Vietnam War, the US did not have any reason to believe that the Vietcong or the NVA would depart from their established path of resistance and opposing the South Vietnamese government (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Nagl, 2002). The aims and motivations of the Vietcong organisation, their loyalty to the NVA and their motivations for fighting could not be questioned.

Third, the number of actors is limited, usually in the form of a polarised contest between two parties: a coercer and a coerced. In his much cited study of coercive air power, Robert Pape consistently refers to the cases as containing a coercer and a target (Pape, 1996, p. 49). In the seven case studies of “the Limits”, all the studies are cases that are bi-polar, entailing a coercer and a coerced. In the relatively few cases discussing non-international conflicts entailing non-state actors it is almost entirely in the context of a polarised context (Sayigh in Byman & Waxman, 2002; Freedman, 1998; Wijk, 2005). Conflicts that entail multiple actors that engage in a fluid and constantly shifting game are not addressed by theory.

### **2.5.2. The rationality presumption**

Coercion is at heart a theory of decision-making in that it assumes that the potential or actual infliction of suffering have the inherent property of inducing behavioural change consistent with the coercer’s wishes. It is precisely the opposing actors’ decision making

cycle that is the object of the coercive use of force. Coercion theory rests heavily on the assumption that actors make rational decisions based on economically derived cost-benefit analysis. The notion of rationality, as laid out by Schelling, assumes actors whose decision making and consequent actions are guided by a desire to optimise utility and reduce loss. Although the perception of utility and loss is dependent on individual preferences of what is important, the notion of Schelling is derived mainly from economic theory of utility optimising and rational actor theory (A. George, 2003; Jakobsen, 2011). The central element to Schelling was that an actor will aim to avoid suffering by accommodation; if exposed to a threat or the use of force, they will calculate the gain of compliance against the cost of non-compliance. If the analysis concludes that the cost of non-compliance is too high, compliance will be the logical outcome. Theory either bluntly assumes that this is the case, as does Schelling, or substantiates it through the use of examples and case studies.

However, the notion that economically derived rationality is the single most important factor in human decisions is questionable (Cook, 1990; Grafstein, 1995; Simon, 1995; Zuckert, 1995). Rather, actors may come to decisions and act based on a number of inner dispositions and outer influences in which coercion theory's assumption of rationality is one but many drivers. This does not in any way suggest that decisions are irrational or incomprehensible - though in some instances they can be, of course - but rather that human decision making and activities are in their nature complex and multi-faceted, and that the prospect of suffering may not be the single most important factor.

The notion of economically derived rationality is also challenged by the dilemma of "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973). As argued by Rittel et al., "in a pluralistic society, there is nothing like the undisputable public good" (Ibid, p. 155). Coercive use of force may result in perverse and unintended consequences by producing martyrs, for instance, which instils a defiant mood of resistance in larger parts of the population that is not consistent with the rationality presumption of coercion theory. George consequently argues that there is a requirement to replace the notion of unitary rational actors with "actor specific behavioural models" (A. George, 2003). Although George and other authors have acknowledged that the presumption of rational decision making is not sufficient to explain behaviour in conflict, theory does on the whole still assume economically derived utility optimising to be the single most important driver for human behaviour.



### **2.5.3. The credible threat**

Coercion theory is unclear on how to define a credible threat (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 18, 169-171; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Wijk, 2005). Generally it assumes credibility to be a product of the availability of military capacities (hard force) and the will to use them. It consists of two elements: 1) the coercer must have enough military capacity at their disposal to raise the costs on the side of the coerced to a level where they perceives it to be in their interest to yield, and 2) the coerced must actually believe that the coercer has the will to apply the necessary amount of force. In other words, the coerced must perceive the ability of the coercer to raise cost that exceeds their own ability to endure pain and suffering. There are consequently two elements of interest to this thesis with respect to the credible threat: 1) the ability of the coerced to endure pain and suffering, and 2) the degree to which the coercer possesses the military capacity and will to raise costs above the threshold at which the coerced would yield.

The first element is the ability of the target audience to absorb suffering. It is an element that forms the flip-side of military strength because it departs from the notion that it is not the coercer's ability to induce suffering and pain that is the most important, but the receiver's ability to absorb it (Lebow, 2006). Contrary to Schelling and other realist approaches, Lebow argues that "for the purpose of bargaining, the ability to absorb pain counts just as much as the ability to inflict it" (Ibid p. 43). According to Lebow, the ability to absorb suffering derives from the perceived vitality of the issues at stake. A conflict perceived to be existential, Lebow argues, will imply an increased willingness to absorb suffering compared to one in which there are limited material issues at stake. Although most theorists are more concerned with the ability to inflict pain than the ability to absorb it, there is substantial empirical support for Lebow's view. States and populations seem to be able to absorb an immense amount of pain when the stakes are high, as illustrated by the Allied and German bombing campaigns of the Second World War and the US bombing campaigns during the Vietnam War. There may be good reasons to assume that the ability to absorb suffering is as relevant to the Afghan conflict as the ability to inflict it. Through more than three decades of war and suffering, Afghan society may have been conditioned into a way of life in which war and conflict is perceived to be the normal condition.

The second issue requires that the coercer entails the ability to raise costs through inflicting suffering and pain, in the words of Schelling termed "hurting power", beyond the



insurgent's ability to endure it (Schelling, 1966, p. 7). In the absence of such an ability, the insurgents would logically not perceive the threat to be credible.

Theory generally defines military strength in terms of traditional military capacities. Robert Pape studied the outcomes of coercive air campaigns, not because air power represents the only available capacity, but because it is “the most important instrument of modern coercion, and the most useful for investigating the causes of coercive success and failure” (Pape, 1996, p. 55). Airpower was the primary coercive tool in a range of campaigns, including the Vietnam War and the 1999 Operation Allied Force. Coercion theory acknowledges, though, that almost every military offensive capacity may have a coercive potential. During the Cuban Missile Crise, the US coercive capacity was represented by the US navy and the US air force. Of relevance to this thesis is that coercion theory generally assumes military strength to equal the availability and will to use traditional military capacities, be it air power, artillery or missiles, to threaten to or inflict pain and suffering on the opposing party.

The second aspect of military strength is that coercion theory assumes that there is an imbalance between the coercer and the coerced. The coercer is assumed to be the militarily stronger party. In all cases mentioned by Pape, the coercer is militarily stronger than the coerced (Pape, 1996). The same relation applies for the seven case studies in “The Limits”, and Sechser's study of militarily compellent threats, the coercer is always stronger with respect to traditional military capacities than the coerced (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; "Insurgent Abuses against Afghan Civilians ", 2008). Although some exceptions exist - it can be questioned the degree to which Iran was inferior to Iraq in the 1980's conflict - theory presupposes an imbalance between the coercer and the target in which the target is militarily inferior.

#### **2.5.4. Demands**

The fourth element central to coercion theory is the element of demands. Schelling argues that demands consist of a set of objectives to which the coerced must comply, a credible threat that will materialise if the opponent does not comply and a timeline to prevent compliance being delayed indefinitely (Schelling, 1966). Other authors seem less concerned with the requirement of clearly articulated demands, thus implying that demands may be delivered implicitly or indirectly (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994). The former may be illustrated by the Cuban Missile Crise whereas the latter may be

illustrated by the Rolling Thunder and Linebacker bombing campaigns in Vietnam. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, political statements of what the US expected were articulated and forwarded to the Soviets and the statements were substantiated through the activities of the US military. The latter may be illustrated by the US bombing campaigns Rolling Thunder and Linebacker. These campaigns were conducted in order to change Vietnamese behaviour, but clearly articulated demands as used by the Kennedy administration in 1962 were not forwarded to Hanoi (Simons in Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996, pp. 174-210).

In any case, whether demands are assumed to be articulated and delivered openly or implicitly, coercion theory maintains that the opponent must understand what are the coercer's wishes and the consequences of not complying.

#### **2.5.5. The notion of choice**

The fifth and final central element of coercion theory is the issue of choice. The issue of choice does not allude to the operational or tactical decision making process, but whether the opponent is at liberty to actually make the choice of compliance or non-compliance. The notion of choice has two implications: first, the theoretical basis for choices and second, what kinds of choice are open to the opponent.

Choice as understood in coercion theory originates from the notion of rational choice theory as laid out above. It presupposes that the process of choice is a function of a deliberate process where the opponent consciously and actively chooses compliance or non-compliance. This thesis fully acknowledges the theoretical centrality of choice as contrasted to no-choice if exposed to brute force. However, the notion of choice as a function of a linear process that leads to compliance or non-compliance is theoretically questionable. First, the mere notion of rational choice may be questioned (Elster in Cook, 1990; Zuckert, 1995). Rational choice as well as coercion theory requires the decision maker to have, if not full, then at least very good information of the situation and the issues at stake, and the will and ability to deliberately and consciously analyse the situation upon which a decision is carefully laid out. One of the many critiques against rational choice theory is that this prerequisite is rarely if ever the case (Cook, 1990). Alternative theories for decision making also emphasise the complexities and the cognitive and emotional factors that question the notion of rational choice (M. D. Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Cook, 1990; Monroe & Maher, 1995). Second, the opponent must be able and willing to analyse and calculate the up and down sides of compliance vs non-compliance in ways consistent with theory. If the values that form the basis for the opponent's

decision-making differ substantially from the utility-optimising assumption of coercion theory, these assumptions may be of limited value as a tool to predict behaviour. Finally, emotional factors like rage, pride, the desire for excitement and the perceived necessity of proving oneself may influence choices in ways that are not consistent with theory.

As argued above, coercion can be contrasted to brute force where the opponent in reality has no other option than to comply; hence theory anticipates that choosing non-compliance is a real choice. The opponent can accept the increased cost, thus leaving it for the coercer to choose further escalation, other means of influence or accept coercive failure. It is, however, difficult to imagine a contemporary conflict, in particular a conflict like the Afghan, where the opposing actors would not have a choice. The total destruction of the opponent on the battlefield - as illustrated by the epic battles of the Second World War or the German notion of “*verblutung*” during the First World War - is, for all practical purposes, no longer a realistic alternative (Strachan in Robinson, 2012, pp. 255-283). This thesis consequently assumes that the matter of choice is a given. What is more relevant from the perspective of coercion theory is the function of coercion to reduce the number of choices that the opponent perceives are open to them. During the Kosovo crisis and the Operation Allied Force, General Naumann argued that the purpose of the air campaign was not to force Milosevic into a corner, but to reduce the number of options available to him (Henriksen, 2007). Arguably, therefore, the theoretical notion of choice does not imply a bipolar either/or proposition, but to limit the number of choices that the coerced perceives are open and relevant to them.

#### **2.5.6. The central elements of coercion theory and Afghanistan, conclusion**

The purpose of this section has been to identify and analyse the assumptions and prerequisites that underpin coercion theory that are assessed as relevant to the later analyses of theory’s utility in the Afghan conflict. The relevance of coercion theory depends broadly on the degree to which its basic assumptions and central elements resonate with the distinct characteristics of the conflict. If these assumptions and prerequisites depart substantially from the distinct characteristics of the conflict, it will be a strong indicator that theory, in its current state, requires development in order to be relevant.

The discussion above identifies five central elements. Initially, theory presupposes actors that are unitary, and whose decision making processes are predominantly based on theories of rational choice and economically derived utility optimising. Second, the element of choice - as contrasted with no-choice through the use of brute force - is central to coercion

theory. However, no-choice is hardly an option in the Afghan conflict; hence it cannot be contrasted to the option of choice as presupposed by theory. The alternatives are then not choice vs. no-choice, but a finite or potentially infinite number of choices available to the opposing actor. Third, the element of military strength is logically important since it provides the coercer with the tools necessary to enforce their policy. Coercion theory generally equates military strength to “hurting power”, that is the potential of military means to raise costs by either reducing military capacities or inflicting pain and suffering on the side of the opponent. Fourth, some coercion theorists emphasise the ability to absorb suffering as equally important as the ability to inflict it. The key factor that may influence the ability to absorb suffering is the perception of the importance of the issues at stake. Finally, coercion theory argues that the coercer must, explicitly or implicitly, make clear to the opponent what are their objectives and the consequences of not complying.

The later analysis will consequently aim at exploring the degree to which there is consistency between the assumptions of theory and the factual situation of the conflict. A simplistic matrix for exploring the relation between theory’s assumptions and the factual situation on the ground is proposed in Table 2.1 below.

	<b>Assumptions of coercion theory</b>	<b>The situation on the ground</b>
1	Unitary actors	
2	Rational actors	
3	The credible threat	
4	Demands	
5	Choice	
	<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	

Table 2.1, the basic assumptions of coercion theory

## **2.6. Coercive success in Afghanistan**

The purpose of coercion is here defined as either creating the conditions that allow for negotiations on favourable terms, providing bargaining power, or that the coerced changes their behaviour consistent with the coercer's wishes. This thesis argues that the relevance of coercion departs from, not only the degree to which the basic notions of theory corresponds to the distinct characteristics of the conflict, but whether coercive use of force translates to success.

Since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the toppling of the Taliban regime, there has been a discussion as to whether the international engagement in Afghanistan has been a success or not (Biddle, Christia, & Thier, 2010; Kagan, Kagan, Dressler, & Forsberg, 2011; Nagl, 2012). The discussion is marked by ambiguities as to what constitutes success. Scholars, political leaders, military commanders and representatives from the aid communities apply different definitions of success and have consequently different answers as to the degree the Afghan mission proved successful. Similarly, different research areas also entail different notions as to what constitutes success, as convincingly demonstrated by Larsdotter (Larsdotter, 2011). Since this thesis focuses on the utility of coercive theory, a good starting point for defining success is coercion theory but, as Bratton argues, coercion theory is neither consistent nor clear on the issue (Bratton, 2005). Defining, or at least assessing, what constitutes coercive success thus requires a definitional effort.

The classical way of measuring success in military campaigns is either by one party being victorious, or through the achievement of political and military objectives. Coercion theory distinguishes between the complete military victory conceived through brute force and victory achieved through coercion (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Pape, 1996). Victory through coercion is generally understood as the coerced accepting the conditions articulated by the coercer as a matter of choice, acknowledging that the consequences of not accepting will not serve their interests (Bratton, 2005). The notion of winning was prevalent also within ISAF. General McCrystal's tactical directive of July 2009 stated that "counterinsurgencies are difficult to win, but we will win this war" (ISAF, 2009a). The ISAF commander's intent of autumn 2010 stated that "the aim of the mission is to assist GIRoA in defeating the insurgency to a level where it no longer poses an existential threat to the state" (ISAF, 2010a). However, as this thesis suggests, it may be the case that the notion of victory or the achievement of objectives is not sufficient. Rather, the complexities of the conflict, the tensions between centre and periphery, its protracted nature and the root causes that underpin

it suggests that more nuanced tools are required in order to define success and progress (Bang, 2014).

The notion of success in armed conflicts is discussed within various research disciplines, as well as being a part of articulations in military doctrines, military plans and political policy papers. Coercion literature generally discusses success as either victory or the opponent's compliance to the coercer's demands, but, as Bratton argues, theory is not clear as to what constitutes success and how to determine it (Bratton, 2005; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Schelling, 1966). In her study of military interventions in internal wars, Larsdotter convincingly argues that there is a difference in how success is defined in research on peace operations and in the counterinsurgency literature (Larsdotter, 2011). In research on peace operations success is usually defined in terms of negotiations and eventually peace, whereas research on counterinsurgencies tends to define success in terms of victory (Larsdotter, 2011, pp. 75-77). Nations will frequently describe their intentions in policy or strategic papers that may contain definitions of success, as did for example the so-called "Faryab strategy" issued by Norway in 2009 (Utenriksdepartementet, Forsvarsdepartementet, & Justisdepartementet, 2009). Almost all military operations will be directed through a hierarchy of plans and orders that usually contain descriptions of aims, objectives and end-states, the fulfilment of which would be assumed to constitute success.

However, although some commonalities exist, there is no uniform or commonly agreed definition of success, hence defining whether a military campaign was a success or not easily allows for cherry picking. It is indeed also a challenge that the various approaches to success are not mutually reinforcing. When asked whether the Norwegian mission in Afghanistan was a success, representatives of the Norwegian Government frequently mentioned the improvements in infrastructure, the availability of education and improved healthcare and the improvements of the ANSF and not least the reduction in Al-Qaeda capacity as signs of campaign success, whereas researchers and the political opposition would point at the deteriorating security situation and the inabilities of the Afghan government to create progress as signs of failure (Eide, 2013; Gjerde, 2012; Suhrke, 2011).

In order to articulate a baseline for what may constitute coercive success in the Afghan conflict, this thesis argues that it is necessary to combine the notion of success derived from coercion theory with tools from other disciplines, as Larsdotter's thesis suggests. The notions of success assumed most relevant for the purpose of this thesis are consequently those derived

from coercion theory, the COIN literature, the conflict resolution literature, military doctrines and military plans. Since the Afghan campaign developed into and was officially recognised as a COIN campaign, arguably the notion of success in COIN theory and literature should be addressed. Military doctrines entail articulations and concepts of success. The Norwegian and German militaries were both equipped with a suit of doctrines that provided a basis for their respective military concepts and the US FM 3-24 was adopted by ISAF as its doctrinal basis. The notion of success in the relevant doctrines is consequently of relevance. Finally, the operational plans and orders developed by ISAF entailed descriptions of aims, end states and objectives, the fulfilment of which would be assessed as success; hence the notion of success in the military planning process is of relevance.

This section will initially address the relation between coercive success and campaign success. Second, it will discuss the various aspects of coercive success from the viewpoints of coercion theory, military doctrines and the policies, aims and objectives articulated by the political and military leadership. It will arrive at proposing a baseline for defining coercive success in the Afghan conflict.

### **2.6.1. Campaign vs. coercive success**

It is initially the case that a campaign, like the intervention in Afghanistan, entails a variety of elements, of which not all can be defined as coercive; hence there may be a requirement to address the distinction between coercive success and campaign.

ISAF defined three Lines of Operations (LOO) in which the ISAF effort should be focused: Security, Governance, and Reconstruction and Development (R&D) (reference). Coercion theory suggests that coercion entails both a “stick” and a “carrot” element, suggesting that the “carrot” element is most clearly represented by the LOO’s Governance and R&D.<sup>12</sup> The “stick” relates mostly, but not entirely, to the LOO security since it entailed almost all military operations ranging from intelligence gathering via Key Leader Engagements to kinetic operations. The definition of coercion proposed above is mainly concerned with the “stick” in that it defines coercion as the “use of threats or force”. It is therefore a distinction between campaign success and coercive success, the latter being part of the former.

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<sup>12</sup> Pape defines military coercion as “manipulating costs and benefits”, benefits thus equalling “carrots”(Pape, 1996). However, coercion theory is generally more concerned with the stick part than the carrot.

However, even though there is a distinction between campaign and coercive success, the main effort of ISAF was indeed military. It involved armed forces that, even though their purpose was not always to project force, could hardly be separated from their military capabilities. As will be shown later, ISAF represented an implied threat consistent with coercive theory. It is further the case that even though ISAF on the command level distinguished between three LOOs, this was hardly the way it was perceived in the local Afghan communities. The magnitude of the ISAF operation was almost entirely military in appearance and suggests that ISAF was perceived first and foremost as a military organisation, and that its Governance and R&D efforts were dwarfed by its military appearance. For the purpose of this thesis, I therefore choose not to separate campaign and coercive success.

Coercion theory is generally vague when it comes to explaining what constitutes success and tends to focus more on whether an operation was deemed a success or not than explaining the outcomes. It is therefore necessary, as argued in the theory chapter, to expand the notion of success with elements from other disciplines. The disciplines that are assumed to be relevant for defining outcomes and utility and are consequently selected for the purpose of this thesis are coercion theory, COIN theory, conflict resolution theory, military doctrines and military plans. The point of departure is that success cannot be defined in binary terms, as either success or failure, but as developments along a continuum in which effects and outcomes are assumed to be more or less successful and not absolutes. This thesis thus departs from Pape's binary notion of success and adopts the more nuanced view that it is possible to achieve desirable effects on some parameters, thus be partly successful, while there are limited achievements on others.

### **2.6.2. Coercion theory and the notion of success**

As mentioned above, the literature is not rich in defining coercive success in general and particularly not in non-international, fragmented and complex conflicts like the Afghan conflict (Bratton, 2005). Coercive success is frequently illustrated by the Cuban Missile Crise in which the Soviet vessels turned and the missiles were dismounted and removed from Cuba (Allison, 1971). The objectives as defined by the US were met, and force was only threatened, not used. Coercive failure can be illustrated by the US "Rolling Thunder" bombing campaign in Vietnam in which the operational objectives were not met in any significant way, whereas the force levels were significant (Simons, in A. L. George & Simons, 1994, pp. 133-174; Pape, 1996, pp. 174-210).



A review of the literature suggests that the following factors are assumed relevant as to the notion of success: 1) compliance with demands, 2) the level of force applied and 3) the issue of time.

### **Compliance with demands**

Central to coercion theory is the notion that the wishes of the coercer must be understood by the coerced, usually in the form of articulated demands (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Jakobsen, 2011; Schelling, 1966). However, theory is unclear on whether demands should be articulated and conveyed explicitly to the opponent, or if it is sufficient that the wishes of the coercer is assumed to be known to the coerced through for example policy statements in the media or through behaviour or particular actions. Using the Cuban Missile Crise as an illustration may be instructive. The objective of the US effort was the dismantling and removal of the Soviet missiles (Allison, 1971; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994). The demands conveyed to the Soviets were: 1) dismantle the missiles and remove them from Cuban soil and 2) the supply ships heading for Cuba must turn around. The US implicitly made clear that the consequence of non-compliance was that its military might would be put into play. The will and ability to enforce the threat was demonstrated through the activities of the US Navy and the US Air Force. The demands were articulated in clear text and by coercive diplomacy through the activities of the US military; hence, there could be no doubt in the Kremlin what the US objectives were and how to respond to them.

There is some controversy, though, whether compliance to demands should be understood as a binary success or failure relation, or as “marginal changes in the probability of behaviour” (Bratton, 2005; Pape, 1996). A consequence of Pape’s argument is that success implies full compliance with the coercer’s demands and should be understood in a binary success or failure relation. However, as noted by Bratton, “some demands are easier for the target to meet than others”, indicating that compliance cannot be disconnected from the type and gravity of the demands presented (Bratton, 2005, p. 110). This view is supported by Byman and Waxman who argue that “the use of absolute, binary measures... does not capture the complex and often subtle effects of coercive threats” (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 35). Byman and Waxman prefer the term outcomes to success, acknowledging that the contrast to success, failure, adds a notion of results being framed in an either/or dichotomy; one is either successful or a failure (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 33-37). The reality, Byman and Waxman argue, is usually much more complex and nuanced.

This thesis adopts the position that coercive success with respect to compliance to demands should be understood as gradual developments along a continuum and not as a binary either/or relation.

### **Force levels**

Theory argues that, insofar as the desired effects and outcomes are achieved, the relative success of coercion is inverse to the level of force applied. Coercion is assumed most successful if force is, to quote Schelling, “threatened, not used” (Schelling, 1966). The instant the application of force is close to or equal to brute force, coercion has failed. In short, coercive success means “to achieve political goals on the cheap” (Pape, 1996, p. 13). Pape distinguishes between coercion and war fighting, the latter equalling brute force (Pape, 1996, pp. 12-15). Coercion is assumed to be more successful the further away it is from war fighting, whereas it is less successful if it is achieved through actions that almost amount to a decisive military victory (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 3-4; Pape, 1996, pp. 12-15). Theory is not entirely clear on the distinction between coercion and brute force, though, suggesting that the term “limited force” is not easy to define (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 4-5; Jakobsen, 2011, pp. 158-159). A prerequisite for coercive success is consequently that the level of force applied was moderate, and as a minimum stayed below the threshold of brute force.

### **Time**

The final issue of relevance to coercive theory’s notion of success is time. Schelling argues that demands are of little use unless they are equipped with a timeline; the target must know when the negative consequences of not complying materialise, allowing for accommodation within the specified time limit: “and there must be a timeline, otherwise tomorrow will never come” (Schelling, 1966). Coercion theorists generally agree that a coercive campaign cannot go on forever, although the Schelling notion of hard timelines is not equally emphasised in either George’s or Pape’s case studies (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996). The issue at stake is not whether time is of importance, but how to deal with it.

Coercion theory generally applies two approaches, either the Schelling notion of hard time lines based on a “comply or else” logic, or a gradualist approach based on a “wait and see” logic. In the first case, coercion is most successful if the target complies before force is applied, reflecting the Schelling notion of coercion being most successful when threatened,

not applied. If the target does not comply within the specified time limit, the coercer has a limited number of options available other than to execute the threat. If the threat is executed, the “comply or else logic” has failed, and the coercer is left with either a gradualist coercive approach or brute force. As argued above, brute force in complex conflicts like the Afghan, in which the target has no real choice, is hardly an option. Hence, a form of gradualism is assumed as the only realistic alternative to “comply or else”.

With respect to the gradualist approach, theory suggests that coercion is successful as long as the force levels remain moderate and the target complies within a reasonable time limit. The gradualist approach corresponds most closely to Pape’s notion of punishment strategies, but also denial entails a “wait and see” component (Pape, 1996). There are two challenges connected to the gradualist approach with respect to time. First, what is a reasonable time limit? The unsuccessful coercive bombing campaign “Rolling Thunder” of the Vietnam War lasted from 1965 to 1968, whereas the NATO operation “Allied Force” in Kosovo/Serbia lasted 78 days (Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Henriksen, 2007). Of course, hindsight always provides good answers to what would be reasonable time limits, but theory has on the whole not addressed the issue, apart from the rather abstract notion of not going on forever.

Second, how long must a coercive success last after the termination of hostilities or the acceptance of terms? The question is particularly relevant in complex protracted conflicts like the Afghan in which some of the basic assumptions of coercive theory can be questioned. As will be shown through the case studies, tactical successes have rarely resulted in lasting progress or enduring changes consistent with the ISAF-defined objectives. Coercion theory is generally vague on this issue, and does not on the whole address the issue of lasting effects outside the achievement of narrowly defined strategic and operational objectives. A case in point is the US Linebacker bombing campaign of the Vietnam War that eventually led to a negotiated US withdrawal from Vietnam, but in consequence also allowed for the fall of the Saigon authorities in 1975, which was hardly the ambition of the US government.

Apart from the Schelling notion of hard timelines that are communicated and enforced, coercion theory acknowledges the importance of time, but is generally vague on its practical impact. This relates in particular to whether coercion can be successful only in the short-term perspective, defined as the termination of hostilities and the acceptance of terms, or if success also requires outcomes that last beyond this point. If the latter is the case, coercive

success would require that tactical successes translated into effects that were consistent with the coercer's wishes and sustainable in the absence of further coercion.

### **Coercion theory and success, conclusion**

Coercion theory's notion of success is insufficiently developed with respect to the articulation of demands, force levels and time. First, theory is not entirely clear on whether demands should be articulated and communicated explicitly or whether it is sufficient that the opponents are aware of the coercer's wishes and the consequences of not complying. In those cases where demands are not explicitly articulated, which must be expected to be the norm in the Afghan type of conflicts, the achievement of operationally defined objectives may pose a realistic measure of success. As pointed out, this thesis argues that success should not be understood in terms of binary either/or outcomes, but as developments along a continuum of selected criteria, e.g. operational objectives.

Second, coercion theory generally agrees that coercive success requires moderate application of force. If high force levels are applied, coercion may border upon or even evolve into the domain of brute force, and should then be perceived as unsuccessful. There is no universally recognised method to assess when coercion evolves into brute force, hence this is a matter which must be assessed in the situation and context in which it appears.

Finally, coercion is time sensitive. A coercive campaign cannot last forever, but the notion of clearly articulated timelines as suggested by Schelling is hard to imagine in protracted conflicts like the Afghan. Rather, trends of the achievement of relevant objectives and other selected criteria may be more appropriate, as suggested by the four phased approach proposed by Koehler (Koehler in Chiari, 2014). As will be shown in the case studies, the use of military force often resulted in tactical successes that were short-lived, whereas the long-term impact remained questionable or even absent. This thesis maintains that for coercion to be deemed successful it has to result in observable and desired outcomes that last beyond the immediate impact of tactical successes.

### **2.6.3. The notion of success in counterinsurgency-literature**

From 2008 onwards, the ISAF campaign was officially termed a COIN campaign in the ISAF campaign plan and orders, and COIN concepts substantially impacted the conceptual thinking and the notion of success. A substantial literature is available that discusses the outcomes of counterinsurgencies and the reasons for their success or failure, but the literature is not rich in defining what actually constitutes success (Corum, 2007, 2008;

Seth G. Jones, 2008; Kilcullen, 2006, 2009; Ucko & Egnell, 2013). However, Larsdotter argues that “in most research on peace operations and counterinsurgencies, success as the dependent variable is usually not discussed at any length” (Larsdotter, 2011, p. 75).

COIN theory argues that success can be derived from an enemy centric or population centric school of thought (Dixon, 2009; Duyvesteyn, 2011; Gentile, 2011; Plakoudas, 2015; Ucko & Egnell, 2013). The enemy centric school will emphasise the military victory, in which the insurgency is defeated to a degree where it no longer poses a substantial threat to society and the existing rulers. The population centric will emphasise “winning the hearts and minds” and thus the consent of the people in order to alienate the insurgents from the general population.

There are indeed challenges connected with both notions. The enemy centric approach assumes that there is an identifiable enemy that actually can be defeated through military means, as suggested by the search and destroy tactics preferred by Westmoreland in Vietnam (Nagl, 2002). However, as many insurgencies do not entail regular and easily identifiable forces, defeating them through military means has often proved a challenging venture.

The population centric assumes that there is a negative correlation between the goodwill of the people and the support of the insurgency. It assumes that there is a difference between the people and the insurgents. If the counterinsurgent can win the hearts and minds of the people, this will translate to reduced support to the insurgency.

Kalyvas argues that there is an important distinction between control and consent as the main criteria for success in a COIN campaign (Kalyvas, 2006). The former notion emphasises efforts to assume physical control of geographical and populated areas. Kalyvas, drawing on empirical evidence from a number of civil wars, argues that the main criteria for success is control: “A robust empirical observation is that the allocation of collaboration among belligerents is closely related to the distribution of control, that is, the extent to which actors are able to establish extensive rule of a territory” (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 111). A central element to Kalyvas’ argument is that the population is most likely to collaborate with whoever exercises real rule in an area. In short, control trumps hearts and minds. If the counterinsurgent is able to sustain control over an extended timeframe, the population is prone to shift its preferences towards collaborating with the army (Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 112-114). It should be noted that control only through repressive and coercive means is not likely to succeed. Kalyvas argues that a relatively small armed force cannot coerce a population to

collaborate unless it can draw on a general resentment towards the opposing actor as well as being perceived legitimate and a realistic alternative itself. As such, the counterinsurgent must be able to “out-control” and “out-popularise” his opponents in order to physically be able to control the contested area.

Finally, there is a general consensus in the literature that combating an insurgency is difficult and the examples of failed counter-insurgency campaigns are numerous. With respect to the prerequisites for success in a COIN campaign, most authors agree that an overarching strategy and unity of effort and command is helpful, and that the counterinsurgent must have a thorough understanding of the societal, cultural, linguistic, ideological, religious and human environment in which they are operating (Egnell & Ucko, 2013; Farrell, 2010; Kilcullen, 2006, 2009). This rather demanding point of departure is presumably what caused Farrell to argue that “Foreigners make lousy counterinsurgents”. A foreign force will almost always be strange to, and lack legitimacy in, the eyes of the domestic population, hence their task is difficult from the outset (Seth G. Jones, 2008).

#### **2.6.4. Success from the viewpoint of military doctrines**

For this section, it will suffice to establish the fact that neither Germany nor Norway departed for Afghanistan with doctrines that addressed counterinsurgency campaigns in any depth. The national notions of success were consequently not a function of doctrinal guidance or thought. Hence, here I choose to focus on the FM 3-24 that from 2008 onwards became the standard doctrinal reference used by ISAF (Beljan, 2013).

Apart from providing authoritative statements as to the conduct of counter-insurgency warfare, FM 3-24 entails a separate chapter on assessments (Army, 2006, Chapter 12). Assessments are defined as “the process that measures the overall effectiveness of employing joint force capabilities during military operations” (Ibid, p. 12-1). The 3-24 thus provides descriptions and an articulation of what it assumes translates into success.

The purpose of assessments is to “assess campaign progress towards achieving goals and objectives” (Ibid, p. 12-1). Initially, the FM 3-24 acknowledges the difficulties of assessing progress in the complex environment represented by a counter-insurgency campaign. It alludes to the flawed assessment process of the Vietnam War that depended heavily on particular metrics, e.g. body counts (Nagl, 2002). The metrics used and assessed in the Vietnam War proved to be of little significance in comprehending the actual developments in the field. FM 3-24 thus calls for a comprehensive and nuanced process in which metrics are

combined with qualitative analysis and sound operational judgements. Fundamentally, FM 3-24 defines two types of measurement criteria, measurements of effects (MOE) and measurement of performance (MOP). With respect to designing MOEs, the manual proposes 9 points to be assessed, e.g. raw counts vs. relative counts, local knowledge, number of informers, number and scale of attacks and insurgent recruitment.

The FM 3-24 finally arrives at proposing a number of indicators of progress (Army, 2006, p 12-7):

- Acts of violence
- Dislocated civilians
- Presence of businesses
- Agricultural activity
- Presence or absence of associations (e.g. political parties)
- Availability of government services
- Freedom of movement
- Tax revenue
- Industry exports
- Employment rates
- Availability of electricity
- Attacks on infrastructure

Generally, the FM 3-24 argues that more of the “good things”, e.g. trade and employment, and less of the “bad things”, e.g. violence, indicates campaign success. It does not, however, propose specific measurement values to assess the degree to which development within the indicators translates to success. This is assumed to be an issue left to the assessment cells and the military commanders.

#### **2.6.5. The military plan and success**

Central to military operations are the planning process and the plan which is its output. The planning process and the consequent plan it produces will entail descriptions of what constitutes success, and the ways in which these descriptions are developed have a substantial impact on the way success is perceived within the military organisations.

Since the military planning process is not assumed to be well known outside the military community, some introductory remarks about it may be required. The conduct of substantial military operations like ISAF is normally based on a hierarchy of plans, reaching from the overarching strategic plans to the detailed and tactical plans of concrete operations on the lower unit level. The hierarchy of plans directing ISAF operations can be illustrated by Figure 2.2 below, in which the NATO Joint Force Command in Brunnsom was responsible for the strategic and long-term campaign plan that in turn formed the basis for the plans developed at the lower level HQs down to the PRT or task force level.

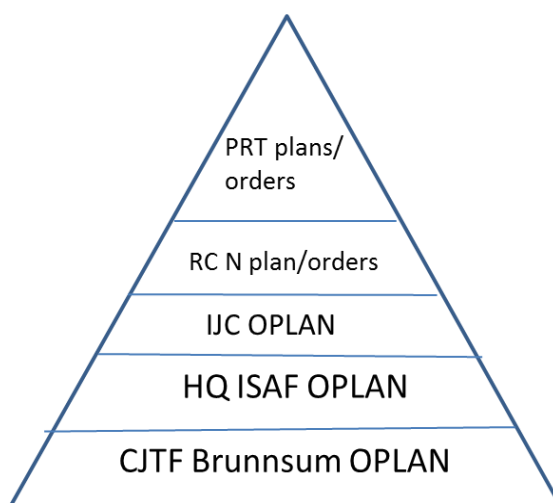


Fig 2.2, hierarchy of plans

The conceptual foundation for the development of military plans in NATO and ISAF was the NATO document Guidance Operational Planning (GOP) (NATO, 2005).<sup>13</sup> The planning directive describes how the planning process should be conducted, the elements that should be included and the consequent development of the plan. Although intended as guidance for planning on the strategic and operational level, its principles were used also at lower levels of military command even down to the PRT level and below. In addition, most nations would have nation-specific planning guides that would entail the principles of the GOP, but prescribe simplified processes for use on the unit level down to platoon or squad

<sup>13</sup> The GOP was replaced by a new planning guidance, the Comprehensive Planning Directive (COP-D) in 2010 which aimed to include the complexities of conflicts like the Afghan in military planning. However, for the timeframe relevant for this thesis, most of the planning was based on the GOP.



size operations. Hence, military planning in ISAF was based on well-known and acknowledged NATO principles.

Success in the military plan is usually defined through articulations of end states, aims and objectives the achievement of which is assumed to constitute success (NATO, 2005, pp. 3-6,3-7). Although there is a slight distinction between these terms in their strict military meaning, it suffices for the purpose of this thesis to treat them as a singular whole, here termed objectives. The GOP simply defines an objective as “an aim to be achieved” (Ibid, p. 3-7). The measurement of success would consequently be an assessment of whether the defined objectives were met in any meaningful way.

The level most relevant for this thesis is the tactical level as far as the PRT’s were organisations operating on this level, and even the RC N was assessed to be an HQ on the high tactical or lower operational level. At the tactical level, objectives represent “the physical object of the action taken, which may be a definite tactical feature, the seizure and/or holding of which is essential to the commander’s plan” (Ibid, p. 3-8). Success on the tactical level, as defined by the planning directive, is thus assumed to equal or at least closely resemble tactical successes or successful engagements. On the whole, the notion of success as a function of winning battles or engagements permeates the way in which the GOP is constructed and consequently how it informs the military community. It was the author’s personal experience that the way in which success was defined through the military planning process was the element that first and foremost impacted the notion of success within the military organisation.

#### **2.6.6. Defining success in complex contemporary conflicts**

Whereas success in international conflicts is usually easily defined, the distinct characteristics of complex contemporary conflicts like the Afghan suggest that defining success here is more complicated. This thesis argues that it is necessary to include the notion of success from different fields of research and subject areas to allow for an analysis of outcomes in the Afghan conflict. The sections above consequently address the notion of success not only from the perspectives of coercion theory, but also from other relevant research areas and disciplines: the perspectives of COIN literature, military doctrines and the military planning process. It argues that the notion of what constitutes success is different within the different perspectives, suggesting that articulating precise and useful definitions of coercive success in the Afghan conflict is potentially challenging.

This thesis thus proposes that coercive success can be defined through reconciling the relevant criteria derived from the research fields and subject areas discussed above as suggested by Table 2.3 below.

<b>Field of Research/ Subject area</b>	<b>Criteria for success</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Coercion literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited force levels</li> <li>• Compliance to demands/ achievement of objectives</li> <li>• Sustainable</li> <li>• Negotiations</li> <li>• Strategic</li> </ul>	
COIN literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victory</li> <li>• Achievement of objectives</li> <li>• Geographical/areal control</li> <li>• Hearts and minds/popular support</li> <li>• Governance/institutions</li> </ul>	
Military doctrines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioural indicators</li> <li>• Incidents/activities</li> <li>• Popular support</li> <li>• Governance/institutions</li> </ul>	
Military plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilment of objectives</li> <li>• Tactical successes</li> </ul>	

Table 2.3, coercive success

The table illustrates that there are some common denominators between the different subject areas. First, it is a prerequisite for any coercive success that force levels are moderate. In the instance where the level of force evolves into the domain of brute force, it will by definition no longer amount to coercion as it is defined here. Second, most fields of research and subject areas agree that a successful outcome requires some degree of fulfilment of objectives. Third, successful coercion requires behavioural change. Behavioural indicators are also emphasised in the COIN literature through the hearts and minds school of thought and in military doctrines through their emphasis on behavioural indicators and a reduction in violent incidents. Fourth, coercion, Schelling argues, is bargaining power. Henceforth, the conduct of negotiations that leads to favourable outcomes is indicative of coercive success. Finally, coercion theory's notion of sustainable outcomes must be assumed to be valid also within the other fields.

Two caveats are necessary to complete the definitional effort. First, this thesis maintains that coercive success is defined in relative, not absolute, terms. If, for example,

operational objectives are achieved at low force levels, this is assumed to constitute a greater success than if the force levels were high. Second, coercion is assumed to include both the overarching strategic as well as the local level. Coercive successes can be achieved on the local level even though they do not translate into campaign achievements. Whereas most research on coercion is conducted on the strategic level, this thesis focuses on the outcomes of coercion locally.

## **2.7. Conclusion, theory and literature review**

The purpose of this chapter has been to frame coercion theory in order to allow for an analysis of its utility in two provinces in the conflict in Northern Afghanistan between 2005 and 2012, and to review the relevant literature. Its central argument is that the utility of coercion theory rests on whether the fundamental assumptions of theory resonate with the distinct characteristics of the conflict and the degree to which coercive use of force produced the desired effects and outcomes.

The chapter consists of 5 sections. First, it aims to define military coercion. The literature offers different, but partly overlapping definitions, but the core of coercion is that it revolves around making someone do what they otherwise would not have done, persuaded to do so by some kind of threat or forceful intervention. The definition that will form the basis for the later analysis is derived from Jakobsen who defines military coercion as: “the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors” (Jakobsen, 2011). Second, it discusses the purpose of coercion. Coercion theory generally argues that the purpose of coercion is to put sufficient pressure on the opponent that will lead to behavioural change consistent with the coercer’s wishes or the conduct of negotiations that produces favourable outcomes. However, Zartman’s theory of ripeness and the Mutually Hurting Stalemate provides an interesting contrast to coercion theory’s notion of purpose. Third, the literature review maintains that the utility of coercion theory requires theoretical insights and literature beyond the classical coercion literature. First and foremost, since the Afghan campaign in 2008 was officially recognised as a counterinsurgency, the literature on insurgencies and COIN is of relevance. Fourth, this thesis maintains that coercion theory rests on a set of assumptions and propositions. These are identified as: 1) the unitary actor, 2) the rationality presumption, 3) the credible threat, 4) the function of demands and 5) the element of choice. If the conflict in question does not conform to the basic assumptions and propositions of theory, then theory cannot be expected to provide explanatory power to the conflict. Fifth and finally, this thesis argues that the utility of coercion theory rests not

only on the degree to which its basic assumptions and propositions conformed to the situation on the ground, but the degree to which coercive use of force translated into success. This thesis argues that defining success is challenging in a complex contemporary conflict like the Afghan and that it is necessary to include the notions of success from different fields of research and subject areas. The discussion on what may constitute coercive success arrives at proposing that success requires the full or partial fulfilment of: 1) moderate force levels, 2) the fulfilment of objectives/acceptance of demands, 3) behavioural changes consistent with the coercer's wishes, 4) the conduct of negotiations and 5) outcomes must be sustainable and as a minimum last beyond the conduct of tactical operations.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The utility of coercion theory, this thesis argues, rests on three arguments: 1) force must be used consistent with the definition of military coercion, 2) there must be a degree of consistency between the presumptions and propositions upon which theory rests and the actual situation on the ground and 3) coercive use of force must have effects and outcomes that are sufficiently consistent with the coercer's wishes. This thesis aims to examine the degree to which coercion theory has utility in a particular context - the conflict in the provinces of Faryab and Kunduz in Northern Afghanistan from 2005 to 2012.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out some of the methodological challenges that follow from examining the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict and account for the methodological choices. First, I will examine some methodological challenges. Second, I will account for the methodological choices, including a discussion on how conclusions are arrived at. Third, I will account for the selection of cases and empirical data. Fourth, I will discuss the sources of evidence. And finally, I will provide some reflections on my own position as a researcher, acknowledging that I have served with ISAF in Afghanistan and consequently been a party to the conflict I am examining.

#### **3.2. Some methodological challenges**

Studying the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict is a research area that is methodologically challenging. In the theory chapter, coercion theory is defined as a set of assumptions, methods and prescriptions that in their entirety represent the theoretical universe that aims to explain the potential of military force to induce behavioural change. If coercion theory is to have utility, the effects and outcomes of coercive use of force should logically conform with the postulations of theory. Henceforth, the utility of coercion theory requires a causal connection between the use of force and effects and outcomes that are consistent with the articulations of theory. It is, in short, a theory of causation. The chief methodological challenge for the purpose of this thesis is that causation in complex social relations is fundamentally difficult to determine (Elster, 2015; Kurki, 2008). One cause may have many effects, and one effect may have many causes, and the way they relate is highly contextual.

The way the issue of cause has been challenging here is that it is difficult to determine the degree to which the use of force in a given context caused a particular set of behavioural changes. If, for example, the number of violent incidents decreased during and in the

immediate aftermath of a major military operation, this could of course be a consequence of the use of force, thus confirming the relevance of coercion theory; the infliction of cost influenced the coerced to abstain from unwanted practices. However, it could also be owing to a range of other causes that had little or nothing to do with the military operation. Good statistics could of course mitigate this problem, but relevant statistics have generally not been available. The use of the CIDNE database correlated with the NDRE data on missions has provided some clues, but is not sufficient to produce statistically reliable conclusions. More importantly, behavioural change is a matter that cannot easily be reduced to one or a few definable variables. Revealing the impact of coercion on behaviour has thus been the chief methodological challenge for this thesis.

There have, in addition to the issue of causation, been some challenges, albeit of lesser gravity. Firstly, it has also been challenging to gather good quality data. As noted by Wörmer, there is a shortage of good quality written sources with adequate granularity of the region's provinces (Wörmer, 2012). I have sought to mitigate the relative lack of written sources through in-depth interviews with relevant actors with substantial field experience. It is, however, a potential weakness that it has not been possible to interview Afghan actors in Afghanistan.

Secondly, the written material for this thesis includes plans and orders issued by ISAF and the PRTs. Some of these plans and orders are still subject to classification, thus their availability for research purposes has been limited.

### **3.3. Methodological choices**

The methodological choices should address how knowledge is constructed within the framework of this thesis. The methodological choices are arrived at through a combination of methods that are assessed as appropriate to answer the research question and to mitigate the methodological challenges discussed above.

Firstly, this thesis places itself within the tradition of qualitative research. It is based on interviews, observations and the study of relevant written primary sources and available literature in the field. It does not purport to produce statistically reliable data. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, there is a shortage of good statistics.<sup>14</sup> Although some surveys have been done on various aspects of Afghan behaviour and perceptions, as for example the

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<sup>14</sup> The use of the data from the CIDNE database and the NDRE generated data on missions in Faryab will be discussed later.

perception studies by the NDRE and the studies conducted by Koehler et al., there are no good studies on the correlation between the use of force and behaviour in Northern Afghanistan (Eggereide, Martinussen, Marthinussen, & Barstad, 2012; Koehler & Gosztanyi, 2014; Svein E Martinussen, Barstad, & Christiansen, 2014). These studies have been useful though to complement the data gathered through interviews and other primary sources. Secondly, the nature of coercion suggests that quantifiable methods may be of limited utility. Quantitative methods require the identification and isolation of interdependent variables, an issue that would prove highly complicated in the Afghan conflict. Rather, this thesis assumes that the study of complex social phenomena such as the utility of coercion cannot easily be reduced to a relation between a highly limited number of variables (Elster, 2015; Kurki, 2008).

Secondly, this thesis lends itself to a case study strategy. Case studies have been the prevalent method of studying coercion since the publication of “The Limits” in 1971 (Alexander L. George et al., 1971; Jakobsen, 2011). The strength of the case study is that it allows for an intensive empirical examination of a particular phenomenon in its real life context, allowing for a potential to reveal cause-effect relationships through, for example, the method of process tracing (Brady & Collier, 2010; Elster, 2015; Alexander L. George & Bennet, 2005; Gerring, 2007). Case studies allow for the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the phenomenon in question in depth, and are thus not limited to one particular method. The usual criticism of case studies is their perceived limited potential to produce generalisable knowledge and thus inform the development of theory. A single case will, according to this critique, only shed light on that particular case, and will not produce generalisable conclusions. However, as noted by George and others, case studies have become increasingly accepted within the social sciences, and, although certain limitations surely exist with respect to their potential to develop theory, studying the phenomenon of coercion leaves few realistic alternatives (Alexander L. George & Bennet, 2005, pp. 1-36).

As mentioned above, the issue of cause has been a real challenge. Acknowledging the inherent complexities of Afghan society and the conflict and the almost indefinite number of interlinked factors that are in play, I have chosen a pragmatic approach to the issue of cause. First, as laid out in the theory chapter, this thesis does not differentiate between coercive and campaign success. Second, it does not purport to identify distinct causal structures. It cannot say with certainty that, for example, an operation or a particular type of coercion led to a distinct outcome. Rather, through a discussion of operations, activities, observations and available quantitative data, the thesis will substantiate that it is likely that coercion resulted in

certain effects. It will, in this sense, apply a form of process tracing, in which the sequence of events is linked to the narratives presented through the interviews, the data from the available surveys and the academic literature.

Conclusions are arrived at by first determining whether force was used consistent with coercion theory, second through an analysis of whether there was consistency between the actual situation on the ground and the articulations, presumptions and propositions of coercion theory and, finally, through an analysis of whether coercion produced the desired effects and outcomes.

### **3.4. Case selection**

Scholars have different things in mind when referring to a case or a case study (Gerring, 2007, p. 17). George et al. define a case study as “a class of events”, whereas Moses and Knutsen define it as “histories with a point” (Alexander L. George & Bennet, 2005, p. 17; Moses & Knutsen, 2012, p. 133). Cases do not exist independently outside a particular context or an analytical framework. This thesis adopts the position proposed by George and Bennet that case studies are: “the detailed examination of an historical aspect of a historic episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalisable to other events” (Alexander L. George & Bennet, 2005, p. 5).

The cases to be studied here are the instances of use of force consistent with the definition of coercion laid out in the theory chapter and applied by the coalition, with an emphasis on the Norwegian and German use of force in Faryab and Kunduz provinces respectively. “The cases”, then, are not the provinces or the conflict per se, but the application of force by the respective nations within the given timeframe.

Why were these cases selected? This thesis aims to study the utility of coercion theory in cases where nations deploy their military in an expeditionary capacity in out-of-area operations. As mentioned in the introduction, since the termination of the Cold War, this has become the way that a range of nations have frequently employed their military. However, most case studies on coercion are done with an emphasis on the US (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Freedman, 1998; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994). There is limited research on the coercive use of force by European nations. It has therefore been a priority for this thesis to examine the coercive use of force by other states than the US.



The Afghan conflict was the dominant international conflict through the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It represented a type of conflict that is not well studied in coercion theory. Hence the experiences from the Afghan conflict are of relevance to the development of coercion theory. It is further the case that the use of force in Northern Afghanistan has been inadequately studied compared to the literary focus that has been on the southern parts of the country. This thesis argues that there are distinct characteristics relating to the conflict in Northern Afghanistan which distinguishes it from the conflict in the South and that is of particular interest to the development of coercion theory. These characteristics include the ethnical composition of the North, the relation between the different ethnicities, the impact of the major warlords and strongmen and the history of conflict in the selected provinces.

Both Norway and Germany deployed their military to Afghanistan and in time became involved in their most intense military operations since the Second World War. It was from the outset clear that Norway and Germany had participated in a range of offensive operations that included the use of force to influence their opponents, the Taliban. The cases were consequently selected because they were assessed as relevant and suited to 1) examining the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict in the North and 2) developing theory with respect to the use of force by nations that have traditionally not applied force offensively in an expeditionary capacity.

The author has also developed a particular interest in the conflict in Northern Afghanistan through his missions in ISAF from 2007 to 2011 which were influential in the selection of cases. The service in Afghanistan instigated a particular interest in the utility of force in the Afghan conflict, not least because the effects and outcomes of the operations and activities the author participated in planning remained uncertain. It is further an issue that the selected cases to some degree have assured access to sources. The author's background in the Norwegian military has allowed for detailed insight into the activities and operations of the Norwegian military, not least access to primary written sources. Through my service in Afghanistan, I also developed a substantial network within the German military that has been convenient with respect to gathering data from the German activities and operations in Kunduz.

### **3.5. Sources of evidence**

As argued by Yin, "a major strength of a case study is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence" (Yin, 2003, pp. 97-98). It allows the researcher to use those

sources that are assessed as the most useful for studying the phenomenon in question and using more and different types of sources will make the argument more convincing. This thesis draws on a broad set of sources, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to allow for the analysis of the utility of coercion theory in Northern Afghanistan.

First, a useful source of information has been written primary sources. These include archival material from the Norwegian Department of Defence and plans, orders and procedures that were produced by ISAF during the relevant timeframe. I have been granted full access to the DoD archives and has received valuable help in identifying relevant data. I have also made use of aggregated data from the incident databases used by ISAF, most notably the CIDNE database from which aggregate data was made available by the NDRE. There have been two major challenges with respect to the availability of written primary sources. Firstly, they are not consistent through time and by type. The RC N and PRT archives were for all practical purposes the units' file structures and they were not handled according to acknowledged archival procedures. Even though the NDRE and the Norwegian Joint HQ did a data capture before the withdrawal in 2012, the material is piecemeal and not coherent through time.

Secondly, the issue of classification has restricted the availability of data. Although a substantial part of the material made available to the author could be used, some is still classified and cannot be referred to in an unclassified dissertation. Up to 2006/7, the level of classification generally did not prevent the use of ISAF plans and orders, but due to a computer upgrade in 2007/8, such material was generally given a more restrictive classification, thus being less available for research purposes.

Second, the main source of information has been qualitative research interviews with individuals with substantial experience of the Afghan field. The interviewees were selected through a combination of the authors knowledge of potential respondents as a consequence of the my missions in Afghanistan and a snowball method of finding respondents. I have aimed at, and taken substantial care of identifying sources that had relevant experiences from the Afghan field. All interviews were semi-structured based on an interview guide.<sup>15</sup> They usually lasted around one hour and addressed those issues of the respondents' experiences assumed to be relevant to the study of coercion. Through the preparation and conduct of the interviews,

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<sup>15</sup> The interview guides are attached as Appendix B. It should be noted that the experiences gained from the interviews with the Norwegian military resulted in a developed interview guide that was used for the German respondents.

substantial care was taken to avoid social desirability bias and other forms of bias that could influence the outcomes of the interviews. However, as noted by Kvale, interviewing almost by definition includes a relation between the interviewer and the respondent that inevitably will include some kind of reciprocal influence (Kvale, 2001).

A total of 33 interviews were conducted based on the attached interview guides. These respondents can broadly be divided into three separate groups: Norwegian and German military, civilians within the aid or humanitarian communities and Afghan interpreters. In addition to these groups, I have also interviewed a former Norwegian Minister of Defence, a former Norwegian Chief of Defence and a former member of the German Bundestag. Prior to the official initiation of my PhD study, I conducted two pre-study trips to Afghanistan in spring and autumn 2011. During these trips I conducted a total of 5 interviews, including officers serving with ISAF at the RC N, a representative of USAID, an Afghan representative of the APRP programme and a US officer working with the reintegration programme. Finally, I conducted a total of 7 interviews with ISAF and Afghan officers during their attendance at the NATO Joint Force Training Centre (JFTC) pre-mission training in Bydgoszcz in Poland in November-December 2012.

The main contribution of the interviews to this thesis is twofold. First, acknowledging the piecemeal and incoherent availability of written primary sources, the interviews allowed for reliable data on issues that could not be obtained or verified through the written sources. The total number of interviews as well as the variety of respondents has proven highly valuable in constructing reliable information on the use of force and its effects in Afghanistan. Secondly, the interviews have been valuable in their own right because they provided a set of narratives and perceptions from the Afghan field that is not reflected through other sources. There is no objective truth available as to the effects of the coercive use of force; it depends very much on the perceptions of the actors. The interviews have provided differing, but highly valuable viewpoints and perceptions on the utility of force. Each interview represented a piece in a puzzle that, when put together, allowed for a careful examination of the utility of coercion theory.

Third, I have made use of the quantitative data provided by other sources, most notably the perception surveys conducted by the NDRE and the surveys conducted by Koehler et al. on Kunduz province. As noted above, there is a shortage of data on Northern

Afghanistan, and the mentioned surveys provide the best quality data available on Afghan perceptions in the respective provinces. In particular, the NDRE surveys that were conducted bi-annually from 2010 to 2013 provide a very good opportunity to assess developments through time.

Fourth, I have made use of the academic literature that is available on Northern Afghanistan. Giustozzy's work on the insurgents of the Afghan North, but also Münch's work on the local Afghan power structures and the International Military Intervention and Wörmer's works on the Networks of Kunduz have been particularly helpful (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010; Münch, 2013; Wörmer, 2012).

Fifth, and finally, I have discussed the issues of the application of force and its behavioural consequences with various Norwegian and German researchers, including Dr Arne Strand from Norway and Dr Philipp Münch, Dr Jan Koehler and Dr Anja Seiffert from Germany. Although these discussions are not referenced here, they have provided valuable insights on relevant aspects of Afghan society and, not least, the potential of military force as a vehicle to instil behavioural change.

### **3.6. Some reflections on my own position as a researcher**

Ideally, there is a distance between the researcher and the object of their research. The researcher is assumed not to be influenced by the research object and to hold the position of an observer who objectively observes facts that can be analysed (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 1). However, the notion of the "objective" researcher is indeed questionable (Ibid, p. 1). It immediately calls for the qualification of whether objective facts really exist or whether facts are mere presentations of perceptions that have been individually, socially and culturally filtered: "Data and facts are the constructions of results and interpretations" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 1). This notion of facts indicates that the researcher will be biased in some way; the researcher's observations cannot be fully disconnected from their own experiences since the construction of meaning is by definition a filtered process. Being too close to the object of research increases the potential bias. I served in Afghanistan three times between 2007 and 2011 and did, because of my position as chief of the RC N Plans and Policy branch twice, acquire intimate knowledge of the conflict, its actors and issues through the ISAF system. This calls for a reflection on the issues of proximity and distance by having been part of the problematic to be studied.

Generally, I have found it helpful to have served in Afghanistan. Even though I was not there as a researcher, the service allowed for detailed insights that would have been inconceivable without this experience. I believe my Afghan experience was helpful in at least two ways: 1) the possibility of receiving first hand and detailed knowledge of the conflict, its actors and issues through the ISAF system, and 2) having been part of the conflict allowed me to be inside processes and decision making cycles in ways that would have been difficult as an external researcher.

Through my service in Afghanistan, I was involved in the planning of actual operations as well as the overarching campaign plan for the ISAF RC N area of responsibility (AOR). Through the summer of 2007, I was involved in the planning of the operation “Hare Kate Yolo II” that took place in October-November the same year. This operation was the first combined large scale operation to be conducted in the district of Ghormach and assumed to be the first large scale operation involving Norwegian units. Through my service as the Chief Plans and Policy branch of the RC N between September 2008 and April 2009 and Sept 2010 and March 2011, I was intimately involved in and responsible for developing the ISAF RC N campaign plan for the Northern region. Through this work, I had numerous meetings with representatives of the Afghan 209th Corps, the Afghan Police and the NDS as well as representatives of UNAMA and various aid organisations. I also attended numerous intelligence briefings by the RC N intelligence branch as well as the PRTs intelligence units. The combination of doing operational planning, attending intelligence briefings and frequent meetings with some of the GIROA key actors allowed for detailed insights that would most probably not have been available to an external researcher.

Being part of the processes also allowed an understanding of society and culture not easily available through other sources. This can be illustrated by the so-called security meeting held every Sunday at the Province Governor’s office in Maimana. This was the regular meeting in which all Afghan institutions and international organisations were represented and issues of security and development were discussed and decided. I participated in one such meeting representing ISAF RC N and afterwards attended an official dinner at the Governor’s guest house. Through such experiences, of which there were many, I arguably gained valuable insights into Afghan culture, society and decision making processes. These experiences have, to my mind, increased my understanding of Afghanistan and the conflict beyond what would have been possible through other sources.

However, being close to the research object also calls for caution. The chief disadvantage is the potential of being predisposed to certain viewpoints with respect to actors and issues. By having served extensively with one party to the conflict there is always the possibility of being overly sympathetic to viewpoints and perceptions held by this part, in my case, ISAF. I was deeply involved in developing and writing the ISAF plans, hence I might easily end up in a situation trying to prove that we (ISAF) were right - I planned it and it worked.

I have also interviewed several Norwegian and German military personnel who I worked with while in Afghanistan. Through our military experience in general, and the Afghan experience in particular, we share a common ground expressed through language and experiences that may influence interviews: which questions are asked and how are they articulated (you do not want to be overly critical of good colleagues). I have aimed to avoid such biases through the careful development of interview guides and a constant awareness of the issue.

## **4. The cases**

### **4.1. Introduction to the Norwegian and German missions**

The purpose of this thesis is to study the utility of coercion theory in two provinces in Northern Afghanistan. It departs from the notion that the basic assumptions and propositions of theory should resonate with the distinct characteristics of the Afghan conflict in order to have explanatory power.

Although Schelling proposed a universal model of coercion based on theories of rational and unitary actors, most theorists agree that context matters. George argued that there was a need to replace the “simplistic assumption that adversaries are rational, unitary actors with more actor specific behavioural models” (A. George, 2003). This thesis adopts George’s position, hence it is required to present the characteristics of the provinces in question. The Afghan mission represented something qualitatively new to Norway and Germany. Neither of these nations had similar experiences prior to their missions in Afghanistan and in particular their conduct of and participation in operations in which force was used outside the paradigm of self-defence was new. The chapter will consequently explore the Norwegian and German contributions, the chosen models and the phases of the operation. Through a careful mapping of context and the military contribution, the chapter will allow for the later analysis of three factors: 1) Was force used consistent with theory? 2) Did the basic assumptions of theory conform with the situation on the ground? 3) Did the coercive use of force translate into success?

## **4.2. The case of Norway in Faryab**

### **Introduction**

“Of all provinces of Afghanistan, probably none deserved to be called the ‘war-lord hotbed’ more than Faryab” (Giustozzi, 2009).

As with most small or medium-sized European Nations, the purpose of the Norwegian Armed Forces is first and foremost defence of national interest and territory and support of its NATO allies if required. However, Norway has not been alien to deploying its military to areas well beyond Norwegian shores, as suggested by its long-term deployment to UNIFIL in Lebanon and the substantial participation in various operations in the Balkans in the 90’s. These missions, although in particular some of the missions in the Balkans entailed robust mandates, were all conducted as UN-led peace support missions or NATO-led peace enforcement operations.

Norwegian forces had, for most practical purposes, not used force outside a narrow self-defence paradigm until the Afghan mission. The notion that the Norwegian military would use force to influence behaviour in protracted and complex conflicts in faraway areas like Afghanistan was consequently not deeply acknowledged by the political establishment, as illustrated by the surprise of some MPs when Norwegian F-16s delivered their first weapons in Afghanistan in January 2003 (Johnsen, 2003). By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, terms like Counter Insurgency and Comprehensive Approach were not a part of the political and military vocabulary with respect to what the Norwegian military was assumed to do. A few years later, this had changed substantially through the Norwegian involvement in the Afghan conflict and in particular its engagement in Faryab province. By the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Norwegian forces had been involved in their most intense fighting since the Second World War, and the Norwegian military had used force in Faryab province on a hitherto unprecedented scale. The “peace nation” of Norway was fighting an intense and sometimes bloody conflict against a domestic insurgency that threatened to reverse the once positive developments in Afghanistan.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the utility of coercion theory by studying the conflict in two provinces in Northern Afghanistan. Military coercion is here defined as “the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors” (Jakobsen, 2011). Coercive use of force thus includes the use of



force outside the paradigm of self-defence previously assumed to be the norm for Norwegian international military operations.

#### 4.2.1. Context, the province of Faryab

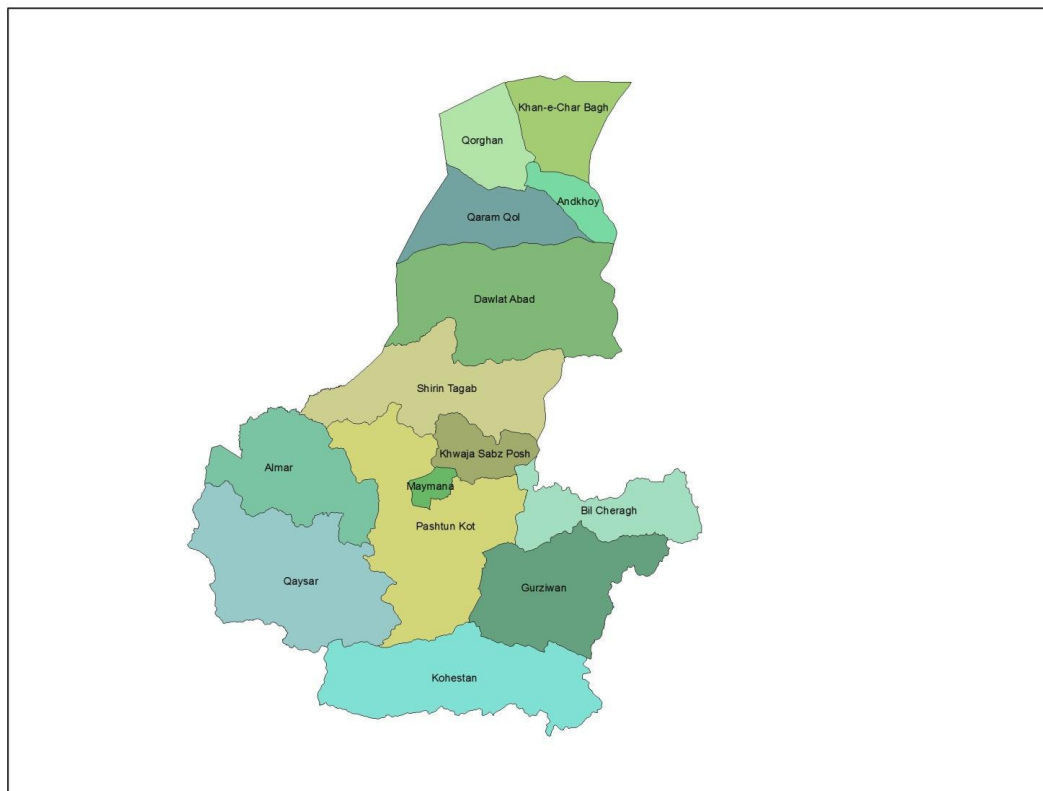


Figure 4.1, Faryab province (without the district of Ghormach)

The purpose of this section is to illuminate the distinct characteristics of Faryab with respect to its geography, climate and demography to the extent that these are relevant to the utility of coercion theory. It departs from the notion of George that in order to assess the efficacy of the coercive use of force, it is necessary to develop “Actor Specific behavioural Models” and Lebow’s notion that the receptiveness of the coerced to coercion matters as much as the coercer’s ability to raise the costs (A. George, 2003; Lebow, 2006). Of particular interest here are, consequently, the ethnical composition, actors and fault lines of Faryab.

Faryab is situated in the North-Western part of Afghanistan bordering the province of Badghis in the West, the provinces of Jowzan and Sar-e-Pul in the East, and the province of Ghor in the South. Faryab is one of Afghanistan’s many border provinces bordering Turkmenistan in the West and North. It is, even by Afghan standards, a remote province that for centuries managed with little or no influence from the central Afghan government. In the North, the province consists of desert like formations and dry steppe land and is scarcely inhabited apart from the major city of Andkhoy and some scattered villages. Further South,

the terrain rises until it reaches the western part of the Hindukush in the southernmost districts of Kuhestan and Gurziwan. In particular, the remote areas in the South and East are difficult, sometimes impossible to access during the winter because of the poor infrastructure and harsh weather conditions. The winters are cold and sometimes damp, whereas it gets extremely warm during summer with temperatures exceeding 50 degrees Celsius.

The province covers approximately 21,146 km<sup>2</sup>, and has a population of between 825,000 and 1,300,000, estimates fluctuate (Bauck, Strand, Hakim, & Akbari, 2007). According to the MRRD profile, approximately 89% of the population live in rural areas, or in smaller or medium-sized villages (*Faryab Provincial Profile*, 2012). The main cities are the provincial capital of Maymaneh with a population exceeding 50,000 and Andkhoy in the North. Faryab is thus, like most provinces in Afghanistan, populated mainly by village-based peasants who are either subsistence farmers and/or engage in local trade.

The economy of Faryab is, for most practical purposes, based on agriculture and trade in legal and illicit goods. There is practically no industry in the province and no major companies that could provide employment. Unemployment rates are consequently high and standards of living are low, in particular in the more distant areas (Marthinussen, Rutledal, Eggereide, & Hennum, 2010). The UNODC has declared Faryab almost opium free, but it may serve as a transit for the opium trade and other illicit goods ("Afghanistan Opium Surevy 2014, Cultivation and Production," 2014, p. 15).<sup>16</sup> Control over trade and smuggling routes and activities are assumed to be a substantial source of income for the local strongmen and a potential source of conflict, although Giustozzi claims this is not necessarily correct (A. Giustozzi, 2009).

The district of Ghormach has a particular history, since it was not originally a part of Faryab, but part of the Province of Badghis in the West. It is situated west of Qaysar district and was temporarily transferred to Faryab in January 2009 by a Presidential Decree of November 2008. Due to the temporary status it is not viewed on most maps of Faryab,

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<sup>16</sup> According to the UNODC report, Faryab lost its status as poppy free in 2013 since poppy cultivation was increasing in Kohistan, Qaysar and Gurziwan districts ("Afghanistan Opium Surevy 2014, Cultivation and Production," 2014, p. 19)

including the one above (Ulrichsen, 2010)<sup>17</sup>. The district of Ghormach had been perceived by consecutive Norwegian PRT-commanders as a safe haven for insurgent activity, and there were indications that violence in the South-Western parts of Faryab originated from the district (Ulrichsen, 2010). Ghormach was originally administered by the Province governor in Badghis, and the ISAF responsibility was exercised through the Regional Command West (RC W) in Herat. However, the infrastructure connecting Ghormach to the rest of Badghis, and the highly volatile security situation in the area, in particular in the district of Morghab, bordering Ghormach in the West, did not allow for ANSF or ISAF security operations in Ghormach by RC W units. As noted by former Chief of Defence, General (R) Sverre Diesen, Norway worked actively through both German, ISAF and Afghan channels to advocate a transfer of Ghormach from Badghis to Faryab, thus allowing for security operations in the district conducted by ANSF and ISAF units in Faryab (Diesen, 26 June 2014). The district of Ghormach remained a troubled area and a Taliban hotspot until Norway withdrew from Faryab in October 2012.

### **The ethnic distribution and the Pashtu population**

Faryab is ethnically and linguistically diverse, containing groups from most of the major ethnicities of Afghanistan including Uzbeks (57%), Tadjiks (21%), Pashtuns (14%), Turkmen (4,5% and Hazara (2,3%) (Bauck et al., 2007). The relative ethnic distribution must be considered an estimate, as other sources indicate other figures, e.g. the NDRE surveys. However, the overall picture of Faryab is one of ethnic and linguistic diversity. In addition, the number of Afghan nomads, the Kuchi, varies throughout the pastoral seasons, amounting to around 100,000 in the winter season (*Faryab Provincial Profile*, 2012). The Kuchi are not a distinctive ethnic group as such, but apparently most are of Pashtun origin.

The way in which ethnicity plays out and influences the conflict may differ between different areas. Some observers have also questioned the real impact of ethnicity as a source of conflict and violence, suggesting that material factors like competition for land and water rights or feuds may be equally or even more important (NO2, 10 May 2014). However, as

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<sup>17</sup> I served as the Chief Plans and Policy Branch (CJ 5) at the ISAF Regional Command North at the time of the transfer. The issue of Ghormach was a major topic at the RC N command level, and in particular Germany was lukewarm towards the idea due to the legal basis for its involvement in Afghanistan. The Bundestag had defined the districts where German forces could operate, a decision that predated the transfer of Ghormach, hence German forces could only enter the district in so-called “in extremis” situations

reported by Norwegian military personnel and other sources, there is a visible ethnic dimension to the conflict in Faryab that cannot be disregarded (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014). This relates particularly to the Pashtun communities and the tensions between them and the Tadjik and Uzbek communities (NO02, 10 May 2014). Most observers agree that the ethnic distribution of Faryab and the consequences of ethnically-based tensions have been a vital driver for the development of the conflict in the province.

Before 1880, Faryab was already an ethnically diverse society, though one with almost no Pashtuns; the major ethnicities present were Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmens. Although conflict and outbursts of violence certainly occurred, the evidence suggests that ethnicity did not play a significant role (Barfield, 2010). Rather, conflict occurred for reasons related to land and water rights, feuds and the quest for power and influence.

The Pashtun population in Faryab originates from the dispositions of the Emir Rahman in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Barfield, 2010, pp. 155-157). As part of his efforts to control Afghanistan, Emir Abdur Rahman deported rebellious Pashtun tribes to provinces in the North, including Faryab. By deporting Pashtun tribes, the Emir aimed to reduce the influence of these tribes in the South, as well as extend central government influence into the area north of the Hindu-Kush in which he exerted less influence. The Pashtun tribes became a useful tool in this process. The deported Pashtuns settled in the area and were given property at the cost of the already existing population. The settlement patterns that were established under the Emir are still clearly visible in Faryab.

There are several layers of organising entities in Afghan society, but most rural people live in defined villages. A village thus becomes a visible and defining entity that is geographically separable from other villages, and contains certain identifiable elements such as ethnicity, language, tribe and family groups. Although some villages are multi-ethnic, the Pashtun villages in Faryab are almost all Pashtun. The Pashtun communities were subject to attacks, rape and pillaging during the unease of the early 90's and after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 (NO02, 10 May 2014; Wiley, 2004).

In Faryab, the Pashtuns are concentrated into some areas in the South-West and western parts of the province; the district of Ghormach is almost all Pashtun, whereas Qaysar, Almar and western parts of Shirin-Taqab are ethnically mixed, although with a substantial Pashtun representation. When attaining briefings in the PRT, the area from Qaysar/Almar and northwards, bordering Turkmenistan, was often referred to as the Pashtun belt (Skaar, 2010).

The areas with a sizeable Pashtun representation are generally less developed than other areas and, as most Norwegian PRT commanders noted, the Pashtun dominated areas

received far less aid and governmental resources (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014). When Norwegian MOT teams visited the Pashtun villages, the lack of aid and projects were frequently addressed as a major source of discontent and an indication that the Afghan government, the positions of which were manned mainly by Tadjiks and Uzbeks in Faryab, did not care much for the Pashtun population.

#### **4.2.2. The Norwegian led PRT in Faryab, a short narrative**

By late 2004, it became clear that the UK would focus its efforts on the southern parts of Afghanistan and had started to look for a candidate for running the PRT in Faryab. Norway had had a small staff in the PRT, and seemed to be a suitable candidate, so the UK enquired if Norway would consider taking over the PRT (Diesen, 26 June 2014). By early 2005, it became clear that Norway would assume lead responsibility of the PRT. In September 2005, the British left and Norway became the prime ISAF representative and what in ISAF military terms was called “the land owner” of a remote province in Afghanistan. Although Norway had engaged in the Balkans through the 90’s, and had participated in many UN-lead operations, the ISAF mission represented something qualitatively new to the Norwegian military. Never before had Norway assumed a responsibility similar to leading the PRT in Faryab. Norway led the PRT until ISAF withdrew from Faryab in October 2012

By the time of the Norwegian take over, Faryab was assessed to be a calm area in which few traces of an organised insurgency existed. Knowledge of the province was weak, most of it was “black”, a term used for areas where little or no information existed (NO03, 4 dec 2014). Hence, the initial task of the PRT was to map the province with respect to geography, infrastructure and actors and issues (Ibid). However, in 2006/7 the situation started to deteriorate, and by the end of the decade involved the Norwegian army in its most intense combat operations since the Second World War. This section will present a short narrative of the activities and operations in Faryab conducted by the Norwegian led PRT through a description of the Norwegian PRT model and the phases of the operation.

#### **The Norwegian PRT model**

The ISAF effort in Afghanistan entailed at most 26 PRTs, of which five were located in the Northern region (Godal, 2016). Although ISAF had produced a so-called PRT handbook, all PRTs were construed and run based on a combination of local requirements,

ISAF guidance and national guidelines (ISAF, 2010b).<sup>18</sup> Norway was, from this perspective, no exception, and developed a PRT that, although it was within the ISAF command structure and executed the tasks and orders from the RC N, had a distinct Norwegian touch that in some aspects contradicted the ISAF developed concepts. In particular, the Norwegian de-facto rejection of COIN and the comprehensive approach separated the Norwegian model from the ISAF concept of an integrated military-civilian effort. This section will address the reasons for the choice of model, the PRT organisation, its tasks and the distinct characteristics of the Norwegian PRT concept.

Eronen argues that there were four generic models of PRTs operating in ISAF: the American, the German, the British (Nordic) and the Turkish (Eronen, 2008a). The British model was chosen by Norway not least because the British preceded Norway as leaders of the PRT in Faryab, and because Norway found the model suitable to Norwegian needs. The British model emphasised a joint military-civilian organisation, although with a military lead and a focus on Security Sector Reform (SSR) (Ibid p. 21). In a memo dated 31 March 2005, a summary of State Secretary Helgesen's visit to Afghanistan, it is noted that: "The organisation of the UK led PRT coincides to a large degree with the Norwegian point of view" (*Statssekretær Vidar Helgesens besøk til Afghanistan 10 - 13 mars 2005 - Hovedinntrykk og oppfølgingspunkter*, 16.03.2005).<sup>19</sup> It appears that the choice of model was pragmatic more than based on principles. There was considerable support for the British way of operating compared to the US in the DoD, and the British were perceived to be the most successful in Afghanistan (Oma, 2014, pp. 75-75). Norway had no previous experience with the PRT concept, and being a small nation with limited resources it could not afford to develop a unique concept, nor did it see the purpose of doing so. In short, the Norwegian model meant that the PRT was to be a predominantly military structure that was to focus on security-related issues, and that reconstruction, development and humanitarian issues were to be planned, coordinated and executed outside the military domain.

From the time of the Norwegian take over, the PRT was relatively small, around 100-120 personnel, and organised with a staff, an ISTAR unit, a Force Protection unit and support and medical functions (Siljebråten, 24 April 2014).<sup>20</sup> In addition, the PRT contained a small

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<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the models, roles, purpose and organisation of the PRTs, see Eronen (Eronen, 2008a).

<sup>19</sup> My translation

<sup>20</sup> ISTAR=Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance

number of civilian advisors. The PRT was from the outset and remained through its mission a multi-national unit that through time included Finnish, Icelandic and Latvian contributions subordinated to the Norwegian Commander.

The main operational asset of the PRT in its initial stages was the ISTAR unit. The unit consisted of the Military Observation Teams (MOT) and an analysing and intelligence gathering capacity. The MOTs travelled the Faryab countryside extensively and were the units that most frequently faced Afghan society. The MOT operations were in the early stages of the mission the operational cornerstone of the PRT, and they continued to play a significant role throughout the Norwegian mission in Faryab.

In June 2008, the combat power of the PRT was substantially enhanced by the introduction of the so-called Task Unit (TU). The TU was introduced as a response to the continued request for more resources by Norwegian PRT commanders due to the deteriorating security situation in Faryab and an acknowledgment that a more forward leaning posture was required in order to deal with the progress of the Taliban. The TU was a reduced company size unit that was equipped with a range of light and semi-heavy weaponry, including the Infantry Fighting Vehicle CV-90 with its 30 mm gun (Chin, 2007). The TU boasted considerable firepower and was, until the introduction of US combat forces in 2010, the most potent military unit in Faryab. The TU provided the PRT commander with the potential for projecting military force on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

The composition of the evolved PR-structure is depicted in Figure xx below (Huse, 2012).<sup>21</sup>

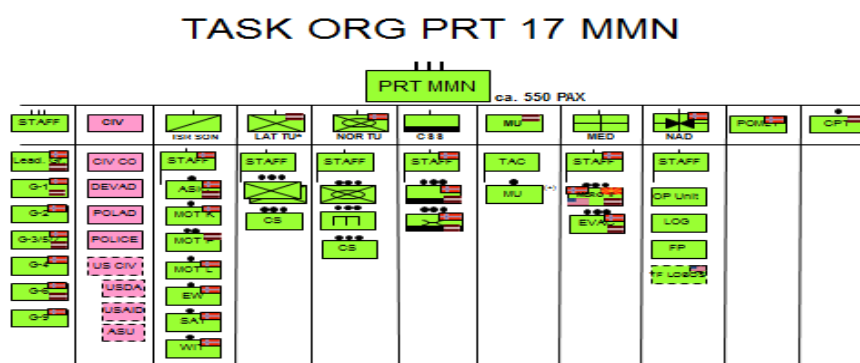


Figure 4.2, task organisation, PRT 17

<sup>21</sup> Table xx refers to the PRT organisation by summer-autumn 2011. At this time, the PRT had developed substantially since the early days, boasting more than 500 personnel.



A Norwegian PRT contingent was, as was customary in ISAF, of six months duration. The change of contingent was done in June and November/December in which most of the personnel were rotated. Some individuals applied for and got an extension, hence a few military would stay in Faryab for a whole year, but this was a clear exception. Some of the PRT sub-units also had offset rotation cycles, thus avoiding the whole PRT being rotated simultaneously. Although quite a few of the personnel serving in the PRT had prior experience of Afghanistan, no PRT commander served in the position of commander for more than one contingent except the commander that oversaw the withdrawal of the Norwegian forces in summer-autumn 2012.

The system of rotation cycles put the military presence in sharp contrast to their Afghan counterparts, but also in contrast to the representatives of other international organisations who practised tenures of up to 3 to 5 years. In a conversation with a UNAMA representative in 2008, the author was confronted with the fact that “every six months I have to start all over again”, reflecting the UNAMA representative’s frustration over the high turnover rates of the military personnel (Skaar, 2010). A Norwegian MOT commander noted that it took two to three months to gain sufficient experience to understand the complexities of Afghan society and consequently be able to function efficiently (NO01, 10 June 2014). Although the PRT commanders interviewed for this thesis do not explicitly mention the rotation cycles as problematic, it seems clear that a presence of six months was indeed short in order to get to know the influential individuals, address and potentially contribute to resolving deep-rooted conflicts and generally function purposefully in Afghan society.

Whereas the 5-month rotation cycles were common to most troop contributing nations, there were two distinct, but interrelated characteristics of the Norwegian model of relevance to this thesis: its rejection of the ISAF COIN concept, and the relation between the PRT’s military and civilian component.

The ISAF COIN model derived from the US FM 2-24 was for most practical purposes introduced with operation Tolo in autumn 2008 (ref: Op Tolo). It emphasised the close coordination of military and civilian efforts along the three Lines of Operation; Security, Governance and Reconstruction and Development. In particular, ISAF adopted the so-called Shape-Clear-Hold-Build (SCHB) concept and the Comprehensive Approach as cornerstones of its COIN concept. Although Norway supported ISAF on the strategic level, it advocated and operationalised a strict division between the military and civilian part of the PRT (Godal,



2016; Huse, 10 April 2014). In theory, therefore, Norway rejected COIN and the Comprehensive Approach on the tactical level. In their communication to the PRT commanders, the Norwegian Chief of Defence and the Commander of the Norwegian Joint Headquarters stated clearly that: “Norway does not do COIN” (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014). However, as will be shown later, the PRT commanders found ways around the Norwegian policy and for most practical purposes conducted operations and activities that were broadly in line with the ISAF guidance.

The Norwegian PRT model entailed a civilian component which, although located and based in the PRT, was not subordinated to the PRT commander and had a purely advisory role to him. Parts of the civilian component reported to the Norwegian embassy in Kabul, and got their tasks and priorities from it (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Godal, 2016, pp. 115-119). The police contingent was subordinated to the Norwegian Department of Justice from which they got their tasks and to which they reported (Høgseth, 2009). The Norwegian Embassy and the Norwegian Government were very clear that the Norwegian civilian contribution should not be part of the ISAF COIN strategy (Godal, 2016, pp. 117-118). Rather, Norway was to pursue a strategy in which there was a clear divide between the civilian and military components, and in which the civilian contribution, in particular its allocation of resources, was not to be connected to or seen as a part of military planning, coordination and operations. The COIN strategy was perceived to represent a confusion of civilian and military tasks and could potentially cause the NGOs’ impartiality to be questioned, and thus jeopardise their ability to operate in contested areas (Ibid).

The civilian component amounted to a few advisors in the initial phase, and although it was through time supplemented with additional resources, it remained a very small part of the PRT. It consisted of a civil coordinator, a development adviser, a political adviser, a police contingent and a prison project. As noted by several PRT commanders, the civilian component did not perceive itself as part of the ISAF command structure and did not engage in or support the comprehensive approach (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014).

One PRT commander noted that he found the Norwegian model and the relation to the civilian component challenging, whereas others accepted the civ-mil division as a workable, though not ideal solution (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014). Contrary to most PRTs then, the Norwegian PRT commander did not have organic resources to execute the COIN concepts of Build and Hold; he did not have the

authority to coordinate civilian and military resources and could not allocate resources to anything but security-related issues. Contrary to the holistic ideal proposed by COIN theory and the carrot part of coercion theory, the Norwegian PRT commander was theoretically left with the stick.

However, as noted by most PRT commanders, they were able to establish a good working atmosphere with the civilian component and found ways to conduct operations that were attuned to the requirements of reconstruction and development. In particular, the presence of the USAID provided the PRT commander with an institution that was obliged to support the COIN strategy and that was willing to support the PRT operations by executing reconstruction and development projects in concert with the COIN objectives and the comprehensive approach.

### **The phases of the operation**

The activities and operations of the Norwegian contribution are structured chronologically in three phases, based on Koehler's four-phased division of the German mission in Kunduz province (Koehler in Chiari, 2014). The chronology applied by Koehler is broadly assumed to be fitting also for Norway in Faryab, although some differences may exist.<sup>22</sup> The phases are partly overlapping and provide an analytical framework that is useful, and allows for comparison between the Norwegian and German contributions. The first part is the establishment and orientation phase, ranging from September 2005 until 2007. It was the period in which no large scale operations were conducted, and the PRT focus was on intelligence gathering and capacity building. The next phase is the escalation phase, ranging from 2007 until 2009/10. In this period, it became clear that the Taliban was on the rise, and their influence gradually increased throughout the province. It is also this period in which the conduct of major coordinated military operations, like Harekate Yolo II, was initiated. The third phase is the surge that starts with the introduction of a substantial US contribution in the North in winter/spring 2010; a brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade, a total of more than 5,000 soldiers, heavy equipment and not least more than 50 helicopters. The fourth phase is of lesser relevance to this thesis as it mainly pertains to the consolidation and handover phase in which the focus gradually turned to enabling

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<sup>22</sup> Ekhaugen and Oma argue that the Norwegian military component developed through three distinct phases (Ekhaugen and Oma in Chiari, 2014). The three phased division is also used in the official Norwegian investigation of the mission in Afghanistan (GE07, 3 April 2016). This division, however, did not include the US supported surge from 2010 as a separate phase; hence I find the phasing proposed by Koehler more fitting.

Afghan security forces to independently handle security and not least the pull-out of ISAF. Throughout the latter part of 2010 and increasingly in 2011, ISAF focused on the transition of the security responsibility to Afghan authorities through the so-called Inteqal programme. In Faryab, transition was completed with the Norwegian withdrawal in October 2012.

### **Phase 1, Establishment and orientation (2005 – 2007)**

The first phase starts with the Norwegian take-over of the PRT responsibility in September 2005 and lasts until spring-summer 2007. It coincides with the early and groping start and ends with the acknowledgment that there was a rising insurgency in parts of Faryab which the PRT was insufficiently manned and resourced to deal with. The initial size of the PRT was small, around 90-110 military and a handful of civilian personnel, mainly Norwegian, but augmented with personnel from Finland and Iceland (Ekhaugen and Oma in Chiari, 2014; Flatemo, 2008; GE07, 3 April 2016). The PRT was located in the city centre of Maymaneh in a building-complex called “banken” (the bank) reflecting the building’s prior use. The PRT structure and composition largely mirrored the model inherited by the UK, which by the Norwegian authorities was assumed fitting and in accordance with Norwegian objectives (Eronen, 2008b; NO03, 4 dec 2014; Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014; *Statssekretær Vidar Helgesens besøk til Afghanistan 10 - 13 mars 2005 - Hovedinntrykk og oppfølgingspunkter*, 16.03.2005).

The first phase was, by and large, a continuation of the activities and operations conducted by the British: intelligence gathering, relation building and support to the local authorities. The PRT’s main operational tool was the MOT teams that served as the “eyes and ears” of the PRT commander and the frequent meetings between various branches of the PRT staff and their Afghan counterparts, mainly the office of the Provincial Governor and the leadership of the ANP and the NDS (GE07, 3 April 2016; Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014).

In the early days of 2004/5, patrols were usually greeted with friendly gestures, interested and sometimes cheerful local people (AF05, 26 Feb 2015; NO03, 4 dec 2014). Patrols would be invited into villages and compounds for discussions and to drink tea. The situation changed in February 2006, when the PRT camp came under attack by an angry population (GE07, 3 April 2016, p. 122; Siljebråten, 24 April 2014). Although the PRT experienced no fatal casualties, the incident was the triggering factor for the decision to move the PRT from “the Bank” to an area outside the city centre, near the local airfield (Godal,

2016).<sup>23</sup> It is not entirely clear what caused the incident, but it was at the time connected to the Muhammed drawings that had upset a lot of Muslims (Godal, 2016, p. 122). However, as noted by a Norwegian officer, the attack may have been ignited by the drawings, but it may also have been connected to imbalances in the local power dynamics and that some LPBs were uneasy with the PRTs actions and interest in their activities (NO03, 4 dec 2014). As noted by one MOT team member (NO03, 4 dec 2014): “I do not believe that the attack was caused by the drawings alone. In 2006, we were under instruction not to engage the local warlords and only talk to the formal structures. They certainly did not enjoy this, and the attack on “the Bank”, could just as well have been facilitated in order to indicate dissatisfaction with the PRT”.

Through autumn 2006, Col Sommerseth claimed that the PRT patrols still enjoyed total freedom of movement, and were involved in three TIC-incidents only, of which none was connected to the Taliban (Sommerseth, 10 April 2014).<sup>24</sup> The TIC-incidents were ascribed to “people that fired at one another, and when we arrived, they started to fire at us. We were a third part that could interfere in their business” (Sommerseth, 10 April 2014).<sup>25</sup> Sommerseth argues that during his tenure the Taliban was not perceived to be a force of substantial influence and their influence was assessed as marginal at the time. A Norwegian MOT squad leader noted that during his tenure in 2006, he only heard the term Taliban mentioned once, which he interpreted as an indication that they were not perceived to be influential by the local people (NO03, 4 dec 2014).

However, the situation started to deteriorate, and by spring and summer 2007, it became clear to the Norwegian military that the once stable situation had changed. The author visited the PRT in early summer 2007, and attended several briefings at the PRT. During one of these, the briefer consistently referred to several groups and individuals as “the Taliban”. Although it is questionable the degree to which the mentioned groups and individuals actually were “all Taliban”, the Taliban presence could no longer be rejected. The advent of the Taliban was localised to the district of Ghormach and partly Almar and Qaysar and connected to the Pashtun settlements in these areas. By summer 2007, the PRT and RC N acknowledged

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<sup>23</sup> During the incident, six soldiers were lightly wounded.

<sup>24</sup> TIC= Troops In Contact. Usually referring to an ambush or an ISAF unit caught in a fire fight.

<sup>25</sup> My translation

that it was necessary to engage the situation through a more forward leaning posture that marked the entry into the next phase.

### **Phase 2 Escalation (2007 – 2009)**

Whereas the first phase did not see the use of offensive and by definition coercive operations, this changed markedly during the second phase. The single most important contextual factor that caused the change was the perception that the Taliban had re-established itself in the province (Berntsen, 25 April 2014). By spring and summer 2007 it was clear to the PRT that the Taliban had reorganised and increasingly challenged the established regime and ISAF in parts of Faryab. As a consequence of the deteriorating security situation the PRT assessed that it would need to deal with the situation far more offensively than had been the case in the first phase (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Godal, 2016, p. 53). The second phase thus saw the introduction of large scale and offensive operations that included the use of force intended to prevent the Taliban advance. It was also the phase in which the Task Unit was deployed to the PRT, the Norwegian rejection of the COIN-strategy and the Comprehensive Approach became apparent and Norway introduced the so-called Faryab strategy (Utenriksdepartementet et al., 2009).

The PRT was substantially strengthened in phase two. In 2007, it was allocated a more robust medical unit and more resources to force protection as well as a slightly more robust civilian contribution (Ekhaugen and Oma in Chiari, 2014, pp. 222-224). The major change occurred, however, in 2008 with the introduction of the Norwegian Aeromedical Detachment (NAD) in April and a reduced company size infantry unit, the so-called Task Unit (TU) in July (Ibid p. 227).<sup>26</sup> The TU came as a result of the worsening security situation and an acknowledgment that the PRT needed a manoeuvre force with “punch”. Although the TU was small in manpower, around 60 personnel, it boasted substantial firepower and tactical mobility, including four CV-90 Infantry Fighting Vehicles with their 30 mm gun. The introduction of the TU enabled the PRT to conduct operations on a different level than had been the case with the MOTs. Whereas the first phase did not see PRT-led offensive operations, this changed with the introduction of the TU. Where the MOTs had been the “eyes and ears” of the PRT, the TU became the “sledge” (Bruøygard, 24 April 2014). Although the

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<sup>26</sup> The NAD consisted of four Bell 412 helicopters equipped for medical evacuation, but with a substantial self-defence capability through their introduction of “door-guns”.

MOTs firepower had increased substantially with the introduction of new equipment, most notably the armoured Fiat-Iveco vehicles late in the phase, they did not have the capacity, nor was it their task to conduct offensive operations. The TU enabled the PRT to conduct operations with an explicit intention to contain, disrupt and neutralise the rising insurgency through military means.

In May 2007, the PRT experienced an IED attack near the camp that was ascribed to the Taliban, and the PRT reported an increasing number of violent incidents.<sup>27</sup> According to the CIDNE database, the number of incidents connected to enemy action, counter-insurgency and explosive hazards rose from 89 in 2007 to 168 in 2008 and 235 in 2009 ("ISAF CIDNE database," 2014). Observer reports add to the perception of deteriorating security. As one MOT commander noted: "In 2008, it started to get rough" (NO03, 4 dec 2014). The "roughness" was reflected by the actual increase in incidents, but also the impression that the ISAF presence was less popular than in the early days and patrols experienced indifference or even aggression.<sup>28</sup>

The Taliban stronghold was perceived to be the district of Ghormach, then being a part of Badghis province, but included also parts of the districts of Almar and Qaysar with connections further north through the so-called Pashtun belt all the way to Dowlatabad (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). Since Ghormach was not a part of the RC N AOR until January 2009, operations in the district were restricted because the German led RC N could not support ordinary operations there.<sup>29</sup> However, operation Harekate Yolo II in autumn 2007 and Karez in spring 2008 were conducted in Ghormach (Godal, 2016). After Ghormach was opened for a more routinely ISAF presence in 2009, attacks on ISAF units became frequent. South of the Bazar, the PRT had, unofficially, identified a so-called TIC line; meaning that south of this line one would expect to be attacked (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO04, 21 Febr 2015).<sup>30</sup> The ISAF patrols in Ghormach experienced TICs frequently, as noted by one MOT Squad leader serving from November 9 to May 10 (NO04, 21 Febr 2015): "If we were static for more than an hour, we would be attacked". Units operating in Ghormach

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<sup>27</sup> Violent incidents included fire-fights, ambushes and various types of IEDs.

<sup>29</sup> Ghormach was off-limits for German forces because Germany had defined the districts in which their forces could operate could include only those districts that were originally part of the Northern Region. Ghormach, originally being part of Badghis province, belonged to the RC W AOR (Godal, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> TIC= Troops in Contact, usually referring to an ambush or ISAF units being fired at.

soon got used to incoming fire and were involved in fire fights on a number of occasions. Even in the Bazar, an area assumed to be under governmental control, the situation was fragile, and incoming fire occurred from time to time.

From 2007 onwards, RC N and the PRT thus assessed that it was necessary to engage the Taliban strongholds in order to prevent their advance, and not least signal to the wider Afghan audience that GIRoA and ISAF was the winning side. Through delivering a decisive stroke against the Taliban in areas where they were advancing, ISAF (in cooperation with the ANSF) would reduce their military capacity, support the introduction of good governance and, not least, create the conditions for reconstruction and development efforts.

### **Phase 3, the Surge (2010-2011)**

“The Surge” is here defined as the period in which the Northern Region was reinforced with a substantial contribution of US forces, a brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade. The US forces were unevenly distributed through the Northern Region, but their main combat power was focused on Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz and Faryab. In Faryab, the 10<sup>th</sup> MTN established a battalion size unit outside Meymaneh in Camp Griffin, and deployed helicopters for medical evacuation to the PRT. In total, the US contribution to Faryab was around 1,000 personnel (Godal, 2016). The US forces were first and foremost tasked to do mentoring of their Afghan counterparts, in particular the ANP, but the US forces also assumed the main responsibility of Ghormach and conducted a range of offensive operations in the district (Ibid p. 128). In addition, the Afghan 209<sup>th</sup> Corps established a brigade in Faryab with its headquarters in Maymaneh. The strengthening of the ANSF substantially increased their ability to stay in areas not previously accessible on a permanent basis. Finally, the PRT changed its focus from offensive operations to mentoring and supporting the ANSF (Godal, 2016). The TU was eventually reorganised to become a dedicated mentoring unit, but retained parts of its fighting capacity, and supported the operations in the Orthepa valley.

Although the PRT continued to participate in a range of activities and operations, the operations in the Orthepa valley north of Meymaneh are assessed as the most significant for this phase. They came about as a result of the Taliban advance in the area, and resulted in a joint operation between Afghan and PRT units that was sustained for a prolonged period. It became an example of an operation that was qualitatively different from most of the operations of the second phase, rid the area of the Taliban while it lasted, and evidence

suggests that it had a long-term impact. It may, therefore, serve as an illustration of an operation which combined the use of force with other effectors that in total resulted in at least a temporary operational success.



### **4.3. The case of Germany in Kunduz**

“If you want to die, go to Kunduz”, Afghan proverb (Wörmer, 2012).

Germany's historical experiences from the two World Wars have led to a public and political sentiment that has been deeply sceptical to the use of military force outside the paradigm of national self-defence. Although Germany has traditionally been a firm supporter of NATO and participated in various missions in the Balkans in the 90's and 2000's, the Afghan mission represented something qualitatively new that was to become a paradigmatic shift in the way Germany viewed the utility of force. Unlike most other NATO member nations, the German Parliament, the Bundestag, upheld very tight routines of receiving information and keeping control of the German contribution. Although it soon became clear to the German military, the Bundeswehr, that the situation in Kunduz was far more volatile and warlike than originally anticipated, it took a long time before the reality on the ground was reflected in the political discourse.

Germany, like Norway, had to digest the impact of the terminology that came about with the ISAF engagement, like Counter Insurgency warfare and the Comprehensive approach. By the time of the German assumption of leadership of the PRT in Kunduz, Germany had no COIN doctrine, and the arrangement of its military was tuned against symmetrical operations conceptually based on manoeuvre theory. However, through the cause of the German mission in Kunduz, Germany, like Norway, became involved in intense and violent military operations on a scale not seen by the German army since WW2.

#### 4.3.1. Context, the Province of Kunduz

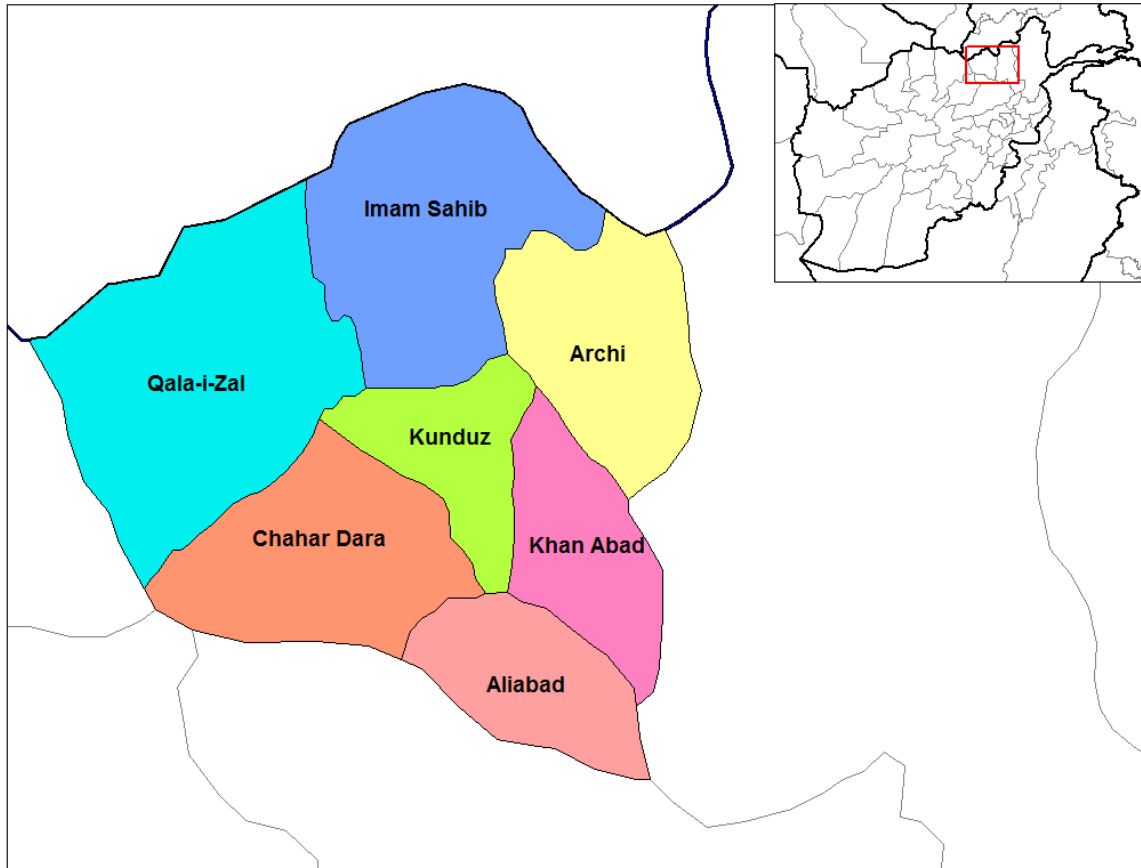


Figure 4.3, Kunduz province

The purpose of this section is to illuminate the distinct characteristics of Kunduz with respect to its geography, climate and demography to the extent this is relevant to the utility of coercion theory.

The province of Kunduz is situated in the North-Eastern part of Afghanistan bordering the provinces of Balkh in the West, Baghlan in the South and Taloqan in the East. It is, like Faryab, a border province, bordering Tadjikistan in the North. Whereas Faryab has been a remote province that historically has managed with limited influence from the central authorities, this has not been the case with Kunduz. Since the formation of modern Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Durrani in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Kunduz has been assessed as strategically important and always had the attention of the ruling elites in Kabul. The main reasons for Kunduz's strategic importance was and is its position on the central trading and smuggling routes between North and South (Barfield, 2010; Devlin, Rinck, Denny, &

Zaman, 2009; Wörmer, 2012). Whoever controlled Kunduz province, and in particular Kunduz city, also controlled the trade.

Kunduz province consists of 7 districts of which the district of Kunduz also contains the major city of Kunduz. In the North, the province consists of dry steppe land with the city of Shir Khan Bandar as the area's most valuable asset. Shir Khan Bandar is situated on the bank of the Amu Daria River and is one of Afghanistan's major border crossing points. Further south, the soil gets increasingly fertile and Kunduz has sometimes been referred to as the bread basket of Afghanistan. Parts of the province are difficult to access due to bad road conditions and hilly terrain, but it is generally more accessible than Faryab. The poorly developed infrastructure has a particular impact on travel during the winter and wet season.

The province covers approximately 8,080.9 km<sup>2</sup>, and has a population of around 1 million of which the city of Kunduz is home to around 250,000 ("Central Statistics Organisation," 2016; Wörmer, 2012). Since there are no other major cities in the province, around 75% live in rural areas, and in smaller or medium-sized villages, making Kunduz slightly more urbanised than Faryab.

Because of its fertile land and strategic importance, Kunduz developed a more advanced economy than Faryab. From the mid-1930's the swamps of the Kunduz river were drained and a large industrial complex was founded and run by the privately owned Spitzar company (Wörmer, 2012, p. 8). Prior to the Soviet invasion in 1979, Kunduz was said to be one of the most economically developed provinces in Afghanistan (Ibid, p. 8). The UNODC has declared Kunduz poppy free, but assesses that around 90 metric tons of heroin is smuggled out of Afghanistan annually through the northern route that includes the border crossing at Shir Kahn Bandar ("The Global Afghan Opium Trade, A Threat Assessment," 2011). The UNDOC does not provide numbers for the amount of drugs that passes through Shir Kahn Bandar, but since few good alternatives exist, the amount is most likely substantial.<sup>31</sup> The efforts of the Ibrahimi clan to control the border crossing and their likely involvement in the trade of illicit goods suggest that smuggling is a substantial source of income (Münch, 2013; Wörmer, 2012).

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<sup>31</sup> In the author's recollection from the counter narcotics assessment of ISAF, ISAF generally assessed that the official border crossing points were substantial elements in the narcotics trade on the northern route. Even though large parts of the borders are extremely porous, the inaccessibility of northern Badakhshan, the poor infrastructure and the corrupt practices of the ABP suggest that the built-up border crossing points are used.

### **The population and ethnic distribution**

With respect to the actors and issues of Kunduz, Wörmer argues that there is a shortage of sources (Wörmer, 2012, p. 6). Wörmer points on the works produced by Schetter, Glassner, Mielke, Giustozzy, Köhler and Reuter as the most authoritative. It is generally challenging to find good sources on specific provinces in Afghanistan, and in particular the Afghan north is understudied compared to e.g. Helmand and Kandahar. The descriptions of the actors and issues of Kunduz for the purpose of this thesis are therefore mainly based on the research of Wörmer, Münch and Giustozzy as these are undoubtedly the most authoritative on the matter (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010; Münch, 2013; Wörmer, 2012). In addition, articles produced by the Afghan Analyst Network and research institutions like AREU provide valuable information.

The ethnic composition of Kunduz is 34% Pashtun, 27% Uzbek, 27% Tadjik, 9,4% Turkmen, 4,6% Arab, 3,5% Hazara and small groups of Baluch, Pashai and Nuristani (Wörmer, 2012, p. 8). These figures must be assessed as rough estimates as no population census has been held since the early 70's, and Afghanistan provides no systematic mapping of child births and ethnic distribution. The Pashtu population originates mainly from several waves of immigration from the South, in particular due to the dispositions of the Emir Abdur Rachman between 1880 to 1900. As Kunduz, prior to the immigration of Pashtu settlers, was sparsely inhabited by farmers of local ethnicities, and the Pashtuns were given land and water rights by the central government as part of their pasthtunisation strategy, this has since been a source for conflict and ethnic tensions.

However, as Kunduz contains a far larger proportion of Pashtuns than Faryab, they have had a much stronger position than the Pashtuns of Faryab. Whereas Faryab had an overwhelming Uzbek majority, the consequence of which was visible in the distribution of resources and the formal positions of power, the ethnic distribution of Kunduz was less biased. Unlike Faryab, and in spite of ethnically based fault lines, the Pashtuns of Kunduz regularly occupied positions of importance in the formal system of governance and the ethnicity of powerbrokers reflected the ethnic composition of the province (Wörmer, 2012). But, even though the ethnic distribution was less biased, conflict that followed ethnic fault

lines was still commonplace in 2001/2. According to Giustozzy, a 2002 Human Rights Watch report stated that: “widespread abuses including killings, sexual violence, beatings, extortion and lootings’ of Pashtuns at the hand of ‘three main ethnically-based parties and their militias’, all non-Pashtun, ‘who are taking advantage of the vulnerability of unprotected. . . Pashtun communities” (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010, p. 34).

The Pashtuns of Kunduz are distributed throughout the province, but ethnically mixed villages are rare. The largest percentage of Pashtuns are in the districts of Chahar Darrah and Archi where they represent the dominant ethnicity (Wörmer, 2012). In particular the district of Chahar Darah contains Pashtu settlements in which the Taliban could find substantial support and shelter and in time became a constant source of conflict.

#### **4.3.2. The German military in Kunduz, a short narrative**

The German Parliament, the Bundestag, voted in favour of the UNSCR 1510 15<sup>th</sup> October 2003 that laid the foundations for the ISAF expansion (Chiari, 2014, p. 137). 24<sup>th</sup> October, the Bundestag approved the decision of the German Government to participate in the ISAF mission after a controversial debate (Ibid, p. 138). Germany had not contributed to the US invasion of Iraq, and was in dire need of improving its relationship with Washington. However, it also questioned the PRT concept; the concept was new to the German politicians and the military and serious doubts were expressed with respect to its utility (Ibid, p. 138). In addition, sending the German military to the Afghan countryside did not resonate well in those parts of the German polity who from the outset were deeply sceptical of the expeditionary use of the military in an interventionist capacity. The German mission was therefore, from the outset, intended to be a stabilising and reconstruction mission in which the role of the military was to support and assist the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It was not perceived as, or intended to be, a war-like operation. In the early phase of the mission, the German soldiers stationed at Kunduz “in their self-perception.....understood themselves as military reconstruction personnel and thus far away from the conflicts in other parts of Afghanistan” (Chiari, 2014, p. 144). The main tasks of the early contingents were to establish the camp, map the province and liaise with the local authorities and representatives of the international community in Kunduz (Ibid, p. 143).

However, the deceptive calm of the early days soon started to change, and by 2006/7 it was clear to the German army that the Taliban had re-entered the stage and that they faced an organised insurgency in parts of the province. The developments in Kunduz eventually

resulted in the German army being engaged in its most intense combat operations since WWII and 53 of its soldiers were killed (Wikipedia, 2017a). In particular, the so-called Kunduz bombing in 2009 changed the prevailing perception in Germany that the Afghan mission was one of peace support and reconstruction efforts, leading the German Government and the Bundestag to eventually accept that Germany was engaged in an armed conflict.

This section will consequently present a short narrative of the German operations and activities in Kunduz through a description of the German presence and model and the phases of the operation.

### **The German military presence and model**

In the sections above a detailed description is presented of the Norwegian PRT model and the phases of the operations in Faryab. In some aspects, the German model did not deviate too much from the Norwegian. The tenure of its servicemen was shorter, but still comparable, usually 4 or 6 months depending on the function they manned. The PRT commander and key elements of the staff usually served for 6 months, whereas personnel detached to the units that faced the Afghan field most frequently, e.g. the MOLTs and the Force Protection units, usually had tenures of 4 months (Münch, 2013). The PRT staff was organised according to the standard NATO arrangements of a brigade or battalion staff. The PRT emphasised intelligence gathering in order to increase the situational awareness of ISAF and the PRT staff engaged in numerous meetings with the Afghan structures of power through the so-called key leader engagements. However, although obvious similarities existed, the German presence and model differed from the Norwegian in important aspects.<sup>32 33</sup>

First, the German PRT was far bigger than the Norwegian; it contained at most 8-900 personnel which included a force protection company and two infantry companies and was far better resourced than the Norwegian led PRT (Chiari, 2014, pp. 148-152). In consequence, therefore, the PRT in Kunduz was from the outset better equipped to engage the local communities and to influence the relevant actors.

Second, Germany had chosen a dual leadership model in which the military and civilian commander theoretically were on the same level of command (Chiari, 2014; Eronen, 2008a; GE12, 18 April 2016). The dual leadership was based on the notion that there was a

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<sup>32</sup> See Eronen for a comprehensive discussion of the different PRT models (Eronen, 2008a).

<sup>33</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the evolution of the German PRT and military presence in Kunduz, see Chiari in “From Venus to Mars” (Chiari, 2014).

division of labour between the military and civilian institutions; they had in principle different tasks in a conflict area. In theory, therefore, the military commander ran the military and security-related operations, whereas the civilian commander was responsible for the humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. The governance line of operation seems to have been an issue that included both the military and the civilian side. The military commander was an integrated part of the ISAF command structure and took his instructions from the RC N commander, whereas the civilian commander reported to and took his instructions from the Federal Foreign Office (Eronen, 2008a; GE12, 18 April 2016). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present an in-depth assessment of the German command and leadership arrangement of the PRT, but in reality the dual leadership model became challenging (GE09, 14 March 2016; GE12, 18 April 2016; Werner, 2014).

The PRT was led by four German ministries, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (GE09, 14 March 2016). However, although the Ministry of Defence provided the main bulk of the resources for the PRT, it had no authority to instruct the other ministries, hence on a ministerial level the Kunduz mission was a consensus-based operation. On the local level, the PRT commander was an integrated part of the ISAF command structure and took his instructions from and reported to the RC N commander. The civilian commander was subordinated to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was not (and did not perceive himself to be) part of the ISAF command structure (GE12, 18 April 2016). But, the civilian commander had no authority to instruct or coordinate representatives from the Ministry of Development or Interior. The coordination and synchronisation of activities and operations thus rested on the efficacy and willingness of an “alliance of the willing”, and frequently boiled down to the various actors’ personalities and ability to work together (GE11, 19 April 2016; GE12, 18 April 2016; Werner, 2014).

The theoretical equality of the military and civilian commander was also challenged by the substantial resource bias. As noted by German civilian representatives in the PRT, whereas the military commander had a huge staff and a unit of several hundred personnel at his disposal, the civilian staff consisted of 3-5 (Chiari, 2014, p. 144; GE09, 14 March 2016; GE12, 18 April 2016). It was therefore extremely challenging for the civilian part of the PRT to keep up to speed with the operational tempo and the staff schedule of the military leadership.

The difference in culture and focus also became challenging. The civilian side perceived that the military had a short-term perspective on most issues that was in stark contrast to the perceptions within the Foreign Office and the aid community that sustainable development required long-term perspectives. In consequence, the differences in culture and focus made it a challenge to operationalise the Comprehensive Approach and the Hold and Build part of COIN. The civilian side frequently found that they were either unable to support operations within the timescale expected by the military commander, or found that the focus and wishes of the military were not consistent with the agenda and plans of the German aid and development community (GE09, 14 March 2016; GE12, 18 April 2016).

Finally, and unlike the Norwegian PRT, the German PRT was tightly knit to the national military line of command. The Ops Command Potsdam (Einsatzführungskommando-EiFüKo) expected reporting and feedback on a level of detail that was far greater than the Norwegian Joint Command expected of the Norwegian PRT.<sup>34</sup> The practical consequences of the German micro-management are difficult to determine, but it may have influenced the autonomy of the PRT commander, thus having been a factor that led to the passive approach that Germany was accused of practising up to June 2009.<sup>35</sup>

Third, Germany introduced the so-called Ausbildungs und Schutzbataillon (ASB), usually referred to as the Task Force Kunduz, in July 2010 as a response to the deteriorating security situation (Chiari, 2014, p. 152). However, although the Task Force resided in the PRT camp and set up its headquarters there, it was directly subordinated to the RC N commander and not a part of the PRT structure, as was the case with the Norwegian Task Unit. The ASB was also a far more potent military unit than the Norwegian TU. In addition, the German contingent eventually comprised of the OMLT to the Afghan Army 209<sup>th</sup> Corps 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade with its headquarters in Kunduz (Chiari, 2014, pp. 150-153). The ASB was a battalion size unit that boasted considerable fighting power, and the unit that, together with the task Force MeS, represented the most potent military capacity available to the RC N commander.

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<sup>34</sup> The level of detailed reporting and the hands-on approach and tendency to micro management by the German Ops Command was an issue that was frequently discussed throughout the author's missions at the RC N.

<sup>35</sup> In June 2009, as a consequence of a series of clashes and fire fights, the German army revised its Rules of Engagement allowing for less strict procedures for engaging the opponents than previously directed (GE04, 28 Oct 2015).



Fourth, Germany had, like Norway, a problematic relation to COIN, and had its own interpretation of the Comprehensive Approach. Germany had, again like Norway, not developed a national doctrine for COIN-type operations (Noetzel, 2010; Noetzel & Schreer, 2008; Schreer, 2010). The original German concept for irregular warfare, “Aufstandsbekämpfung”, did not include all aspects of COIN as it emphasised the use of force to combat the enemy and not the holistic approach advocated, for example, by US FM 3-24. COIN had also been perceived by the German military as a predominantly Anglo-Saxon concept with questionable utility (Münch, 2010; Noetzel & Schreer, 2008). The German Army issued a COIN textbook intended to “convey information, stimulate reflection on the topic and provide points for information” in June 2010, but according to German officers, the textbook was never officially published or recognised (GE08, 8 March 2016; *Preliminary Basics for the Role of Land Forces in Counterinsurgency*, 2010).

According to Noetzel and Schreer, the German appreciation of the Comprehensive Approach was more focused on “post-conflict reconstruction”, than the actual coordination and synchronisation of the ongoing civilian and military efforts that was the intention of the NATO term (Noetzel & Schreer, 2008). However, the argument can be made that it was not so much the German official appreciation of the Comprehensive Approach that was the challenge, but rather the bias in resources and culture as described above. The Comprehensive Approach required, among other things, a certain degree of equality between the actors with respect to mandate, resources and focus. The military planning process, in which operations were planned and conducted within weeks or a few months, did not resonate well with the yearlong perspectives of the civilian side, and, as noted by the Kunduz civilians, made the operationalisation of the Comprehensive Approach challenging (GE09, 14 March 2016; GE11, 19 April 2016; GE12, 18 April 2016). An additional challenge was the obvious lack of a body that had an overall coordinating authority. As the case was, the dual leadership of the PRT meant that reconstruction and development efforts rested with the civilian commander. However, he was (as mentioned) dependent on other organisations to actually conduct reconstruction and development efforts, e.g. the German governmental aid organisation BMZ, over which he had no authority (GE11, 19 April 2016; GE12, 18 April 2016; Werner, 2014).

Fifth and finally, as Germany was for a long time hugely reluctant to accept the Afghan mission as being a party to an armed conflict, Germany chose an operational approach that until summer 2009 emphasised force protection and risk avoidance rather than an active approach to deal with the rising insurgency (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010; Münch, 2013).

Germany did not perceive its military to be in a situation of armed conflict, and all cases of use of force that resulted in fatalities or injuries to Afghans were to be investigated through the German civilian justice system. In consequence, therefore, until June 2009, the German ROEs were highly restrictive, allowing the use of force in a strictly reactive function dependent on a narrow understanding of the self-defence paradigm (GE04, 28 Oct 2015).

### **The phases of the operation**

The activities and operations of the German contribution were structured chronologically in three phases, based on Koehler's four phased division of the German mission in Kunduz province (Koehler in Chiari, 2014). The phases are partly overlapping and provide an analytical framework that is useful. The first part is the establishment and orientation phase, ranging from January 2004 until 2006/7. It was the period in which no large scale operations were conducted, and the PRT focus was on intelligence gathering and capacity building. The next phase is the escalation phase, ranging from 2006/7 until 2009/10. In this period, it became clear that the Taliban was on the rise, and their influence gradually increased throughout the province. It was also during this period that major coordinated military operations, like the Moshtarak, were conducted. The third phase is the surge that starts with the introduction of a substantial US contribution in the North in winter/spring 2010; a brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and the 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade, a total of more than 5,000 soldiers, heavy equipment and more than 50 helicopters. The fourth phase is of less relevance to this thesis as it mainly pertains to the consolidation and handover phase in which the focus gradually turned to enabling Afghan security forces to independently handle security and the pull-out of ISAF. Throughout the latter part of 2010 and increasingly in 2011, ISAF focused on the transition of the security responsibility to Afghan authorities through the so-called Inteqal programme. In Kunduz, transition was completed with the German withdrawal in October 2013.

### **Phase one - establishment and orientation (2004-2006)**

The German official assumption of leadership in Kunduz was marked by a parade on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2004 (Chiari, 2014). From that date onwards, the PRT and the other units based in Kunduz evolved to become the major effort of Germany in Afghanistan, according to Chiari referred to as the "Flagship concept" (Chiari, 2014, p. 139). From the outset, the German presence in Kunduz was limited; by February 2004 the PRT consisted of around 300 soldiers, a number that was to increase considerably throughout the mission. When the

German military arrived in late 2003, they inherited an improvised US camp with few facilities, placed inside Kunduz city in a building complex that had hosted the last governor appointed by the Taliban (Münch, 2013). In 2006, the PRT moved to a plateau outside the city near the airfield. It was on the same spot that the Soviets had had a camp during the 80's, a fact that according to one German source may have encouraged local Afghans to sympathise with the insurgency and to continue the rocket firing practices of the times of the Soviet occupation (GE12, 18 April 2016).

There is a general consensus that the first phase was one of relative peace and tranquillity to the extent that the PRT earned the nickname “Spa of Kunduz” (Chiari, 2014, pp. 145-146). The PRT, unlike all other PRTs in the north, actually enjoyed a swimming pool. The early German commanders did not perceive the Taliban to be an important factor, and generally did not assess that there was an insurgency in the province. Clashes and violence certainly occurred, but as in Faryab, these were ascribed to criminality or factionalism that had little or nothing to do with the Taliban.

The German army practised a low-profile approach illustrated by a TV report dated autumn 2005 “in which soldiers on foot patrol moved through the centre of Kunduz in teams of two without helmet protection (Ibid p.146). The operations of the first phase did not differ much from those of Norway in Faryab, but the Bundeswehr apparently did not patrol the countryside as extensively as the Norwegian MOT teams. The PRT units, with some exceptions, patrolled the area close to the camp and focused on force protection (Münch, 2013). The military approach during this phase was characterised by “armed patrols, but the emphasis was on dialogue and establishing good community relations” (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, pp. 68-69). In the relatively few cases force was used, it was always consistent with the Germans’ narrow understanding of self-defence (reference Erica Gaston).

### **Phase 2, Escalation (2006-2010)**

The tranquil situation of the first phase started to change in 2006/7. German intelligence had registered Taliban agitators in the Northeast and in 2007 attacks and suicide bombings occurred, the first in May 2007 in Kunduz city (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, pp. 69-70). By 2007/8, it was evident to the German PRT that a violent insurgency had taken root in parts of the province, and that the Taliban and Taliban-affiliated groups like the IMU were on the rise (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010, p. 35). The major strongholds of the Taliban were identified as the district of Chahar Darah and some isolated pockets in other districts, in

particular the village of Gor Tepa in the Kunduz district. In time, some of the Taliban strongholds became heavily defended, with dug-in defensive positions, trenches and warning systems.

However, even though the situation had changed, the German approach did not change accordingly. Germany maintained the established perception of the Afghan conflict, at least within the German AOR, as one of peace support. Germany, therefore, maintained a low profile approach throughout 2007-8, although some major operations were executed in order to limit the Taliban progress. Giustozzy argues that the de-facto strategy of Germany was to ignore the Taliban and continue not to deal actively with the situation (Ibid p. 35). There may have been several reasons for the reluctance to accept the Afghan conflict as an armed conflict also in the North and deal more actively with the situation. Noetzel and others have argued that there is a distinct reluctance within the German political community to apply force offensively outside the scope of homeland defence, a notion that cannot be separated from Germany's particular history (Noetzel, 2010). It may also have been the case that the knowledge of the developments in Kunduz was poorly understood within the Bundestag and the political level in the Ministry of Defence (GE04, 28 Oct 2015; GE10, 16 March 2016). In any case, Germany maintained a reactive approach to operations throughout 2008/9.

In the summer of 2008, Germany took over the responsibility of providing the QRF in Masar-e-Sharif that had previously been a Norwegian contribution (Chiari, 2014). Although intended to be a RC N resource, the QRF resided in, and eventually became part of, the PRT structure. The QRF represented a substantial boost to the PRT capacity to project force, and by late 2008, the PRT became involved in major operations together with their Afghan counterparts in the ANSF.<sup>36</sup>

The major change in the German approach occurred in April 2009, when the first German soldier was killed in a regular fire fight when ambushed by Taliban groups (GE02, 27 October 2015). The incident led to the above-mentioned change in ROE's that allowed German soldiers to use force in the face of hostile intent and not only when fired upon, which had been the earlier practice. However, for the soldier on the ground the ROE change was not perceived to be substantial (GE02, 27 October 2015; GE04, 28 Oct 2015). Also the ROEs did not allow for the offensive use of force as a tool for mission accomplishment, but rather

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<sup>36</sup> Operation Moshtarak was conducted between 29 December 2008 and 7 January 2009 (Chiari, 2014, p. 149).

represented a modification of the earlier practised narrow German appreciation of the self-defence rules. In any case, the Bundeswehr became more offensive during the summer of 2009, and the German QRF attached to the PRT conducted several operations in which fighting became the norm rather than the exception (Chiari, 2014, p. 150; GE02, 27 October 2015). On 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009, when ambushed, units of the German QRF chose to counterattack, and thus departed from what had been the prevailing German practice of pressing through and leaving the battlefield. During this battle, which lasted for more than five hours, the German units claimed to have killed more than 20 Taliban operatives, and by the end of the day eventually won the battle and observed the Taliban fleeing (GE02, 27 October 2015).

The incident that more than anything contributed to changing the German perception of the Afghan conflict was the so-called Kunduz airstrike of 4<sup>th</sup> September 2009. The airstrike was ordered by the PRT commander as a response to intelligence that two fuel trucks had been captured by the insurgents and were heading for a Taliban controlled area (GE04, 28 Oct 2015; Sturcke & Batty, 2009). The airstrike resulted in more than 90 Afghan casualties, of which some most probably were civilians and not accountable to the Taliban. The airstrike, although militarily justified, caused an uproar in Germany, and was hugely criticised by President Karzai ("German state not liable to pay compensation to victims of 2009 Kunduz airstrike," 2016; Sturcke & Batty, 2009). It led to the resignation of the German Minister of Defence, Franz Joseph Jung, and importantly led to Germany's official acceptance that the Bundeswehr was involved in an armed conflict.

### **Phase 3, the Surge (2010-2011)**

As with Faryab, the province of Kunduz was affected by the US surge from spring/summer 2010. Whereas the German approach to operations had started to change in late 2008, the introduction of major US combat forces made ISAF better equipped to deal offensively with the rising insurgency. The US comprised of around 750 soldiers of the 1-10 Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain division (Chiari, 2014, p. 151). Germany also reorganised the PRT in 2010 and removed the offensive capacities from the PRT commander by establishing the ASB as a task force directly subordinated to the RC N commander. In addition, Germany also focused on the mentoring part by substantially strengthening the OMLT attached to the ANA 209<sup>th</sup> Corps 2<sup>nd</sup> BDE with its subordinated Kandaks. Finally, ISAF, and in particular the US, focused on strengthening the ALP

programme, aiming to organise the hitherto more or less autonomous militias into the programme.

The ASB enabled Germany to conduct offensive operations on a scale not seen before in Kunduz. In particular, operation Halmazag (Lightning) in which the ASB played a key role was designed to expel the Taliban from the southern parts of Chahar Darah district. With the ASB in place, the PRT changed its focus to be mainly an element that provided support to the Afghan authorities through e.g. CIMIC efforts, key Leader Engagements and the coordination of reconstruction efforts.

## **5. The Utility of Coercion Theory in the Afghan Conflict**

The starting point for this thesis is that, if coercion theory is to have utility in the Afghan conflict, three factors are necessary. Force must be used consistent with the definition of coercion, the situation on the ground must conform to the basic assumptions, propositions and articulations of theory and, finally, if force was used consistent with theory, it should result in effects and outcomes consistent with theory's notion of success. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how these factors related to the conflict in Northern Afghanistan. First, it will examine the degree to which force was used consistent with theory, second it will discuss the degree to which the situation on the ground conformed to the basic assumptions of theory, and finally, it will assess the degree to which coercive use of force resulted in the effects and outcomes consistent with the coercer's wishes.

### **5.1. The use of force and coercion theory**

Did Norway and Germany use force in Faryab and Kunduz consistent with the definition of military coercion, here defined as: "the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors"? If force was applied consistent with the definition above, it would have to have been used beyond the paradigm of self-defence, and with the explicit or implicit ambition of influencing the decision-making process and behaviour of its opponents through "threats and/or limited force".

Separating the use of force by Norway and Germany from their coalition partners is inherently difficult. The Norwegian and German units cooperated closely with their Afghan counterparts and in most cases conducted combined operations. The US surge that started in 2010 and the SOF driven kill or capture operations further complicated the issue of distinction. However, the Norwegian and German PRT's and the German Task Forces were essential elements in the planning and conduct of operations in their respective areas in their capacity as the ISAF designated "land-owner". It also seems evident that the way in which force was planned and used, even with the close cooperation of Afghan units, occurred under the guidance and leadership of the ISAF units.<sup>37</sup> Henceforth, it makes sense to use the

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<sup>37</sup> The term used in ISAF was initially "Afghan face" to indicate a level of equality between the ANSF and ISAF. Throughout the mission, and in particular when the issue of transition became evident, "Afghan first" became the term to indicate that ISAF had a mere supporting function. However, as noted by a Norwegian officer with respect to the Orthopa Valley

predominantly Norwegian and German cases to illustrate the degree to which coercion theory may prove useful in the Afghan theatre.

What would indicate that force was used consistent with theory? Byman and Waxman argues that a coercive strategy is the deliberate and intentional use of coercive instruments that works through certain mechanisms in order to achieve political goals (Byman & Waxman, 2002). According to Robert Pape, coercive mechanisms can be divided into four types: denial, punishment, risk and decapitation (Pape, 1996). Byman and Waxman use a similar division of coercive mechanisms, dividing them into power base erosion, unrest, decapitation, weakening and denial (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 50). Coercion theory generally applies a “comply or else” approach to coercion in which the coercer explicitly or implicitly makes clear to the opponent what is expected of them (demands) and the potential consequences of not complying (cost) (Pape, 1996; Schelling, 1966). From the outset therefore, using force consistent with theory would imply the presence of a deliberate coercive strategy in which instruments were carefully and consciously selected and used in order to work through certain mechanisms, for example decapitation or denial, to influence the opponent to comply to the coercers wishes.

Arguably, and although ISAF conducted a kill or capture campaign intended to decapitate the local Taliban leadership, ISAF did not consciously articulate a coercive strategy. Initially, it is clear that the word “coercion” did not figure anywhere in the operational plans of ISAF, and the theoretical notion of coercion was not discussed as part of the planning process. The author did three missions at the RC N in which two were in the position of chief of the plans and policy branch (CJ 5). Using force consistent with coercion theory was a topic that was never discussed or addressed (Skaar, 2010). The respondents for this thesis did not generally reveal any developed understanding or knowledge of coercion theory, and ISAF certainly never articulated an explicit coercive strategy.

I have found no evidence indicating that the Norwegian or German political authorities addressed or even discussed the use of force as a vehicle to influence behaviour consistent with coercion theory. The Norwegian decision making process was mainly concerned with logistical and security issues and did not address the way in which force was to be applied

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Operation, he perceived the PRT units to be in the driver’s seat during the course of the operation (NO05, 21 January 2015).



outside issues of legality and legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> For a long time Germany perceived the mission in Kunduz to be a peace support operation, and the mere notion that it should use force actively or offensively in order to influence insurgent behaviour was fundamentally absent from the German political discourse (Noetzel, 2010; Noetzel & Schreer, 2008).

If ISAF had not articulated a coercive strategy, could it still be the case that force was used consistent with theory? If this was the case, ISAF must have used force consistent with the definition of military coercion as articulated above; in order to “stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors”. If this was the case, coercive use of force would have had materialised on the tactical level, through the conduct of tactical operations. If ISAF planned for and used the military units in order to influence their opponents through the coercive mechanisms articulated by Pape or Byman and Waxman, it would still be military coercion, albeit without a consciously articulated strategy. This thesis, consequently, argues that if force was used consistent with coercion theory, it would materialise through the articulations of the plans and orders that directed the military operations and/or the military activities and operations that came about as a consequence of these plans and orders.

In order to explore the degree to which Norway and Germany used force coercively, this section will explore: 1) the ISAF plans and how these were perceived and interpreted by Norway and Germany, 2) how Norway and Germany approached Afghan society, acknowledging that its mere presence could represent an implied threat and 3) four major operations that included the offensive use of force.

#### **5.1.1. The Campaign plans**

The conduct of operations within the entire ISAF AOR was directed through the hierarchy of campaign plans. The NATO command responsible for the conduct of the ISAF operation was the Joint Force Command in Brunssum (JFCB). The JFCB developed the overarching plan that had its basis in the politically and strategically defined objectives for the operation. However, the JFCB developed plans were broad and not specific, hence it was necessary to break them down into manageable documents that more clearly provided objectives and directed operations. This was done at the HQ ISAF, the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) and eventually at the regional commands. Throughout the mission, the campaign plans

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<sup>38</sup> In an interview with former Minister of Defence, Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, she argued that application of force in an offensive capacity was addressed by the Norwegian Government, but mainly with respect to issues of self-defence, legality and legitimacy (Strøm-Erichsen, 17 June 2014).

evolved into huge documents that included annexes covering most aspects of the ISAF campaign.<sup>39</sup> They usually had a one to two year outlook and were revised annually.

The plans that directly affected the PRT and Task Force operations in the North were the plans developed at the ISAF Regional Command North (RC N). The RC N plans combined the overarching aims and objectives of HQ ISAF and the IJC with regional and local requirements in order to direct the subordinate units. They are thus relevant to the assessment of whether ISAF in the North directed operations that included the coercive use of force. The plans and orders of ISAF are still subject to classification, and some of them have not been made available to the author. The following discussion is consequently based on those orders that have been made available, that are assumed relevant and where the data is used on an aggregate level in order to avoid classification issues.<sup>40</sup> The author participated in developing the Naiad Tolo in 2008/9 and the Omid in 2010/11, hence parts of the information here presented is based on the author's recollections.

The RC N developed campaign plans and orders available to the author were the following:

<b>Time of issue</b>	<b>Plan/Order</b>	<b>Remark</b>
March 2007	Operation Now Ruz:	
November 2007	Operation Pamir	
March 2008	Operation Shamshir	
November 2008	Operation Naiad Tolo	Introduced the COIN principles
February 2011	Operation Omid 1390	

Table 5.1, the campaign plans

Generally, all plans articulated a set of intentions, aims, objectives and end states, the accumulation of which represented the final objectives to be reached. In the plans available to the author, such articulations were operationally defined, meaning that the overarching campaign objectives were broken down into manageable elements that could be

<sup>39</sup> The campaign plan Omid, which the author participated in writing, consisted of more than 1,000 pages including all annexes and appendices.

<sup>40</sup> The plans and orders were made available to the author through the Norwegian Joint Headquarters and the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment that had collected the data prior to the Norwegian withdrawal from Faryab. The collection of plans and orders was not exhaustive, but the lacunas are not assessed as vital in order to assess the coercive use of force.

operationalised through the military organisation. If RC N directed operations that included the coercive use of force, arguably it would have been through such articulations.

The “Now Ruz” articulated as its three first key objectives to 1) neutralise insurgent leadership and C2 capacity, 2) disrupt insurgent internal Freedom of Movement and Lines of Communication and 3) contain and disrupt selected insurgent sanctuary areas (*Operation Now Ruz*, 2007). One of the RC N commander’s intentions for the Pamir was to “continue to identify and disrupt INS/IAG safe havens, sanctuaries, LOCs, smuggling routes and degrade INS/IAG leadership”. In the same plan a key objective was to “degrade INS capabilities in RC N AOO”, whereas one end state was “local INS/IAG leadership and influence degraded” (ISAF, 2007). Similar articulations are found in all the plans relevant to this phase. Arguably, articulations like neutralise, disrupt and degrade are qualitatively different from articulations like support and protect. They suggest that ISAF planned to use force actively consistent with the coercive mechanism of denial; to reduce the military potential of the Taliban in order to push back the insurgency.

Of particular interest to this thesis is the RC N version of the operation Tolo campaign plan, the “Naiad Tolo” (ISAF, 2008). The “Tolo” was the first ISAF plan developed after the 2008 Bucharest Summit, and it specifically and officially introduced the COIN concepts of Shape-Clear-Hold-Build (SCHB) and the Comprehensive Approach (CA) as well as the so-called Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO) (Dyndal & Vikan, 2014; NATO, 2008). Fundamentally, the “TOLO” built on the principles advocated by the US Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 (Army, 2006). The FM 3-24 was also frequently referred to in the planning process while developing the Tolo, the implication of which was an increasing consciousness within ISAF that it was conducting a COIN campaign (Skaar, 2010).<sup>41</sup> The TOLO and its introduction of the COIN concepts invariably meant that ISAF was to approach the insurgency actively also through military means.

The Comprehensive Approach prescribed that the military effort should be coordinated and synchronised with non-military efforts in order to improve infrastructure, engage in education and healthcare and provide humanitarian assistance (Dyndal & Vikan, 2014; NATO, 2008; Petersen & Binnendijk, 2008). The Comprehensive Approach rested fundamentally on two factors: 1) the Afghan conflict could not be won by military means

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<sup>41</sup> Operation Tolo was the ISAF/ANSF name of the campaign plan to cover the long-term operations of ISAF and the ANSF from November 2008.

alone. It was necessary to deliver positive incentives as well, and these incentives should be coordinated and synchronised with the military effort.<sup>42</sup> 2) The people's "hearts and minds" could be won by doing "good things": delivering humanitarian aid, reconstruction efforts and the support of good governance.

The SCHB was a logical consequence of the COIN concept and Comprehensive Approach. It prescribed a sequenced approach to operations in which the opposing forces should be engaged actively and offensively through shaping and clearing operations (Cordesman, 2009). Shaping and clearing would logically include the use of armed force to "disrupt, contain and neutralise" the insurgency in order to allow for the Hold and Build. Whereas COIN can be perceived as a holistic approach to dealing with an insurgency, the Shape and Clear parts were the elements that included the offensive use of force. The introduction of COIN and consequently the SCHB suggest that it was the implicit intention of ISAF to influence its opponents through military means, broadly consistent with coercion theory.

Finally, the EBAO thinking was reflected in consecutive ISAF campaign plans already from the "Now Ruz", although the way effects were articulated differed from plan to plan. Common to many articulations of effects were that they described a change in insurgent behaviour as the desirable outcome. For example the Shamshir described how effect number 1 was "Insurgents are reconciled or defeated", whereas effect number 2 was "Illegal Armed Groups are disbanded or defeated". Articulations of effects thus support the notion that the ISAF mission was also about influencing insurgent behaviour through military means.

Consequently, although a coercive strategy was not explicitly articulated, the ISAF plans and orders contain articulations, phrases and wording suggesting that it was the aim of ISAF to influence its opponents, mainly the Taliban, through the use of coercive mechanisms, most notably denial. The articulations of objectives and end-states, the effects-based approach to operations and not least the introduction of COIN concepts from 2008 called for an offensive approach in which the insurgency was to be "disrupted, contained and neutralised" to a level where it did not present a significant threat to Afghan society. Arguably, the

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<sup>42</sup> The comprehensive approach had been thematised and used in previous conflicts. For example, the US introduced the system of hamlets in Vietnam that should benefit from positive incentives in order to reject the Vietcong (Nagl, 2002). According to Nagl, the system did not work very well, and the potential of winning the population's hearts and minds through positive incentives is deeply contested (Dyndal & Vikan, 2014).

articulations of the above-mentioned plans and orders suggest that it was the intention of ISAF to “use military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors”, hence consistent with the definition of military coercion.

### **The campaign plans, coercion theory and the Norwegian and German perceptions**

How were the COIN principles and the articulations of ISAF’s developed plans and orders understood by Norway and Germany? Neither Norway nor Germany had developed national COIN doctrines, and the doctrinal basis for both nations rested fundamentally on the notion of symmetrical warfare and maneuverer theory (*Forsvarets fellesoperative doktrine, del B operasjoner*, 2000; Forsvarsstaben, 2007; Münch, 2010; Noetzel & Schreer, 2008). Norway’s senior military leadership expressed quite clearly that “Norway does not do COIN” (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014). Norway rejected, at least on the national level, the comprehensive approach, and practised a strict division between military and civilian tasks. Also, Germany was deeply sceptical of the COIN concepts which they assumed to be an Anglo-Saxon concept with limited utility (Noetzel & Schreer, 2008). Both nations emphasised that their main focus in Afghanistan was supporting the Afghan authorities through capacity building, and in particular training and mentoring the ANSF.

However, on the tactical level, the officers interviewed for the purpose of this thesis displayed a developed understanding of COIN (Bruøygard, 24 April 2014; GE01, 29 October 2015; GE08, 8 March 2016; Huse, 10 April 2014). From 2008/9 onwards, COIN principles were discussed during mission training and the principles of the FM 3-24 became common knowledge. The SCHB concept was known, and became institutionalised at the tactical level from the publication of the “TOLO”. Although the term “coercion” was never used, the idea that it was within the ISAF mandate and mission in the North to influence the insurgency through the use of military means seems to have fastened from 2008 onwards.

The articulations of the plans and orders were processed through the military organisations as is standard in NATO. In the first phase, neither Norway nor Germany possessed the resources to conduct operations with the potential to influence the opponents. The early Norwegian PRT commanders understood their task as mainly supporting the Afghan authorities in order to improve their capacity and abilities. They neither had the resources, nor the intention to “contain, disrupt and neutralise” the insurgency (Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014). But they also noted that, during this phase, there were few indications of an organised insurgency in Faryab. The situation in Kunduz was in

this phase not very different from the one in Faryab, a situation that led to the above-mentioned reference to doing service in Kunduz as “Spa Kunduz”.

However, as the situation deteriorated, there was a growing consciousness among the military commanders that firmer actions were required. As such, the large scale military operations like Harekate Yolo II and the Halmazag came about mainly as results of the assessments done at the tactical level in Faryab and Kunduz. The phrases of the operational plans and orders to “contain, disrupt and neutralise” thus from phase two coincided broadly with the PRT commanders perceptions of what was required in order to deal with the situation. Arguably, therefore, the articulations of the RC N developed plans and orders were interpreted within the local context and resulted in activities and operations that were broadly consistent with coercion theory.

### **5.1.2. The presence of ISAF and MOT operations**

Coercion theory argues that coercion includes not only the actual application of force, but also explicit or implicit threats to use it (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Jakobsen, 2011; Schelling, 1966). Threats are an indirect form of coercion insofar it demonstrates a will to apply force if required. It can consequently work though all coercive mechanisms pending what is threatened.

The question of relevance here is whether the mere presence of ISAF represented an implied threat consistent with theory. Presence can be assessed as an implied threat only insofar as it represents or communicates a capacity and willingness to apply force in those cases where conditions consistent with the coercer’s wishes are not met. It is not sufficient that the presence represented a military potential itself, it must be connected to demands or objectives that were known to the coerced to represent a coercive instrument consistent with theory. Here, I will focus on the Norwegian MOT operations because the sources available for this thesis do not allow for an in-depth discussion of the German MOLT operations. Arguably, though, the German presence in Kunduz did not deviate substantially from that of the Norwegians in Faryab. If anything, a German MOLT had, at least in the early phases of the operation, a more substantial military footprint than the Norwegian MOT. Henceforth, if the Norwegian MOTs represented an implied threat consistent with coercion theory, this would apply even more to the Germans.

The PRT units that most frequently faced Afghan society on a regular basis in Faryab were the MOT teams (Huse, 10 April 2014; NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014;

Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014). The MOT teams were the backbone of the PRT operations throughout the Norwegian mission, and although the shape and form of the MOTs changed throughout the period, they were always the vehicle that most frequently faced the Afghan population. They are consequently assessed as the units that were up front in representing ISAF in the Faryab countryside; hence, if the ISAF presence short of major operations was perceived to represent an implied threat, it would most likely be through the activities of the MOTs.

MOT operations could last from a few hours to several days (NO03, 4 dec 2014). The MOTs travelled the Afghan rural areas, visiting districts, villages and settlements in order to establish contact with the local authorities and representatives of the ANSF, identify the dominant actors and gather insights into the general situation and the issues that were of importance and concern to the local population. A distinct characteristic of MOT operations was that they had a low military footprint since a team consisted of two vehicles only; in the first phase, un-armoured Toyota Landcruisers or Mercedes Geländewagens and from 2008/9 in armoured Fiat Ivecos.

The MOTs were, first and foremost, intelligence gathering units, but they did also collect information and report on grievances and shortfalls in the local communities. There were incidents in which the MOTs had to use force as a self-defence measure, but this was always in response to situations where they were either attacked or found themselves in the midst of fire fights (Huse, 10 April 2014; Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014). However, although the MOTs had a light military footprint, they had on various occasions demonstrated that they were capable of boasting considerable firepower. In particular, after the Norwegian Army started to use the Iveco armoured cars, the MOTs' firepower and military appearance were substantially increased compared to the early days. A Norwegian officer and MOT commander noted: "I had more triggers in my team, than a company of the ANA" (NO01, 10 June 2014). It was also the case that the light military footprint may have had effects beyond its intentions, since the Norwegian soldiers were well-equipped and had a war-like appearance. As noted by a Norwegian officer, "We looked like gladiators and were dressed for war" (NO03, 4 dec 2014). Finally, the MOTs could draw upon ISAF theatre resources, in particular air power, if required. The use of airpower has had a distinct meaning in Afghan society since the Soviet occupation, and its use in TIC situations and during the major operations had made it clear to the Afghans that it was always available



to ISAF units. This thesis thus argues that the MOT operations made visual the coercive potential of ISAF, and consequently represented an implied military threat.

However, coercion theory argues that the military potential must be connected to demands or objectives that are known to the coerced to represent a coercive mechanism consistent with theory. If presence through the MOTs represented a coercive mechanism, it was because they explicitly or implicitly communicated to the target audience that not complying would release the military potential of ISAF. The interviews conducted with the Norwegian military personnel with experience of MOT operations suggest that explicit demands were not used. However, the military potential was implicitly used in the MOTs' communication with local strongmen. The way this could play out was, according to an MOT commander, that when the intentions of the coalition were discussed with a local strongman, the coalition objectives were subtly addressed. If, then, it appeared that the local strongman (for example) had insufficient control in his own area, a reply could be that ISAF or the ANSF had to allocate more resources to the area, which again meant that the local strongman would lose face (NO01, 10 June 2014). The coercive potential represented by the presence of MOT teams was, then, not in the blunt "comply or else" form or through clear cut demands, but in the subtlety of the discussions between the MOT representative and the other actors, in which the military potential of ISAF was known, but downplayed. The interviews with the Norwegian military personnel with MOT experience suggest that such communications occurred on numerous occasions. Arguably, therefore, ISAF presence through MOT operations represented a form of coercion, albeit different from the postulations of theory.

### **5.1.3. The offensive use of force**

During phase one, no large scale offensive operations were conducted within the RC N AOR. There were, until 2006/7, few indications of an organised insurgency and neither the Norwegian nor the German PRT assessed that offensive and firm action was required. The early Norwegian PRT commanders noted that they did not perceive it to be their task to conduct offensive operations, they did not have the resources to do it and they did not see the need (Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommerseth, 10 April 2014). This was a perception generally shared by the German contingents. However, as the security situation started to deteriorate in late 2006 and early 2007, the RC N assessed that firmer actions were required. The first major operation to be conducted in the RC N AOR was operation Harekate Yolo II (HKY II) in October-November 2007 in the district of Ghormach in Faryab. It became a template upon which a range of later operations was conducted (Noetzel, 2010). In this and



later operations, the PRTs and their coalition partners used force offensively in order to contain, disrupt and neutralise the insurgency. The operations were specifically designed to reduce the military and violent potential of the Taliban, thus from the outset consistent with the definition of military coercion.

This section will present four case studies of major operations: Harekate Yolo II, Vanguard Viper (VV), the Orthepe Valley operation and, finally, the Halmazaq. They are selected because they represent a range of operations that were conducted between 2007 and 2011 and included the offensive use of force. They were intended to influence insurgent decision making and behaviour. They were all tactical successes, but the degree to which they resulted in sustainable outcomes consistent with theory is questionable. Finally, it will present a brief assessment of the so called kill or capture operations, insofar they are the types of operations that most closely indicated the presence of a coercive strategy.

### **Operation Harekate Yolo II (HKY II)**

Although HKY II was conducted before Operation Tolo was issued, it entailed most of the recognised COIN principles. More important, HKY II provided a template upon which a series of later operations were conducted. HKY II was planned at RC N and in the PRT during the summer of 2007 to be conducted in the autumn. The author was at the time serving in the Operations branch (J3) of the RC N, and was involved in planning it. Through the first half of 2007, the district of Ghormach was perceived by the Norwegian PRT as a safe haven for Taliban operatives, as well as an area from which the Taliban could plan and conduct operations into the nearby districts in Faryab, most notably Almar and Qaysar (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Noetzel, 2010; Solberg, 26 March 2014). HKY II was a combined offensive operation including Afghan, Norwegian, American, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian and German troops, totalling more 2,000 soldiers, including the Norwegian Quick Reaction Force which was based in Camp Marmal outside Mazar-e-Sharif (Berntsen, 25 April 2014).<sup>43</sup> The aim of the operation was to ensure freedom of movement along the main roads, regain control over the areas under Taliban control and prevent the reestablishment of Taliban influence in the area, thus enabling reconstruction and governance efforts inside Ghormach (Noetzel, 2010, p. 493). According to a Norwegian assessment report, the aim of the operation was to “conduct

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<sup>43</sup> Norway provided a QRF to RC N from 2006 to 2007. The QRF consisted of two reduced company-sized units in which one was always on a one hour alert. The Norwegian QRF participated in a range of operations throughout 2007, and became the de facto manoeuvre element for the RC N Commander.

an offensive operation with the intention to deprive the insurgents of support, arrest, and if necessary defeat the insurgents in the area”.<sup>44</sup> Although not yet an official part of ISAF doctrine, the operation was designed after the Counter Insurgency (COIN) concept of Shape, Clear, Hold and Build in which HKY II should conduct the shape and clear part, whereas the hold and build should be conducted by the ANSF, most notably the ANP and civilian organisations (Berntsen, 25 April 2014). The most active phase of the operation was from around 2 - 6 November 2007, but preparations had been going on for weeks, including an intensive reconnaissance and information gathering phase.

The active phase included several rough fire fights with Taliban forces, but eventually the tactical objectives were reached, and the Afghan-ISAF force established control in the Taliban influenced areas.<sup>45</sup> The initial assessments were that the operation had been a tactical success, allowing both governmental and non-governmental organisations to take up their activities in the district (Noetzel, 2010).

However, even though the Taliban forces were battered tactically and suffered substantial losses, the local Taliban leadership and quite a few of its fighters managed to escape the area. After the 6<sup>th</sup> November, the Afghan and coalition forces withdrew from the area, leaving only the police and a minor army unit in Ghormach. Although the operation had been planned to enhance security on a permanent basis through a continuous ANSF presence in the disputed area, this did not happen (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Noetzel, 2010; Solberg, 26 March 2014). The non-military organisations presupposed to capitalise on the tactical gains did not, or were not able to, enter the area and conduct the hold and build part. These organisations, like the NGO Acted that had activities in Faryab, were reluctant to be associated with military operations as it would contradict their ideal of impartiality (Godal, 2016, pp. 123-124). It was also a common denominator for most humanitarian organisations that being linked to a party to a conflict would jeopardise their security and make their employees more likely targets for the opposing actors. The author experienced on a number of occasions explicit reluctance to engage in or contribute to the ISAF planning process, not only by NGOs but also UNAMA (Skaar, 2010). In effect, then, HKY II entailed only the shape and clear part of the SCHB concept (Noetzel, 2010, p. 494). As a result, the local Taliban leadership were able to regroup and re-establish themselves in the area, thus persuading and

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<sup>44</sup> Extracted from the 2.bn/QRF report after its mission in Afghanistan in 2007.

<sup>45</sup> The operation did not entail the whole of Ghormach; the Southern parts of the district remained untouched by the operation.

coercing the local tribes and villages to provide shelter and active support. Throughout 2008, the situation in Ghormach deteriorated and became even worse than before the operation.

### **Operation Vanguard Viper**

Operation Vanguard Viper was conducted in May 2009 in Ghormach south of the Bazar (NO01, 10 June 2014; Stensønes, 2012, pp. 230-251).<sup>46</sup> The aim of the operation was to influence the insurgents in the areas of Tez-Nava and Jar-i-Sia by cutting off the communication lines between their core areas and the Ring Road (NO01, 10 June 2014, p. 238; Stensønes, 2012). There had been quite a lot of fighting in these areas before and it was assumed necessary to contain insurgent activity in order to continue the construction of the Ring Road.<sup>47</sup> The PRT contributed to the operation with the TU, MOT teams, intelligence and logistical support. The ANSF participated with a company-sized unit from the ANA and a police platoon of around 15 personnel. The operation included intelligence gathering, so-called Key Leader Engagements and offensive operations by infantry and airpower.

From the TU's perspective, the operation was a success. The shaping and clearing was mainly conducted by the TU and its Afghan counterparts. As the operation unfolded, it increasingly took on the character of a battle between the Taliban and ISAF/ANSF units. According to the TU commander, Jan Helge Dale, one wanted to "make clear to ANA and the local population that we are the strongest, that we are winning, and that in this area, we can do as we like" (Stensønes, 2012, p. 239). According to Dale, the concept of operations prescribed an advance into the insurgent dominated areas in order to provoke them into battle and, when they attacked us, we would counterattack. If ISAF and the ANSF were successful, they would have conveyed the message to the local communities that the Taliban did not have freedom of operations and freedom of movement in this area. Through a series of clashes and heavy fighting, the insurgents were slowly pushed back. The insurgents displayed good tactical skills and were decent marksmen, and it was only due to luck and coincidences that injuries were avoided on the ISAF side. The insurgents, though, took substantial casualties both to

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<sup>46</sup> The operation is described in detail by the TU Commander Jan Helge Dale in Malin Stensøne's book "På Våre vegne" (On Our Behalf)

<sup>47</sup> The finalisation of the Ring Road through Ghormach remained an issue of concern and was still unresolved when the current author visited Faryab in September 2011. Consecutive RC N campaign plans emphasised the finalisation of the road, but to my knowledge the road is still not completed in these areas.

ISAF airpower and the ground units. Finally, they pulled out or melted into the population and, after several days of hard fighting, the battle was over.

In the aftermath of the operation, the ANA were independently conducting operations all the way to Bala Morghab, an indication that they had greater self-confidence than before the operation. One Taliban commander in Jar-i-Sia did later call the PRT and wanted to cooperate, an event that the PRT interpreted as an indication of success (Stensønes, 2012, p. 250).

The TU was not the only PRT entity that participated in the operation - MOTs also participated. Whereas the TU represented the sledge and was trained and equipped to engage in battle, the MOTs were supposed to do intelligence gathering, key leader engagements and relation building. One MOT was tasked to go to the village of Ashamak, which was situated between the villages of Tez Nava and Jar-i-Sia (NO01, 10 June 2014). Whereas the latter villages were known to host Taliban operatives, there was no-one or nothing of interest in Ashamak. The MOT commander was rather surprised that he was not tasked to engage the other villages, but understood that this was probably connected to the Norwegian Joint Headquarters' reluctance to engage in what they perceived as higher risk areas. The MOT commander recounts:

“The local boss in Tez Nava was the father of the district governor, and the district governor's brother was one of the Taliban commanders. While the operation was unfolding, I could have used this to play the parties against each other. I would have needed tactical support to engage Tez Nava, but if the local chieftain had agreed to receive me he would have had to guarantee my security as custom demanded. But, we ended up in Ashamak, where there was nothing to do, so we just drove around talking to people. Nothing we did mattered in the long run” (NO01, 10 June 2014).

Whereas the TU perceived the operation to be a success, this MOT commander assessed it differently. The TU obviously performed well tactically and won the battle; at least, the insurgents stopped fighting. However, in the view of the MOT commander, he was not able or allowed to engage those individuals who, to his mind, could have led to a lasting change. From his perspective, success was measured in terms of the establishment of sustainable and positive relations more than in tactical successes on the battlefield.

In the aftermath of Vanguard Viper, the ANSF established a stronger presence in the central parts of Ghormach, but the areas south of the Bazar remained a concern (NO01, 10 June 2014). During the operations, the Taliban had either fled or melted into the population in the face of a well-equipped and trained enemy. When the major forces withdrew, the Taliban returned requesting shelter and local support. For local Afghans not to comply to such requests could result in repercussions from the Taliban, and if the local balance of power tilted in favour of the Taliban, they would usually get the support they needed (AF03, 4 March 2015). The ANSF was able to control, at least partly, the central areas and the Ring Road, but the remote areas in the South remained out of GIRoA and ISAF control.

### **The Orthepe valley operation**

Through 2010 and continuing into 2011, the PRT experienced an increasing threat from the north in the Orthepe valley. The valley runs North-West from Meymaneh city through the districts of northern Pashtun Koht and Shirin Taqab until it merges with a parallel valley in an area called Russian Hill. In 2010, The Taliban had expanded its activities in the valley and got shelter and support from elements of the Pashtun communities. The Taliban advanced southwards from the northern parts of the valley, and eventually came within a few kilometres range from the PRT, from which they could launch missile attacks into the PRT camp. The PRT thus assessed that the situation in the valley represented a direct threat to the PRT and the general security in the immediate vicinity of Meymaneh and found it necessary to engage the situation (Huse, 10 April 2014; NO05, 21 January 2015). The result was the Orthepe valley operation, which differed substantially in important aspects from the HKY II, Karez and Vanguard Viper. The description of the Orthepe valley operation is based on an in-depth interview with the Norwegian MOT commander who was the PRT responsible for running the operation (NO05, 21 January 2015).<sup>48</sup> As such, it represents the views of this officer and its content is not confirmed by other sources.

The valley contained settlements of different ethnicities, but as a general rule the Pashtun settlements were located in the north of the valley around the area called Russian Hill, whereas Arab and Uzbek settlements were located further south, with the Uzbek settlements closest to the city of Meymaneh (NO05, 21 January 2015). The local Pashtuns

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<sup>48</sup> The MOT commander in question served in three consecutive PRTs and conducted the Orthepe valley operation almost autonomously with little guidance from the PRT. The operation was, of course, supported and resourced by the PRT leadership, but it seems that the PRT acknowledged that the successful conduct of the operation required hands-on management on a low tactical level.

basically controlled their own area, but had started to put pressure on the Arab communities south of them in order to increase their income through taxation, extortion and access to resources.

Those that exerted the influence were referred to as the Taliban, but most likely their affiliation to the central Taliban structures was weak. The PRT assessed them to be criminals, but by labelling themselves as Taliban, they were acknowledged under the Taliban umbrella and got support and, more importantly, legitimacy through their organisational affiliation. It was difficult, the Norwegian officer asserted, to observe any clear ties to the central Taliban leadership. The Taliban of the Orthepe valley was thus assumed to represent a loose framework of criminals that capitalised on its Taliban affiliation. This probably separated the Taliban in the Orthepe valley from the Taliban in Ghormach, where the organisation seemed to have matured and was better intertwined with the central leadership and the local communities.

As a consequence of the predatory behaviour of the local Pashtuns, the Arab communities organised their own Taliban groups, assuming that the Taliban would not attack the Taliban, thus making the Arab communities less receptive to attacks and violence from Pashtun groups. The increase in Taliban-affiliated groups caused the insurgency to move southwards through the valley until it eventually also included Uzbek settlements, bringing the insurgency a few kilometres north of the PRT camp, sufficiently close that it allowed for direct missile attacks on the PRT.

The PRT assessed that it was vital that the advancing insurgency was pushed back, and that governance and stability were restored in the valley. The operation commenced in June-July 2011. The Norwegian officer conducting the operation described it as a classical COIN operation that entailed all of the SCHB elements. It was, however, not “an operation” like HKY II and Vanguard Viper, which made decisive pushes into enemy territory to gain decisive effects. Rather, the operation lasted for a sustained period of more than a year, in which the main aim was to take back the areas controlled by the insurgents and ensure that they remained under GIRoA control. As such, the operations included a continued presence of PRT units on a hitherto unprecedented scale and the intimate involvement of ANSF forces, local militias and the civilian leadership and population.

The operation commenced with the PRT engaging a local village a few kilometres north of Meymaneh, initially through intelligence gathering operations, and later through the

construction of a fortified checkpoint (CP) in close cooperation with the local police. The village was controlled by a local strongman with predatory tendencies who affiliated himself with the Taliban. Through the presence of PRT units that, in close cooperation with the local police, started patrolling, the local strongman soon found that he could not compete with the strength and firepower of the PRT units and the local police, so he left the area. The PRT then actively supported and mentored the local authorities, engaged in the establishment of militias and supported local governance. Eventually, the local system of security and governance was sufficiently strong to allow for the PRT units to move to the next village. Through this method of gradually expanding its presence, in which the PRT units were the up-front units, the PRT and the Afghans ensured that a sufficiently strong system of security and governance was established before they moved further north. The PRT units were frequently subject to attacks, and used force substantially on several occasions.

A vital factor for success was that, even though the PRT represented the stronger and more agile part, the PRT emphasised Afghan ownership of operations, infrastructure projects and institution building (NO05, 21 January 2015). Eventually, the villages of the Uzbek and Arab areas were reclaimed and the ANSF and the local authorities regained control of the area.

Although Norway practised a strict separation between military and civilian efforts, the PRT was able to use resources for infrastructure improvements and minor projects throughout the operation. If the PRT could not find the money itself, the USAID had a representative in the PRT camp that willingly supported the ISAF/PRT operations (Huse, 10 April 2014). The PRT was thus able to contribute to the local communities with small projects, like road building.

Contrary to the major operations like HKY II, Karez and Vanguard Viper, the Orthepa valley operation seemed to have had more lasting effects. At the time of the interview with the Norwegian officer responsible for the operation, he claimed that the arrangement facilitated by the PRT was still in place, two years after Norway had left Faryab. Although this is unconfirmed information, it suggests that the gradual approach represented by the Orthepa Valley operation had more lasting effects than the previously mentioned large scale operations, which were limited in time and space.



## **Operation Halmazag**

During the spring and summer of 2010, the security situation in Kunduz province had deteriorated. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April, three German paratroopers were killed in a fire fight near the village of Isa Khel and, during the summer, the PRT experienced an increasing number of rocket and IED attacks (Blumröder, 2011). It was increasingly clear that an organised insurgency had taken root in parts of the province, and the situation required a proactive involvement from ISAF and the ANSF. The German intelligence and its Afghan counterparts had identified the district of Chahar Darah and in particular the villages of Isa Khel and Quatlum to be the centre of insurgent activities. Both villages were inhabited by Pashtuns and largely controlled by the Taliban (GE01, 29 October 2015). However, through various sources, the Germans found that the villages were not too keen on housing the Taliban, and had on at least two occasions expelled radical mullahs. It also came to be known that there was a keen interest in having electricity installed in the villages, a facility to which the PRT could contribute (Ibid). Henceforth, the ASB, the PRT and the ANSF started the planning of operation Halmazaq which was intended to expel the Taliban from the villages, provide lasting security and provide reconstruction and development efforts consistent with the villagers' wishes.

The shaping operations started as early as September 2010 with units from the ASB, the ANSF and the US 1/87 Infantry battalion. The purpose of the shaping operations was to gain a better situational awareness and also to suppress the insurgent formations in the area (Blumröder, 2011). The clearing phase of the operation started in October 2010. Through a combined operation that included the German ASB, the ANA and the ANP, a Belgian OMLT and the US 1/87, the units moved in on the villages and established a so-called Combat Outpost outside the village the of Quatlum. The operation eventually resulted in a regular battle that lasted for four days. Through the course of the fight, the ISAF and ANSF forces made use of their overwhelming firepower supported by attack helicopters and air power. After four days of battle, the opposing forces withdrew, or at least stopped fighting. The local population, which had been given the possibility to leave the area during the fight, had chosen to stay; hence the tactical victory was clear to all Afghans in the area.

In the aftermath of the tactical operations, the ANSF and ISAF established combat outposts, checkpoints and a sustained presence in the area. However, as neither the ANA nor the ASB had the resources to stay indefinitely, the US contributed with the formation of militias that were to be the main bulk of the security related hold-part. According to one



source, the militias did a reasonably good job. However, insofar as its manpower was recruited mainly from Tajik communities with links to Jamiat, Mir Alam and Rabbani, they had limited impact in the Pashtu-dominated villages, and there were reports of abusive behaviour (GE07, 3 April 2016). Finally, the situation created after the Halmazag allowed for the introduction of aid and reconstruction efforts.

Was the Halmazag a success? The operation was indeed a tactical success. It was the first time the German contingent had proactively used military force in order to come to grips with an insurgency on the rise. German units had also enjoyed tactical successes in 2009, but this was always in cases of being attacked and force was used as a self-defence measure. In the Halmazag, the ASB had actively engaged the opposing forces, stayed in the fight for four days, and at the end of the day the coalition was victorious. It demonstrated for the local population that the German forces were actually able and willing to pick a fight with the Taliban, thus gaining the respect of the Afghans for being brave and efficient fighters.

There is a general consensus within the German military that the situation in the district improved after the operation and that the situation remained better than before the operation for approximately two years (Blumröder, 2011; GE07, 3 April 2016; GE08, 8 March 2016). However, even though the ANSF and ISAF expanded their presence in the area, they did not have the resources to conduct a 24/7 watch over all the villages. The militias provided some security, but with the passage of time, the Taliban were able to slowly re-enter the area (GE07, 3 April 2016).

The operation enabled the implementation of civilian aid projects that, among other efforts, resulted in the connection of the village of Quatlum and six other villages to the electrical grid (Blumröder, 2011). However, the Afghan authorities were not able to fill the void left open after the Taliban had left the area. As one source noted: “The Afghan Government and its representatives were not able to build structures that lineated the population from the Taliban. So, for a lot of villagers, the Taliban was the preferable alternative” (GE07, 3 April 2016). Arguably, therefore, the initial tactical success had limited duration insofar as the Afghan institutions were not able deliver on expectations.

### **The kill or capture operations**

In addition to the types of offensive operations to be discussed below, ISAF SOF conducted the so-called kill or capture operations. Due to classification issues, these operations are generally not eligible for research and there are few open sources on the issue.

However, their conduct was recognised by ISAF, and a substantial number took place in the Northern region (Clark, 2011; Kuehn & Linschoten, 2011).

The kill or capture operations were specifically designed to target the local Taliban commanders and individuals with certain skills, for example makers of suicide vests. From the perspective of coercion theory, the mechanism through which these operations should work was denial. Their explicit intention was to reduce the military capacity of the Taliban. As there are few sources on the matter, it is difficult to determine the effects of the kill or capture operations, but the Norwegian military assumed that effects generally were short-lived, usually in the range of a couple of weeks up to two to three months (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014).

#### **5.1.4. Conclusion, the use of force and coercion theory**

This section discusses the application of force in Faryab and Kunduz through analysing the operational orders of ISAF and how they were interpreted, the presence of ISAF through the MOT/MOLT operations, the offensive use of force through four major operations and finally the kill or capture operations.

On the strategic and operational level, there was a consciousness in ISAF of the necessity to reduce the military potential of the Taliban by decapitating the local Taliban leadership through the so-called kill or capture operations. However, neither ISAF nor Norway and Germany articulated or consciously followed a coercive strategy. Clearly, it was the intention of ISAF to reduce the impact of the insurgency, a notion that was broadly shared by Norway and Germany, but the political decision making process in both countries was concerned with issues of legality, legitimacy and logistics and not the utility of force. However, on the operational and tactical level, the articulations of aims, objectives and end-states, as they appeared in the operational plans and orders, contained phrases and wording that suggests that ISAF intended to influence the behaviour of its opponents through coercive mechanisms and by military instruments. From 2007 onwards, these orders contained to a varying degree articulations like disrupt, contain and neutralise the insurgency. With the release of Operation Tolo in 2008, ISAF embraced COIN theory by introducing the SCHB concept. The SCHB concept included the offensive use of force to facilitate reconstruction and development efforts, and directed the ISAF units to engage the Taliban more aggressively than before. Although non-military efforts and partnering became increasingly important to ISAF, the COIN concept directed the military units to engage its opponents in order to reduce

their violent activities, to prevent recruiting to the Taliban and to influence the wider Afghan audience not to support them.

The military presence of the PRTs was from the start not substantial. From 2004/5 onwards, their main vehicle for engaging Afghan society was the MOTs/MOLTs. Although intended and equipped as intelligence gathering units, they also engaged Afghan society through KLE, attending shuras and generally talking to Afghans. In particular, the German MOLTs were attuned to protective patrolling in the early phases and not to operations in which the purpose was to project force in order to influence opponents. As such, the MOTs/MOLTs did not represent a coercive vehicle. However, as coercion also includes threats that can be delivered implicitly, the MOTs/MOLTs functioned as a reminder of the ISAF military potential, not least because they could draw on theatre resources like airpower if required. From 2008/9 onwards, the Norwegian MOTs became increasingly better equipped and armed, and the Iveco armoured cars had a more visible military appearance than the prior vehicles. But, military potential is not coercive in its own right; it has to be connected to demands or objectives that are known to the opponent. This thesis maintains that the communication between the Norwegian MOTs and Afghan strongmen contained coercive elements, although subtle and containing no explicit demands or threats. Rather, the ISAF military potential was a backdrop that was known to the actors but downplayed by the MOTs.

Whereas the MOT operations represented coercion in its subtlest and lightest form, this was clearly not the case with the focused and major operations. The four case studies above illustrate that Norway and Germany contributed to and actively participated in operations in which force was used offensively and consistent with coercion theory. The aim and purpose of these operations were deduced from the ISAF campaign plans and had the explicit intention of influencing insurgent behaviour through forceful measures.

This thesis thus argues that the Norwegian units in Faryab and German units in Kunduz in phase two and three used force in an offensive capacity to induce behavioural change among their opponents. The way ISAF articulated its intentions, aims and objectives and the way these were operationalised de facto entailed use of force consistent with “the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors”. Finally, the conduct of the kill or capture operations represented more than any other operations coercive use of force. Although such operations were not conducted by

Norwegian or German forces, they illustrate that in its entirety, ISAF used force consistent with theory.

## **5.2. The conflicts in Faryab and Kunduz and the basic presumptions of theory**

The previous section concludes that Norway and Germany applied force consistent with coercion theory. But, it does not suffice to demonstrate that force was used consistent with theory in order for it to have utility. Theory rests on a set of presumptions of the nature of the conflict and the participating actors, the existence of which are a prerequisite for providing theory with explanatory power and not least a predictive potential. Its utility requires that the basic presumptions of theory sufficiently corresponded to the actual situation on the ground. In the theory chapter, these assumptions are defined as: the unitary actor, the rationality presumption, the credible threat, the function of demands and, finally, the element of choice. This section will explore and analyse the degree to which there was consistency between the situation on the ground in Faryab and the assumptions of theory.

### **5.2.1. The unitary actor**

This thesis argues in the theory chapter that unitary actors translate fundamentally to the following:

- 1) Actors are identifiable, it is possible to identify and separate the actors the coercer wishes to influence from other actors.
- 2) Actors subject to coercion act in a united, coherent and predictable way because organisation, allegiances and motivations are reasonably stable. It generally assumes that actors will fight united under a definable cause and within an identifiable organisation, framing actors as “the PLO”, “the Vietcong” or “the KLA”. The utility of coercion theory rests on the assumption that actors will respond coherently and in a concerted manner to an outer influence.
- 3) The number of actors is limited, usually in terms of a polarised contest between two parties: a coercer and the coerced.

#### **Identifiable actors**

The first premise upon which the notion of unitary actors rests is that actors are identifiable. Since coercion theory is predominantly concerned with states, identifiability is usually not a problem; actors translate to states and their decision making institutions and bodies. The population of the state may be exposed to coercion, as suggested by Pape’s notion of punishment strategies (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Pape, 1996). The population is then

assumed to be a vehicle that can be influenced and may put pressure on its government to comply to the coercer's wishes. Although punishment has been used in modern conflicts, e.g. the 1999 Operation Allied Force and in the Israel-Palestinian conflicts, raising the cost for the general population by inflicting pain and suffering is not consistent with the law of armed conflicts prerequisite of legal targets being military and identifiable ("The Geneva Conventions," 1949). The Douhetan notion of using airpower to bomb population centres to achieve concessions from their governments is against international humanitarian law, carries no legitimacy in the contemporary international order, and was certainly not part of the ISAF strategy. Henceforth, the deduction that follows from applying the identifiability presumption is that there is a distinction between actors subject to coercion and actors that are not. The former are represented by the insurgents and their active supporters, whereas the latter can broadly be defined as "the people".

To what degree was it possible to distinguish the insurgents of the Afghan conflict from "the people"? The idea that there is a distinction between people and insurgents is discussed in COIN literature, and in particular the Maoist notion of revolutionary warfare and the British experiences in Malaya have fuelled the notion that insurgents and people can be separated (Burleigh, 2013; Galula, 2006; Nagl, 2002). The idea also carried substantial weight in the way ISAF planned and conducted operations. From autumn 2007 onwards, ISAF articulated through its operational orders the intention of influencing its opponents by containing, neutralising and disrupting the insurgency (*Operation Now Ruz*, 2007). Although there was a range of actors operating in Faryab, the ISAF reference to "the insurgency" did for most practical purposes translate to groups defined as "the Taliban" and groups that were allied to, affiliated with or supported them, like HiG and the Haqqani network. The assumption underpinning the articulations of the ISAF plans and orders was consequently that there was a distinction between the insurgents and the general population; the latter would not be "contained, neutralised and disrupted". It was not the articulated intention to influence the Afghan population as such, hence the premise underpinning the ISAF articulations was consistent with COIN theory's presupposition that the insurgents could be identified and separated from "the people".<sup>49</sup> This thesis questions the premise by proposing two causes of why distinguishing between insurgents and "the people" was hugely difficult in Afghanistan (Linschoten & Kuehn, 2012).

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<sup>49</sup> Although the articulations of the ISAF operational orders identify a target audience for its operations, there is no doubt that the operations influenced perceptions, sentiments and society outside the narrow scope of the plans and orders.

First, the Taliban were basically local people. Although the sources interviewed for the purpose of this thesis did not mention it explicitly, it is likely that the organisation of Taliban groups in Faryab and Kunduz did not deviate substantially from how it was organised in other parts of Afghanistan. This meant that the Taliban in these provinces would use the so-called Andiwaal system as the organisation's basic building block. The Andiwaal system implied that recruitment and loyalty were built on "longstanding relations built on family, clan, tribal affiliations and friendship" and would generally be localised (Linschoten & Kuehn, 2012, p. 98). A consequence of the Andiwaal system would be that the local cadres of the Taliban would be composed predominantly by individuals with a local belonging, a notion that is widely supported by Norwegian and German military observers (GE07, 3 April 2016; NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014). As noted by a Norwegian MOT commander, "it was my impression that the Taliban was the same people that have lived here always" (NO03, 4 dec 2014). The respondents interviewed for the purpose of this thesis reported that, in most cases, the Taliban consisted of local people that, for a variety of reasons, joined or supported the Taliban, but otherwise lived in the local communities to which they belonged. The localised nature of the insurgents can be illustrated by the formation of the so-called "Dowlatabad gang" in Faryab. This was a group of young men who were involved in petty crime and harassment, but not ideologically aware. However, through the active influence of a competent local commander, the gang evolved from being a local and mainly criminal gang to being ideologised and radicalised into the Taliban agenda (NO02, 10 May 2014):

"Some appeared to be ideologically motivated, and upheld that this was the right path. Others were criminals that obtained legitimacy and an opportunity to exploit the population by drawing on a power greater than themselves, both ideologically and physically. There was one group, the so-called Dowlatabad gang, who started as a criminal group, but in time became ideologised. They were wisely handled by a Taliban ideologue and eventually became a politically radicalised group".

In the Orthepe valley in 2010-11, Pashtu dominated Taliban groups moved southwards from Russian Hill and on their way engulfed Arab and Uzbek communities (NO05, 21 January 2015). The PRT perceived that these groups basically hi-jacked the Taliban brand to enlarge their area of interest and to extort resources from the areas surrounding their heartland (Ibid). When approached by PRT and ANSF forces, they responded forcefully and the PRT units experienced numerous fire fights. However, identifying the Taliban fighters in villages

that eventually came under ISAF and GIRoA control was never easy, and fighters could normally resume their ordinary village life without repercussions.

The Taliban in the Chahar Darah district were reportedly mainly local Afghans that used to be HiG members or sympathisers, but that for pragmatic reasons had chosen to support or join the Taliban (GE07, 3 April 2016). According to a German officer and cultural specialist on Afghanistan, the rank and file of the Taliban in Kunduz were, with some exceptions, locally recruited (GE07, 3 April 2016). The same respondent also noted that, after the Halmazag, the Taliban slowly poured back into the villages of Chahar Darah, and that this was nearly impossible for the international military to observe.

Another dimension of the localised character of the Taliban was the way in which young Afghans were recruited. One Afghan interviewee noted that a friend of his gravitated towards the Taliban and in time became a firm supporter of the movement (AF01, 1 March 2015). This friend had approached a local mosque in which a radical Mullah had advocated the Taliban agenda and the respondent's friend and many others bought into the Mullah's message. The Afghan respondents note that this was the usual way for a lot of teenage boys to be introduced to the Taliban and thus become incorporated into the Taliban organisation (AF01, 1 March 2015; AF05, 26 Feb 2015). It was sometimes known to the local communities who these individuals were, but for outsiders it was extremely difficult to separate the young (and local) Talibs from the general population.

Military sources note that military intelligence was able to identify the central figures of the local Taliban: the commanders, parts of the shadow structures and to some extent individuals that had certain qualifications, e.g. being bomb makers (NO02, 10 May 2014). Hence, the leading characters and those most firmly and openly supporting the Taliban were known. However, it was hugely difficult to separate the Taliban rank and file from other Afghans. The experience of the Norwegian military during or after major operations like Harekate Yolo II and Vanguard Viper and the German military after the Halmazag, was that when hostilities terminated the Taliban fighters fled or melted into the population (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014).

This thesis consequently argues that, even though the senior characters of the local Taliban structures would be identifiable and usually known, the rank and file were not. Individuals and groups that supported the Taliban could easily blend in with the population if challenged, only to materialise later when ISAF or the ANSF had left the area.



Second, it was challenging to distinguish between Taliban and non-Taliban powerbrokers. It was not unusual that LPBs not originally aligned with the Taliban formed their own Taliban groups in order to combat opposing LPBs' Taliban groups. The LPBs and their Taliban groups may have bought into the Taliban agenda, temporarily or permanently, but the way this played out made it challenging to identify the Taliban as a unified and coherent structure (NO02, 10 May 2014). As a consequence of the localised nature of the Taliban, the local groups became intertwined in struggles and issues that had little to do with the overarching Taliban agenda. This can be illustrated by the quest for power in the district of Almar. The district was known to house a range of conflicts and feuds in which various LPBs were engaged (NO02, 10 May 2014). Through a complex dynamic that included shifting alliances, the formation of Taliban groups and the quest for resources and power, the LPBs and the Taliban became intertwined in a constantly shifting game. A Norwegian officer described one such dynamic (NO01, 10 June 2014):

“So, we saw a guy that had started as a local Taliban strongman, who got support from the outside and became leader of one of the local groups. He bought into the ideological and religious argument with such strength that he tried to assume power himself. He was in serious conflicts with the other local strongmen, because they had lost control over this group. So, it was a kind of all against all dynamics, where a local strongman would like to have mine (*the ISAF patrol, my comment*) and the police's support against the neighbouring Taliban group, but ensured that we did not interfere with his own Taliban group”.<sup>50</sup>

Similar anecdotes of Taliban commanders and LPBs that for some reason adopted the Taliban brand or engaged in temporary cooperation with the Taliban were told by several Norwegian officers with in-depth field experience.

This thesis consequently argues that the actors in Faryab were generally not identifiable as presumed by theory. It was fundamentally difficult to distinguish between the Taliban rank and file and Afghans who had little or nothing to do with the movement. The rank and file were not a coherent structure, but rather connected in loosely organised networks in which individuals rotated in and out depending on the local power dynamics and the issues at stake. To quote a German military observer, “Joining the Taliban was a pragmatic decision. In Afghanistan all decisions are pragmatic” (GE07, 3 April 2016). When the population in

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<sup>50</sup> My translation



Chahar Darah supported, or at least did not reject, the Taliban, it was amongst other reasons because the Afghan authorities were not able to provide a functioning government and services that matched the population's expectations.

Some LPBs also used the Taliban brand for their own purposes, even though they did not wholeheartedly support the Taliban agenda. "The Taliban" thus became a common denominator for groups and individuals that ranged from hard core ideological supporters to pragmatic strongmen and groups that found that the Taliban brand was useful to protect their own interests. It was therefore fundamentally difficult to distinguish between insurgents that were subject to coercion and the general population.

### **Unity, coherence and predictability**

The second premise to be discussed here is that "actors subject to coercion act in a united, coherent and predictable way because organisation, allegiances and motivations are reasonably stable". Coercion theory thus assumes that actors are not only identifiable, but also organised entities that will respond in a coherent and concerted way to the coercive use of force by an external actor. Although individuals could certainly be coerced, the intentions of ISAF were to influence organisations like the Taliban, HiG and the Haqqani network on the local, regional or national level. For coercion to have utility, the coerced organisation must respond with adequate consistency and coherence over time.

Theory does not address in any depth the challenges that arise when organisations are fragmented, marked by inner tensions and unpredictable. In the following, this section will present two arguments: 1) the responses to ISAF military activity and use of force were reasonably coherent, suggesting an evolved organisation, and 2) the Taliban was a deeply fragmented organisation, that, in spite of its ability to respond coherently to an outer influence, did not conform to the theory's premise of being a coherent and predictable organisation.

### **Responses to ISAF use of force**

Of particular interest to the utility of coercion theory is whether ISAF use of force was met with forceful measures or if the opposing forces yielded in the face of a militarily stronger actor. The Norwegian military respondents noted that, when they engaged some areas in Faryab, the responses were highly predictable. In Ghormach, south of the Bazar, the PRT unofficially spoke of a so-called TIC line, meaning that if units moved south of this line, they expected to be, and usually were, attacked (NO01, 10 June 2014). As noted by one MOT

commander: “if we stayed at one point more than an hour, we would be attacked” (NO04, 21 Febr 2015). In conjunction with the Orthepa valley operation, a similar TIC line materialised and the PRT units had to routinely fight their way up to the ABP checkpoint at Russian Hill (NO05, 21 January 2015). Although the situation in Ghormach was particularly volatile, there were also other areas in Faryab where the PRT expected engagements if they approached them. In Ghormach, south of the Bazar, the Taliban had organised firm defensive positions with trenches, fire support and warning systems. It was impossible for PRT units to approach these areas unnoticed. The PRT assessed that the Taliban would defend what it perceived to be its heartland, and that the Taliban defensive organisation was reasonably tight, in particular in Ghormach.

The German units had similar experiences in parts of Kunduz. From the spring of 2009 onwards, the German military was increasingly engaged in certain parts of Kunduz. In particular, the district of Chahar Darah contained pockets in which resistance was substantial, and the village of Ghor Tepa in Kunduz district was heavily defended. Through the spring and summer of 2009, the German QRF had been deployed to Kunduz as a response to the incidents in April. The unit patrolled several districts in the province and regularly experienced ambushes and fire fights (GE02, 27 October 2015).

The large scale operations from autumn 2007 onwards were usually met with fierce resistance for a prolonged timeframe of 2 to 5 days. It cannot be determined with certainty how many Taliban fighters were engaged in fighting ISAF and the ANSF, but there were at least sufficient numbers to challenge the coalition forces for several days. Even though it is questionable to what degree all the fighters wholeheartedly supported the Taliban agenda, those who participated in the fighting did so with resolve and motivation (Bruøygard, 24 April 2014; GE01, 29 October 2015). After some days of fighting, the insurgents normally withdrew or melted into the population, but not before having put up a decent fight. The existence of TIC lines and the fighting that resulted from the major operations suggest that, on the macro level, there was substantial coherence in the way the coalition’s use of force was met.

However, on the micro or even individual level, responses were less clear. A Norwegian MOT commander noted that, in Ghormach, there were two Taliban commanders, of which one was hard-core and not interested in contact, whereas the other indicated that he was open to talks (NO03, 4 dec 2014). For various reasons, the PRT chose not to engage this

commander, but the situation illustrates that the Taliban, even in Ghormach, was not a fully coherent organisation. There were also ample examples of Taliban groups fighting other Taliban groups (NO02, 10 May 2014). These groups were usually supporting LPBs that may or may not have been supporting the Taliban, but they were in most cases “on their own side” (Ibid). As mentioned above, some of these groups would approach ISAF to get support if they found it served their interests and if the military potential of ISAF threatened their position.

The response to ISAF use of force was, in the perception of the Norwegian and German military, reasonably coherent and concerted. If ISAF units approached certain areas they would regularly be engaged by an opposing force that appeared to be organised and skilled, thus suggesting that those elements that opposed GIRoA and ISAF were able to organise and act coherently, even though lower level actors were not identifiable as presumed by theory.

### **The Taliban organisation**

The term “organisation” alludes to a distinct way of organising a group of people. An organisation, organisational theory argues, means the existence of a more or less rigid framework with a purpose, a leadership, membership, rules and a hierarchy (Pike, 2015, pp. 17-19; Sinno, 2008, pp. 24-25). In his typology of insurgent organisations, Sinno proposes five basic organisational structures in which the distinction between them is the way power is distributed within them: centralised, decentralised, patronage, multiplicity and fragmentation (Sinno, 2008, pp. 11-13). Sinno argues that “what makes an organisation independent is that its rank and file is bound to its leadership, and no other leadership, as agents or clients” (Ibid, p. 13). Sinno further suggests that the mere use of the term “organisation” can sometimes be questioned, indicating that what appears to be an organisation in the classical sense, should rather be understood metaphorically (Sinno, 2008, pp. 24-25). He uses the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as an example of what, from the outside, appeared to be an organisation with a leadership, a strategy, a command and control system and operational units. However, Sinno argues that the KLA in reality was a loose connection of “isolated groups that adopted common symbols that gained wide acceptance among Kosovars” (Sinno, 2008, p. 25). He thus argues that an actor can fight coherently and concertedly even though it lacks, or has weak, organisational structures.

This thesis argues above that ISAF used force consistent with theory in order to influence the behaviour of organised entities, i.e. the Taliban and groups that were affiliated

with or supported them. Applying Sinno's definition, the Taliban represents an organisation insofar as its rank and file "is bound to its leadership, and no other leadership, as agents or clients". Did the insurgency in Faryab and Kunduz represent an organised entity in which allegiances and motivations were reasonably stable as presupposed by theory? This section will present two partly contradictory arguments. 1) Organisation: there was such a thing as a Taliban organisation that confirmed the basic assumptions of what constitutes an organisation. 2) Fragmentation: the localised nature of the Taliban and the way in which its operatives intertwined with the local power dynamics deeply challenges the perception of the Taliban as a coherent and consistent organisation.

### **Organisation**

Giustozzy argues that the Taliban in the north developed into a reasonably coherent organisation that acted strategically and the actions of the Taliban sub-groups should be interpreted within the strategic narrative (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010). Other authors have drawn on the prior experiences with the Taliban and argued that, since they were once the de-facto government of Afghanistan, they have maintained the organisational characteristics of the state (Crews & Tarzi, 2008; Nojumi, 2002; Rashid, 2001; Sinno, 2008). The section above argues that ISAF were frequently met with coherent and concerted responses when they approached certain areas. Such responses suggest organisation beyond what would be achievable by impulsive and coincidental gatherings of dissatisfied and angry Afghans. It would require a well-developed organisational structure and a functioning command and control arrangement.

The Norwegian and German militaries perceived the Taliban to be organised and that they exercised a control and command structure that enabled them to react coherently and concertedly when faced with ISAF or ANSF units (GE06, 11 March 2016; GE07, 3 April 2016; NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). By the end of the decade, the Taliban had organised itself in all districts with an almost complete shadow structure, including elements such as a shadow Provincial Governor, an education committee and a military committee (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). Although these entities were not necessarily well functioning, they indicate a consciousness of the relevance of organisation and institution building. Through creating shadow structures, the Taliban communicated to the wider audience that they were a relevant alternative to the existing government.

The Taliban further organised or facilitated the establishment of groups of people that were given military or other tasks. The Norwegian military sources indicate that the sub-

groups consisted of a mixture of ideologised groups, groups that found that aligning with the Taliban would serve their interests, and criminal or opportunist groups (NO02, 10 May 2014). These groups accepted to a varying degree instructions and guidance from the central leadership, but also pursued local agendas that sometimes were not aligned with, or were even contradictory to, the central Taliban agenda.

There were indications of communication between the Quetta Shura and the local cadres and, according to a Norwegian military intelligence officer, inspectors and delegations visited Faryab on numerous occasions (NO02, 10 May 2014). In Kunduz, the German military observed that there were contacts between representatives of the Peshawar Shura and the local cadres (GE07, 3 April 2016). It was also observed that representatives of the Taliban from other areas of Afghanistan visited the province on a number of occasions. Although it is impossible to reveal the nature and content of these meetings, it is likely that they entailed discussions regarding the Taliban operations and activities in Faryab and instructions on what the local cadres were to do or achieve.

In 2009 the Taliban issued a “code of conduct” intended to regulate the behaviour and operations of the fielded Taliban units (“Taliban issues code of conduct,” 2009). Although one cannot say with certainty how the “code of conduct” affected the local cadres, it illustrates that the Taliban’s central leadership made efforts to control and direct the organisation and its units in Afghanistan through general instructions and guidelines.

Several of the sources interviewed for the purpose of this thesis also mention the customary Afghan practice of organisational pragmatism to be present in Faryab. Families of influence would make sure their sons were evenly distributed between the competing organisations of power as a measure of survival and influence (NO01, 10 June 2014). It was not unusual that a family would have sons in the ANA, the ANP and the Taliban simultaneously. A consequence of this organisational pragmatism was that it provided the actors with an insight into plans and decision making and they could adjust their behaviour in order to reduce the potential for being caught in the firing line.

The concerted reaction to outer influences, the contact between the central and the local leadership, the observations of the Norwegian and German militaries and the academic literature all suggest that the Taliban in the north in the relevant aspects had a developed and functioning organisational structure.

## **Fragmentation**

Whereas Giustozzy and others emphasise the organisational strength of the Taliban, there are also factors that suggest that the organisation was deeply fragmented on the local level (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010). Most observers agree that the rank and file of the Taliban was predominantly locally recruited. As a consequence of the localised nature of the Taliban, the local groups became intertwined in struggles and issues that had little to do with the overarching Taliban agenda. A telling illustration of this aspect was the quest for power in the district of Almar. The district was known to be home to a range of conflicts and feuds in which various LPB's and groups affiliated with the Taliban were engaged (NO02, 10 May 2014). This sometimes led LPBs to hi-jack the Taliban brand in order to form their own Taliban groups with the intention of combating opposing LPB's. The LPBs and the Taliban groups may have bought into the Taliban agenda, temporarily or permanently, but the way this played out made it challenging to identify the Taliban as a unified and coherent structure.

Joining the Taliban was, for many Afghans, a pragmatic decision (GE07, 3 April 2016). It had to do with issues of survival, the provision of legitimate and acceptable services and the malpractices of the legitimate government. The Taliban in Kunduz were reportedly mainly former HiG members (GE07, 3 April 2016). They had switched to the Taliban when the HiG came under severe pressure from the Taliban in 2009/10, but then, when the Taliban suffered defeats, they switched away from the Taliban again. The Norwegian and German militaries consistently reported on a number of groups affiliated with the Taliban that switched sides when the military pressure from ISAF and GIRoA became too obvious.

A German officer and specialist in Afghan culture argued that even though the Taliban has certain characteristics of an organisation, as argued by Sinno, its operatives maintained networks that were not connected to the Taliban and this increased their chances of survival (GE06, 11 March 2016). It was therefore not the case that the rank and file, and even some of the local commanders, were consistently "bound to its leadership, and no other leadership, as agents or clients". Rather, they operated in a system of informal networks that resembles the image of the kaleidoscope, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 below:



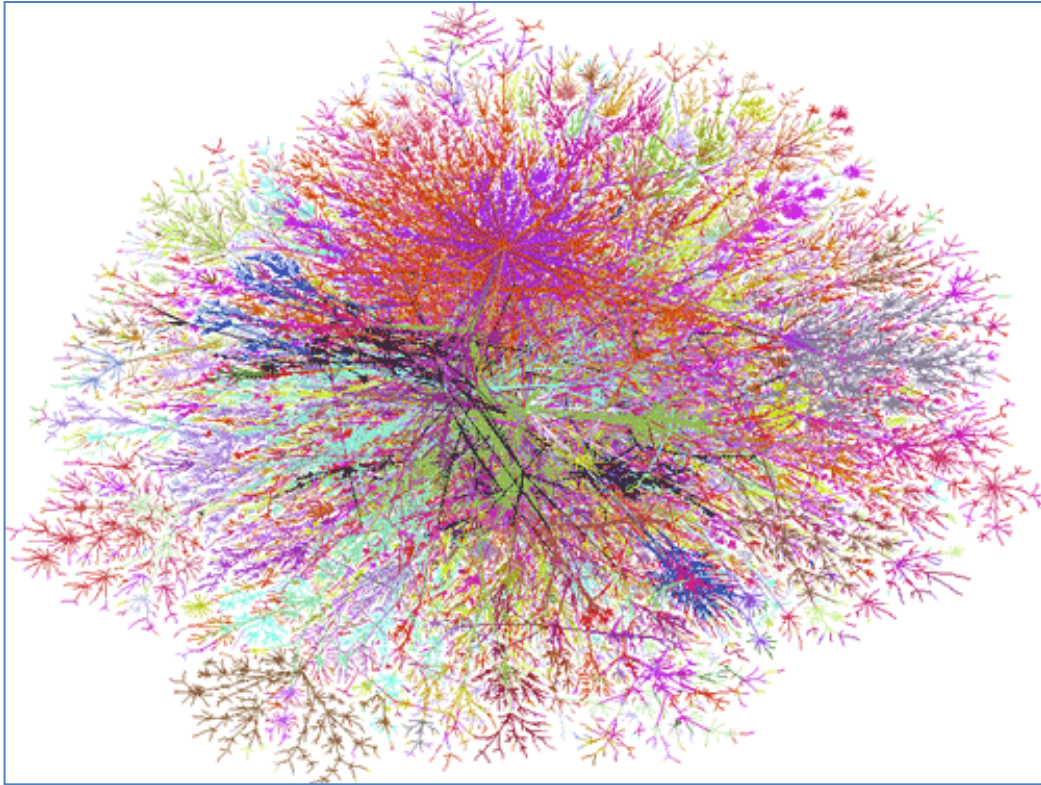


Figure 5.2, illustration of informal networks

A distinct characteristic of these types of networks was that they were not static formations. Rather, as suggested by the German officer, the connections and relations between the groups and individuals were context-dependent and fluctuated through time. In short, actors were allies on some aspects and enemies on others; it depended on the question asked. The observations noted by the Norwegian and German militaries generally supports the notion of organisational fluidity and a general lack of coherence and consistency compared to the theoretical notion of what constitutes an organisation. The Taliban included the ideologically trained hardliners that would never depart from their centrally defined aims via groups that started as criminals and in time bought into the Taliban agenda to local villagers that supported the Taliban for reasons of survival and pragmatism. As such, this thesis argues that the Afghan conflict was kaleidoscopic, the relations and connections were different for each question asked, and the answers were extremely difficult to predict.

Finally, command and control were not nearly as tight as in Western military organisations, hence, in real terms, the central leadership had limited influence on the local cadres. The Taliban's central leadership made efforts to control the cadres, but this was not easily achievable. As noted by a German intelligence officer to the author at the RC N, "The notion of a strategically guided and centrally directed insurgency in Northern Afghanistan

may be real in the heads of the leaders in the Quetta and Peshawar Shuras, but it had little utility on the ground in the local districts” (GE06, 11 March 2016; NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). In Faryab, the Norwegian military quite frequently experienced Taliban groups fighting other Taliban groups and, as mentioned above, the Taliban brand was hijacked or used by groups that were very much in the periphery of the Taliban agenda.

### **Conclusion: unity, coherence and predictability**

As the sections above illustrates, the Taliban in Northern Afghanistan contained clear elements of a developed organisation, while at the same time being deeply fragmented. The question of interest to this thesis is whether the Taliban appeared as a coercible structure; was it possible for ISAF and the ANSF to coerce the Taliban organisation in ways that made its commanders and rank and file act coherently and consistently? The Norwegian and German militaries experienced consistent responses when approaching particular areas in Faryab and Kunduz. This indicates a level of organisation that goes beyond what would be achievable through coincidental gatherings of angry Afghans that would take on ISAF and the GIROA. However, if coercion is to have utility, it presupposes that the coerced are characterised by a certain consistency and coherence. In short, the coerced must react in a predictable manner when exposed to an outside influence, and this reaction should be consistent throughout the ranks. As illustrated above, it is highly questionable whether this was the case for the local Taliban groups. Rather, individual groups supporting the Taliban did so for a variety of reasons, and their receptivity to coercion was dependent on context, motivations and how they perceived potential outcomes to serve their interests. This thesis thus argues that the Taliban did not satisfy the theoretical prerequisite of being “an organised entity in which allegiances and motivations were reasonably stable”.

### **The number of actors**

The case studies referred to in coercion literature almost unanimously discuss cases where there is a polarised relation between a coercer and a coerced, e.g. the USA vs. North-Vietnam, the USA vs the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crise, Israel vs. the Palestinians and the 1999 Air Campaign of NATO vs. Serbia (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 52-57; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Pape, 1996). Arguably, the Balkan conflicts of the 90’s entailed multiple actors, the Palestinians are represented by different organisations and various conflicts in Africa involve multiple actors. However, coercion theory generally breaks down its assessments into a polarised and binary contest between two parties, a coercer and a coerced. The theory does not address in any depth the complexities that arise in



conflicts in which there are multiple actors and the relation between them is complex and fluid.

In the literature and in the ISAF operational plans, the Afghan conflict was usually described as a conflict between the GIROA and the international coalition on the one side and the Taliban and its affiliates on the other (Farrell, 2011; ISAF, 2007, 2008; R. Johnson, 2011). From the outset, then, the conflict should satisfy theory's prerequisite of a polarised contest between two parties, as depicted in Figure 5.2.

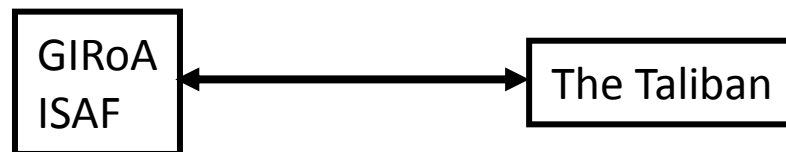


Figure 5.3, the notion of the polarised contest

However, in real terms this was hardly the case. Neither the coalition nor the opposition were unitary and opposing parties in the ideal sense as presupposed by theory. This thesis proposes two reasons for why theory's notion of a polarised contest between two parties has little utility in the Afghan conflict. First, the coalition, here referred to as the coercer, was fragmented and was not able to produce and operationalise a functioning and holistic strategy. It is true that ISAF eventually presented a holistic strategy in 2009 under the new COMISAF Gen McCrystal, but in order to operationalise the strategy it would have required wholehearted acceptance and support from the coalition partners. As illustrated above, Norway rejected the COIN concept and the comprehensive approach, whereas Germany was at best lukewarm towards COIN and pursued a national version of the comprehensive approach (Godal, 2016; Huse, 10 April 2014; Noetzel & Schreer, 2008). The PRTs were generally, as noted by Eronen and others, highly dependent on and influenced by the policies of the nations that provided the troops, resulting in a significant difference between the ways they operated (Chiari, 2014; Eronen, 2008b).<sup>51</sup>

The Afghan authorities were also deeply fragmented. The ANSF did not stand up as a unified structure and was riven by tensions between its various institutions (A. I. Giustozzi, Mohammed, 2013; Giustozzi, 2015). The cooperation between the ANA and the ANP was on

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in the RC N AOR, the German PRT could not actively support the ALP programme, and the Hungarian PRT in Baghlan-e-Jadid could not actively support the police because of national caveats.

various occasions highly problematic and sometimes resulted in endless discussions on who was to do what. Apart from the institutional competition between the organisations, it frequently boiled down to disagreements about their roles with respect to the SCHB concept. As a general rule, there was no appetite within the ANA to do the Hold and Build part, whereas the ANP was consistently under-resourced to maintain security in areas which had been Shaped and Cleared.

In addition, the ANSF was not operating in a vacuum clearly separated from the local power dynamics. Quite frequently, the ANP in particular was an integral part of this dynamic in ways that challenged its role as the official and unbiased representative of GIROA. The ANP low level leaders, e.g. the District Chief's of Police and its rank and file, were predominantly locally recruited (NO01, 10 June 2014). A common denominator of the rank and file was that they had little if any education and training. During a visit to the border city of Hairaton north of Mazar-s-Sharif in the autumn of 2008, the author met a battalion commander of the ABP. During our discussion, he noted that, out of his force of around 180 soldiers, only two were educated, meaning that they could read and write. Similar figures were not unusual among the ANP. Although GIROA and ISAF conducted training and mentoring programmes, the level of education and training remained low. The local leaders and the rank and file were frequently put in position by a local strongman that served his interests by preserving links to the police. Separating the ANP from whatever was important locally was therefore highly challenging. There was in many cases a very thin line between being an ANP policeman, a representative of the local strongman or even a Taliban supporter. A Norwegian officer provided a telling illustration of this very particular complexity by referring to conversations with Afghan policemen who allegedly stated: "If we do not get more support from ISAF now, we have to create our own Taliban group" (NO01, 10 June 2014).

It was also the case that even though ISAF and the ANSF jointly planned and conducted operations, they hardly stood out as a unified and coherent structure. I was intimately involved in the planning of the Naiad Tolo and the Omid and participated in numerous meetings with my counterparts at the ANSF: the ANA 209<sup>th</sup> Corps "Shaheen", the 303 Pamir Northern Region Police, the ABP and the NDS. The expected outcome of these meetings and efforts was that ISAF and the ANSF, from 2010 referred to as the Combined Team, produced plans that applied to both institutions and in theory should result in a common strategy and the coordinated and synchronised conduct of operations.

However, what became obvious to me during these meetings was that it was extremely challenging to merge the various institutions of the ANSF and ISAF into a common understanding of the operational challenges and the way to deal with them. The challenges materialised for a number of reasons. All the meetings were conducted with interpreters who were sometimes of dubious quality, which is challenging when there are rather complicated issues to discuss. Although the senior leadership of the ANSF institutions and quite a few of its mid-level officers were educated and very knowledgeable, there was clearly a difference in the level of training and education that complicated the development of overarching plans and the development of strategy. Generally, I experienced the ANSF officers as very much “hands-on” and tactically oriented, and they were not overly concerned with the development of long-term plans or strategies. Finally, the ANSF units contained officers with in-depth knowledge of Afghanistan and the conflict, knowledge that could never be matched by ISAF officers on a 6-month tour. ISAF, thus, tended to push solutions on the Afghans that had their basis in Western military thinking more than the requirements on the ground in Afghanistan.

Norwegian and German military personnel noted that the cooperation with the Afghan units frequently worked fine on the tactical level, and that the Afghan units performed well when supported by ISAF units or mentors (Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014). However, it is arguable that the ANSF and ISAF cannot be perceived as a unified actor as presupposed by theory.

Second, although the Taliban contained obvious unifying elements, it was, as illustrated above, fragmented and marked by inner tensions and regional and local differences. Representatives of the Norwegian military argued that the Taliban in Ghormach was more coherent and better organised than the Taliban in the Orhepa valley. The latter were perceived as mainly criminals that bought into the Taliban agenda for pragmatic and opportunistic reasons. In the district of Ghormach, allegedly two Taliban commanders had different views on how to engage with ISAF, and in the Almar district in particular different Taliban-affiliated groups competed for power and influence (NO02, 10 May 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014).

In addition to the local groups and commanders affiliated with the Taliban, there were present a range of LPBs that either combated or aligned with the Taliban depending on what they found best served their interests. As a consequence, Faryab was a patchwork of actors whose motivations, alliances and allegiances were fluid and contained few fixed points apart from the vested interests of the local groups and commanders (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02,

10 May 2014). Figure 5.1 above illustrates the immense complexity of the local and regional informal networks of which the Taliban operatives were also a part, suggesting that their interaction with the local communities and power dynamics deeply challenged the notion of the Taliban as one actor (GE06, 11 March 2016).

Rather than portraying the conflict as a contest between two parties, this thesis argues that the Afghan conflict was a multipolar and complex conflict with kaleidoscopic characteristics that can best be illustrated by the so-called “spaghetti slide” that was presented to COMISAF general McCrystal in the spring of 2010 (Figure 5.3):

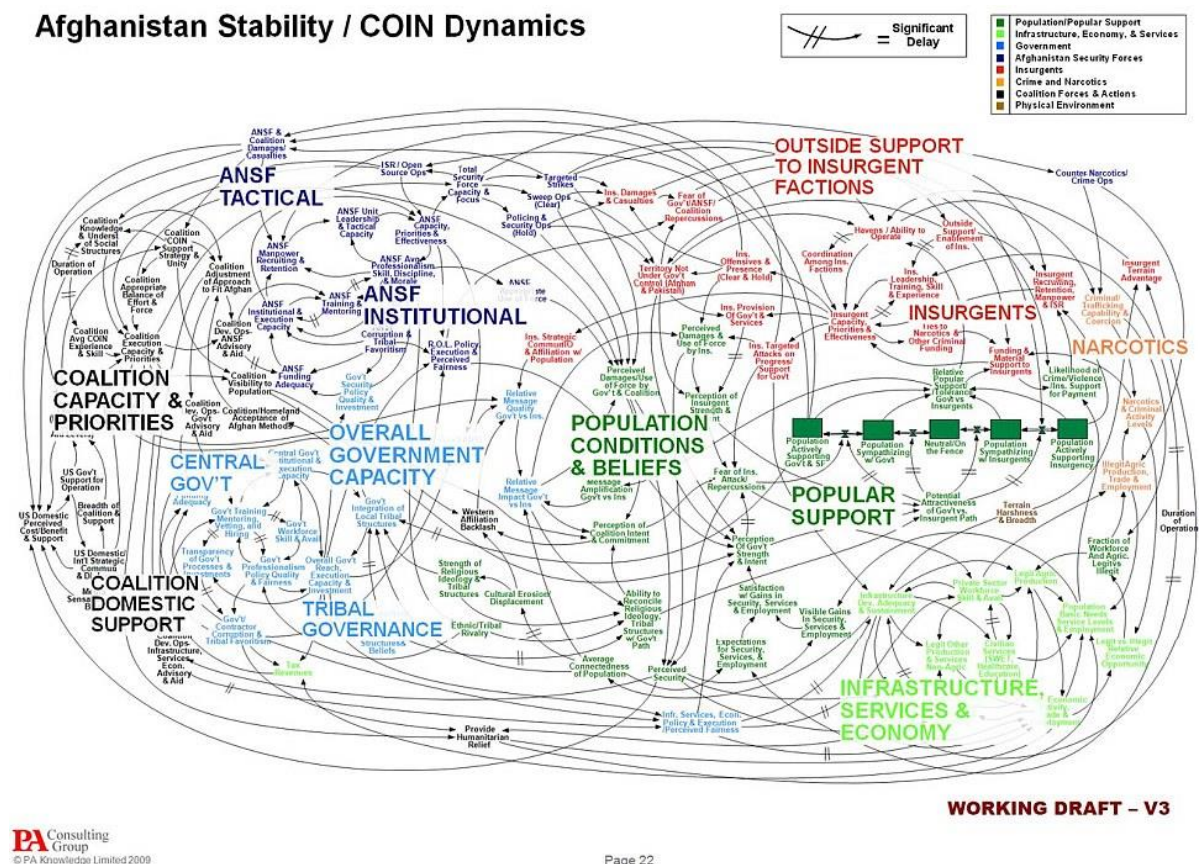


Figure 5.4, the Spaghetti slide

Although the slide was ridiculed at the time and reportedly prompted McCrystal to declare “When we understand that slide, we will have won the War”, it does effectively demonstrate the immense complexity of the conflict. From the perspective of coercion theory, the slide also illustrates the challenges of coercion theory’s linear conceptualisations. If the slide provides a realistic view of the realities on the ground, and in the author’s opinion it does, a relevant question with respect to coercion theory is this: Who should coerce who in order to achieve what?

This thesis consequently argues that neither the coalition nor the Taliban could be perceived as unified actors. Rather, the image provided by the “spaghetti slide” seems more fitting. There were several different actors that were potential coercers, and similarly the fragmentation of the Taliban meant that there was not a single identifiable Taliban organisation to coerce.

### **Conclusion, unitary actors**

Coercion theory assumes actors that are unitary owing to three presumptions: 1) actors are identifiable, 2) actors act in a united, coherent and predictable way, and 3) the number of actors is limited. The sections above present three consecutive arguments. First, it was fundamentally difficult to differentiate those actors that were subject to coercion from those that were not. Although the local commanders and senior figures were usually known, some of the commanders and the rank and file were locally recruited and retained the possibility of melting into the population when the military pressure became too strong. Second, even though the responses to ISAF military operations and the use of force were reasonably consistent, the “organisation, allegiances and motivations” fluctuated, resulting in the Taliban being a fragmented organisation in which the local cadres became intrinsically intertwined with the local power dynamics. Rather than satisfying the perception of “the Taliban”, the reality on the ground consisted of various groups that more or less bought into the Taliban agenda for a combination of pragmatic, ideological and material reasons. Finally, neither the coercer nor the Taliban satisfies the prerequisite of being a unified and coherent actor that operated in a binary and polarised system of coercer and coerced. Rather, both the coalition and the Taliban were fragmented in ways that suggest that the above-mentioned “spaghetti slide” provides a more accurate image of the number of interacting actors than the binary premise of theory.

This thesis thus argues that it makes sense to assess the Taliban as an organised entity, although fragmented, localised and highly autonomous. However, as the section above illustrates, the divisions between the Taliban-affiliated groups, the tensions between the commanders and the way in which LPBs used the Taliban brand for their own purposes suggest that the Taliban was not a unitary actor as presupposed by theory. Added to this argument was the ability of the Taliban rank and file to melt into the general population when required. As the outcomes of the major operations of HKY II and VV suggest, the Taliban fighters were able to disappear from the ISAF radar when they were put under substantial military pressure, but retained the capability of re-entering areas when the major forces pulled



out. The Taliban thus represented a type of formation that could, consciously or not, combine the advantages of being able to mobilise against an external actor when required and simultaneously maintain the low visibility of its operatives from the viewpoint of the opponent.

Arguably, therefore, and even though the Taliban contained unitary elements, this thesis argues that neither the Taliban nor the coalition satisfied the theory's prerequisite of being unitary actors.

### **5.2.2. The rationality presumption**

Coercion theory is at heart a theory of what drives decisions and behaviour. At the core of the theory's presumptions is the assumption of classical rationality: actors make decisions and act based on assessments of the appropriate means to achieve the desired ends (Dekker, 2010; Jakobsen, 2011; Lebow, 2006; Schaub, 2004). Coercion theory is thus based on theories of rational choice and economically derived cost-benefit models. It assumes that actors carefully and consciously assess the potential gains of accommodation compared to the cost of not yielding to the coercer's wishes. Decisions and acts based on anger, desire for revenge, personal animosities and ethnically-based tensions would be assessed as irrational and have generally not been addressed by coercion theorists. Coercion theory further assumes values of benefit and cost to be material and measurable. Benefits, using Schelling's terms, translate predominantly into political concessions or material gains available to the coerced if they yield, whereas cost translates into pain and suffering (Schelling, 1966).

Although central to coercion theory, the sources available for this thesis do not allow for an in-depth discussion of the rationality of the actors of Faryab and Kunduz. It is not possible without insight into the decision making process of the Taliban and their thoughts and discussions to elaborate the degree to which these confirmed the rationality presumption. However, the literature and the observations made by the Norwegian and German militaries may provide some insights that nonetheless are of value to this thesis with respect to the rationality presumption.

Initially, it cannot be substantiated that the behaviour and actions of the Taliban departed substantially from the rationality presumption. Surely, the Taliban experienced losses and absorbed pain, but this was not irrational in its own right. Rather, the narrative produced by the Norwegian and German militaries suggests that the Taliban were conscious of the amount of pain they were willing to accept, indicating an informed understanding of the cost-benefit ratio. Through most of the major operations, the ISAF units' experience was that,

after 2-5 days of fighting, the opponents fled, simply left the area or melted into the population (Bruøygard, 24 April 2014; GE01, 29 October 2015; GE02, 27 October 2015). Operations like HKY II, Karez and Vanguard Viper were of limited duration, and, since the major forces withdrew after some days, it was never necessary for the Taliban to stay in the fight for too long, their losses would be acceptable. The behaviour of the Taliban in combat suggests that they were willing to absorb enough pain to prove their cause, but still be able to fight another day. As noted by a German officer and an Afghanistan specialist, “if the Taliban proved that they could fight the world’s most powerful military for a prolonged time, they would indeed demonstrate their determination and fighting capacity to their core audience: the local Afghans” (GE06, 11 March 2016). The inclination to engage the coalition forces and be willing to absorb substantial amounts of pain cannot be assessed as contradictory to the rationality presumption as long as it served their overarching purpose and aims: being perceived as a relevant actor to be counted on in the construction of Afghanistan in the post-ISAF era.

However, the actions of the Taliban cannot all be framed within a strategic narrative of regime change and animosity towards the international forces. The actions of the Taliban and others that attacked ISAF were likely to have occurred for reasons that did not fit into the classical model of rationality and cost-benefit analysis, such as honour, revenge and the possibility to prove oneself as a commander or fighter. As the discussion above illustrates, the Taliban commanders and rank and file became intertwined in the local power dynamics in ways that were not necessarily compatible with the overarching Taliban agenda. It was a dynamic that also included factors such as ethnic tensions, feuds, personal animosities and revenge. Afghans have sometimes been characterised as being part of a “fierce warrior culture” which is inspired by a particular warrior ethos (Seth G Jones, 2009). A consequence of the warrior ethos is that fighting and combat represent ends in their own right. Fighting provides young men with opportunities to gain respect and honour and is not necessarily connected to a means-ends logic in accordance with coercion theory’s rationality presumption. Fighting is not irrational, but conforms to a different type of rationality than the type postulated by theory, which represents the immaterial interests of the actors (Kilcullen, 2009).

The sources available for this thesis cannot reveal the relative impact of immaterial interests as drivers for conflict-related behaviour. However, the Norwegian and German military sources noted that they in most cases perceived material issues to be in the forefront,



e.g. land and water rights, the quest for power, influence and material resources and not least money, spiced with a degree of ethnically-based tensions, personal animosities and feuds. Ideology certainly played a role, but the respondents interviewed for the purpose of this thesis tend to downplay the ideology part compared to other drivers.

Coercion theory generally applies a narrow definition of rationality derived from economic cost-benefit models and presupposes gains to be economically measurable or come in the form of political concessions. The aims must be rational in their own right, it is not sufficient that the means to achieve the ends abide by the rationality presumption. Applied to the Afghan conflict, most of the actions of the Taliban and the insurgents can be framed within a means-to-an-end understanding, which is clearly rational. Targeting the elected government and the international forces made sense, as did the absorption of pain. However, the ends did not necessarily conform to the theory's notion of rationality insofar as they, on a number of occasions, could not be framed within the classical model. This thesis consequently argues that the rationality presumption of coercion theory is a necessary but not sufficient model to understand behaviour in the Afghan conflict. What is required is an understanding of ends that includes motivations and drivers for behaviour beyond theory's notion at its current stage.

### **5.2.3. The credible threat**

Coercion theory is unclear as to what constitutes a credible threat (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 18, 169-171; Alexander L. George & Simons, 1994; Wijk, 2005). Generally, it assumes credibility to be a product of the availability of military capacities (hard force) and the will to use them. The availability of military capacity must be sufficient to inflict cost on a level that exceeds the coerced's ability to endure it and the coerced must actually believe that the coercer possesses both the capacity and will to employ his potential. In other words, the coerced must perceive that the ability of the coercer to raise the cost exceeds their own ability to endure pain and suffering. There are, consequently, two factors of interest to this thesis with respect to the credible threat: 1) the ability of the coerced to endure pain and suffering, and 2) the degree to which the coercer possessed the military capacity and will to raise cost above the threshold at which the coerced would yield.

#### **The ability to endure suffering**

The first factor is derived from Lebow's argument that the efficacy of coercion depends predominantly on the ability of the coerced to endure pain and suffering (Lebow, 2006). Lebow argues that this ability is a function of the perception of the issues at stake.

Deeply felt and existential issues will, Lebow argues, result in a greater tolerance for pain than material issues such as, for example, the prospect of economic loss.

How much pain were the Taliban and its supporters willing to absorb? The fact that Afghans, like most peoples, did not approve of being influenced or forced by external actors is in itself a factor that would induce an existential element in almost any opposition against ISAF and the Western coalition. But did that imply that all Taliban supporters were dedicated Jihadists who longed for martyrdom, or were material and less existential issues equally important? If the former motivation was the most important, it effectively challenges the basic assumptions of coercion theory. After all, if the insurgents were fundamentally driven by the urge to die gloriously on the battlefield, aiming to influence them through threats or the use of force would have had little utility. The Taliban definitely experienced loss of life and limb because of military operations. The kill or capture operations made being a local Taliban commander a highly risky business, and their prospects for a long life would indeed be limited. It is inherently difficult to assess the Taliban and their supporters' ability to endure suffering without detailed insights into their perceptions and thoughts. The sources available for this thesis do not allow for an in-depth assessment of their inner processes. However, the observations made by the Norwegian and German militaries of Taliban behaviour as well as the available literature may provide some insights as to their ability to endure pain and suffering.

The Taliban in the north made little use of suicide bombers, at least in the early phases.<sup>52</sup> The major operations discussed above entailed fierce fire fights, but loss of life and limb came fundamentally as a consequence of ordinary fighting. The limited use of suicide attacks may be an indication that the Taliban operatives in Faryab and Kunduz had little appetite for so-called martyrdom operations.

The fighters showed in many cases good fighting skills, were decent marksmen and demonstrated good tactical knowledge (Bruøygaard, 24 April 2014; GE02, 27 October 2015). However, in the course of the above-mentioned operations, the insurgents fought for a while, after which they simply left the fight. They did not stay in the fight when facing the possibility of being overrun or annihilated. As noted by a German officer who participated in the Halmazag, "On the fifth day, the insurgents had disappeared, they simply were not on the

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<sup>52</sup> The use of suicide attacks was not totally absent. One of the most infamous attacks killed the commander of the 303 Northern Region Police, General Daoud, in May 2011 and wounded the RC B commander, MajGen Kneipp (Rivera, 2011).

battlefield anymore” (GE01, 29 October 2015). The behaviour of the Taliban suggests that they were willing to accept substantial pain, but only insofar as it served the overarching agenda or was in line with their perceived interest.

The Taliban was further torn by inner tensions and fragmentation. Taliban groups were on occasion fighting each other, and the formation of Taliban groups occurred for reasons that were only peripherally connected to the overarching Taliban agenda, suggesting a limited will to die for the cause.

Following Lebow’s argument, the level of pain that was acceptable correlates with the issues at stake. A major part of the Taliban rank and file in Faryab and Kunduz was locally recruited, and, according to the Norwegian and German militaries, joined or supported the Taliban for pragmatic reasons more than ideological ones. Dissatisfaction with the local authorities and GIRoA was an equally, in some cases maybe the most important, reason that local Afghans joined or supported the Taliban. The Taliban also made use of coercion through so-called night letters and other measures that threatened local Afghans not to support GIRoA and ISAF, indicating awareness within the Taliban of the potential of coercion for influencing the population.

In total, these factors suggest that the level of pain and suffering the insurgents were willing to accept was high, but not indefinite. The ideologically aware fighters that had been trained in the madrassas in Pakistan may have been keen Jihadists who were not susceptible to coercion, but there were obviously limits to how much cost the main bulk of the rank and file were willing to accept.

### **The ability to raise cost**

The second issue requires that the coalition possessed the military capacity and will to inflict suffering that was beyond the insurgents’ ability to endure. Without such an ability, the insurgents would logically not perceive the threat to be credible. This section will focus on the ability of ISAF to raise costs, acknowledging that the full coercive potential in the north also included the ANSF.

The capacity to raise costs equates for most practical purposes with one or a combination of ordinary offensive military capacities, like artillery or manoeuvre units or specialised operations like the kill or capture operations that were designed to influence the insurgency through targeting selected individuals. Airpower may conduct ordinary offensive operations or targeted killings that may have more in common with SOF-type operations, thus

can be assessed as either ordinary or specialised military operations. In particular, the US use of drones for the purpose of targeted killings in Pakistan and Afghanistan has much in common with the SOF-conducted kill or capture operations. What, then, was the ISAF capacity and will to raise costs in Northern Afghanistan? This section will initially discuss the coercive potential in each of the phases, and secondly address the issue of available forces with respect to the requirements of COIN theory.

### **Coercive capacity through the phases**

In phase one, ISAF's organic ability to raise costs in the north was, for all practical purposes, absent, with the possible exception of SOF operations. The ISAF presence in Faryab and Kunduz was the PRTs, and neither included offensive capacities that could be used offensively. The MOT teams in Faryab and the German patrols in Kunduz were mere information and relation building units (NO03, 4 dec 2014). Neither was intended to be offensive, or to be used offensively, in order to influence behaviour, and force was only used for self-defence purposes. The Norwegian PRT commanders of this phase also made it clear that they did not see it as their task to conduct offensive operations (Siljebråten, 24 April 2014; Sommersteth, 10 April 2014). Hence, during phase one, ISAF lacked both the capacity and the will to use coercive force.

In phase two, the reactive posture of ISAF changed, in particular with the execution of the HKY II.<sup>53</sup> During these operations ISAF, in cooperation with ANSF units, aimed to push back the advancing insurgency through the active and offensive use of force. However, the organic offensive capacity of ISAF was greatly limited throughout the phase, although it increased somewhat through the end. In 2007, it basically consisted of the Norwegian QRF, some minor German units and SOF forces. The QRF consisted of two mechanised companies with a total strength of around 150 soldiers (Godal, 2016). The QRF was based in Camp Marmal outside Mazar-e-Sharif, and usually had to return to the camp after one or two weeks of operations. Its potential to influence the insurgency was very limited. The Norwegian QRF was replaced by German units in 2008 and transformed into the PRT organic Task Unit.

Germany deployed a reduced battalion size QRF in 2008 which increased the capacity to conduct offensive military operations in Kunduz. However, as mentioned above, until the execution of the Halmazag, the German modus operandi remained purely defensive. During

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<sup>53</sup> The Norwegian QRF participated in a range of operations during the spring and summer of 2007 which had offensive elements, but the main change in the north occurred with the HKY II.

the summer of 2009, the German QRF in Kunduz experienced an increasing number of attacks and dealt with these attacks more forcefully than before, but always in the context of self-defence (GE02, 27 October 2015). Germany was fundamentally unwilling to proactively deal with the insurgency through the conduct of offensive military operations as proposed by the COIN concept.

Although RC N did not entail organic airpower, it could always be called upon if required. The major operations like HKY II included the availability of airpower. But airpower was generally used in TIC or in extremis situations in the north, and not offensively for pre-planned missions or as a result of dynamic targeting.

There is little information available on the so-called kill or capture operations during this phase, as most aspects of these operations are still subject to classification. Arguably, the kill or capture operations were the type of operations most clearly designed to influence insurgent behaviour. Their prime target types were the mid-level leaders of the Taliban and other high value individuals, like bomb-makers and the constructors of suicide vests. One of the few authoritative open sources on the kill or capture operations is the Afghan Analyst Network report “*A Knock on the Door*” produced by Felix Kuehn and Alex von Linschoten (Kuehn & Linschoten, 2011).<sup>54</sup> The report covers the timeframe between December 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 and September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011. During this timeframe, the report has identified 14 kills as a result of 12 raids in Faryab, and 97 kills as a result of 92 raids in Kunduz (“Every Nato kill-capture mission in Afghanistan detailed and visualised,” 2011). The report does not address operations outside its timeframe, but it is likely that SOF operations of the kill or capture type occurred before and after. It is very difficult to determine the effects of the operations, although most sources agree that they, at least in a short time perspective, reduced the operational capacity of the Taliban (Kuehn & Linschoten, 2011; NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). They demonstrate that, even though ISAF possessed very limited conventional military capacities in the north, it was still capable of conducting operations that were particularly designed to influence the insurgency through the use of force.

However, even though SOF operations became more usual by the end of phase two, the capacity of ISAF to raise costs remained marginal. The limited availability of manoeuvre forces meant that it was only possible to conduct operations that were limited in time and

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<sup>54</sup> See also Kate Clark on the “Takhar attacks” (Clark, 2011).

space, as was the case with HKY II and Vanguard Viper. Outside the conduct of these operations, raising cost remained almost entirely with the SOF operations.

Phase three saw the influx of the two German Task Forces as well as a substantial US contribution. The US contribution included the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter which in the US army doctrine is assessed as a form of flying artillery.<sup>55</sup> Germany also deployed artillery, the 155 mm Panzerhaubitze 2000, to the so-called Operation Point North (OP North), with the ability to target the most contested areas around Kunduz and Chahar Darah. The totality of the surge allowed ISAF to project substantial amounts of force and to sustain it over time.

### **Sustaining the effects**

Even though ISAF, during phases two and three, became increasingly more robust with respect to being able to project force, it would be credible only insofar as it was able to maintain the military pressure for a prolonged timeframe. The experiences from the HKY II and similar operations suggest that conducting focused operations would not suffice to induce behavioural change without the ability to follow up the gains achieved through shaping and clearing operations. The credible threat required the presence of a sufficient number of boots on the ground in order to capitalise on tactical gains.

Enough forces in the ISAF terminology were derived from the postulations of COIN theory regarding the relation between population and security forces. From a COIN perspective, having a sufficient number of forces available is necessary in order to maintain security during the hold and build phase. The ratio does not refer to the coercive capacity per se, but rather to the ability to capitalise on operational and tactical gains. In the authors recollection, the recommended troops to task ratio was 1:50 in average areas and up to 1:20 in the most contested areas in order to maintain safety and security (Skaar, 2010). Accordingly, this would imply around 20,000 police and soldiers in Faryab and similar numbers of trained security forces in Kunduz. These numbers were generally not met in either of the provinces, even if including the totality of the ANSF and ALP. In addition, the low level of education and training within the ANP suggest that, even if the recommended ratio had been met, the degree to which the ability to provide security had been satisfactory would still be questionable. The formation of militias through the ALP programme improved the ratio, but insofar as the ALP in many cases was of dubious quality, it is questionable the degree to which it actually contributed to improved security.

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<sup>55</sup> The notion of the attack helicopters as “flying artillery” was conveyed to the author by a US officer and Apache pilot.

### **Conclusion: the credible threat**

This section presents three arguments: 1) the insurgent's ability to endure suffering was high, but not indefinite. Supporting the Taliban was in most cases a pragmatic choice and the localised structure of the Taliban rank and file suggest that influencing a relatively large number of Taliban supporters was possible. 2) In the first phase, ISAF included no real coercive capacity, but from 2007 onwards its potential to project force gradually increased. Norway demonstrated from the execution of HKY II that it had the will to apply its forces offensively when required, whereas Germany was reluctant to do so until the execution of the Halmazag. However, ISAF exercised considerable restraint in the way it applied force, even during the major operations. By 2010, ISAF in the North had demonstrated a substantial capacity and willingness to project force, although still limited in time and space. 3) ISAF and the coalition did not have the troops to task levels necessary to capitalise on tactical gains.

Was ISAF in the North therefore able to present a credible threat? Clearly, the potential of offensive operations increased through time, and by 2010/11 it was clear to the Taliban and everyone involved in the insurgency that ISAF had the ability to inflict substantial cost. However, the question of interest is not whether ISAF could inflict cost, but whether it could inflict cost beyond the insurgent's ability to endure it. The answer to this question is arguably no. Even though the combination of large scale focused operations and SOF kill or capture operations reduced the operational capabilities of the Taliban, they were always able to recuperate. According to Norwegian military sources, the recuperation time varied between a couple of weeks to three months (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). The German experiences after the Halmazag suggest that the long-term effects of the operation were questionable insofar as the Taliban reportedly slowly re-established itself in the area. Consequently, this thesis argues that the coerced did not perceive the ability of the coercer to raise cost to exceed their own ability to endure it; hence, the threat was not credible.

#### **5.2.4. Demands**

The fourth premise upon which the utility of coercion theory rests is the articulation of demands that must be made clear to the opponent; they must know what is expected of them and consequently how they can reduce or avoid cost. Literature is unclear on whether demands must be delivered explicitly or if implicit demands as a consequence of media coverage or certain activities are sufficient. This thesis argues above that the essence of demands is that the coerced understands what is expected of him and the consequences of not



complying. It is consequently not required that demands are delivered explicitly through cables or other forms of communication.

In the case of the conflicts in Faryab and Kunduz, I have found no indications that demands were communicated explicitly to the Taliban by either PRTs or Task Forces.

Norway was involved with peace talks with the Taliban on the strategic level through efforts by the Foreign office and meetings were held in various places, e.g. Oslo and Pakistan. These meetings did not, however, discuss the local situation in Faryab, and there are no indications that they included coercive elements (Godal, 2016, pp. 145-156). The sources available for this thesis do not reveal whether Germany engaged in such talks on the Government level, but on the PRT or Task Force level no respondents indicated that such talks took place.

The Norwegian PRT commanders interviewed for the purpose of this thesis did not mention any direct contact with Taliban commanders or groups. There is no evidence suggesting that the PRT took an active role in communicating directly with the Taliban or were engaged in negotiations with the opposing actors at any time. As noted by a Norwegian MOT commander, “We were instructed to shy away from direct contact or talks with representatives of the Taliban. We were supposed to support the official and formal structures of GIRoA and not engage the opposition” (NO03, 4 dec 2014). It is likely that elements of the ANSF were in contact with Taliban formations. The author was presented with anecdotal evidence suggesting that it was not uncommon that commanders of the ANSF talked directly to their Taliban counterparts on mobile phones. It is further likely that individuals of the Taliban and the ANSF met and had talks because they knew each other, were related or from the same village. The Norwegian military assumed that representatives of the ANSF and the Taliban had some form of contact, but the content of these communications cannot be determined (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014). There is, however, no evidence to suggest that demands of the “comply or else” form, as prescribed by the theory, were issued either from the PRTs in Faryab or Kunduz or from the ANSF.

Although theory is unclear on the matter, this thesis argues that demands can be delivered implicitly. Implicit demands would take the form of statements in the media or other forms of communication that were substantiated through the military activities of the coercer. Fundamentally, the articulations of aims and objectives as they appeared in the operational plans and orders would translate to implicit demands insofar they were known to the opponents. It is initially clear that the coalition articulations of intentions, aims and objectives were not communicated outside ISAF and the ANSF. However, even though the precise

articulations of the coalition aims and objectives were not known, it is unlikely that the overarching intention of reducing the level of violence was not known to or understood by the Taliban. This thesis presupposes that the Taliban understood that a reduction in their violent activities was desired by the coalition, and that such a reduction would imply a reduction in activities and operations directed against them. Large scale operations like HKY II, VV and the Halmazag were vehicles that must be assumed to have communicated very clearly to the Taliban that the continuation of violent activities would have consequences. Such operations can be compared to the US Navy operations during the Cuban missile crisis. It is not evident to what degree the kill or capture operations in Faryab and Kunduz were known to the Taliban, but it is highly unlikely that the conduct and outcomes of these operations were not known to their operatives. It is unlikely, therefore, that Taliban commanders were unaware of the potential risk of continuing their activities. Arguably, the ISAF *modus operandi* was a powerful communicating tool in its own right. This thesis thus presupposes that the coalition activities and operations functioned as an implicit way of communicating demands, the consequences of which were understood by the Taliban.

#### **5.2.5. The element of choice**

The final central element of coercion theory is the issue of choice. Theory makes two assumptions on the matter of choice: 1) coercion, contrary to brute force, implies that the opponent has a real choice, i.e. choosing not to comply or degrees of compliance are real alternatives, albeit not very attractive. The purpose of coercion is not to take away the element of choice, but to make some choices less attractive than others; 2) choice is a function of a rational, deliberate and conscious process. The coerced will decide how to react to the coercer's wishes based on an analysis of costs and benefits.

Did the Taliban and its supporters perceive they had real choices when facing ISAF and the ANSF? As the sections above on the Taliban responses to ISAF's use of force illustrate, the answer is clearly yes. There is no evidence suggesting that the insurgents perceived that forcefully opposing ISAF and GIRoA was not a real alternative, even though continued opposition became increasingly costly.

Were the choices the function of a rational, deliberate and conscious process? The data available for this thesis does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the degree to which the insurgents engaged in a deliberate and conscious process that formed the basis for their decision making. However, observers' reports and the way the Taliban operated provide some

indications. As noted by the Norwegian and German militaries, there were meetings between the local Taliban and representatives of the central leadership in Pakistan; hence, it is likely that issues of how the Taliban should relate to ISAF and the coalition were discussed (GE07, 3 April 2016; NO02, 10 May 2014). The operational pattern of the Taliban and the way they engaged the coalition forces suggest that there was a consciousness among their operatives and local commanders of how to relate to ISAF. During the course of the major operations, the insurgents stayed in the fight for a time, but withdrew when the military pressure became too strong, thus avoiding decisive losses or annihilation. Giustozzy argues that the Taliban had a well-developed strategy for the North that included the use of force to intimidate and put pressure on the coalition (A. Giustozzi & Reuter, 2010). It is therefore likely that the insurgents' decisions on how to relate to ISAF activities and operations were based on a reasonably conscious assessment of the gains and costs of compliance vs. non-compliance.

#### **5.2.6. Summary and conclusion: the validity of the theory's assumptions**

This thesis argues that the utility of coercion theory fundamentally rests on five assumptions, the presence of which must correspond sufficiently to the actual situation on the ground. If there are major inconsistencies between the assumptions of theory and the realities on the ground, theory's potential to explain the outcomes and predict the effects of the coercive use of force will be limited. This thesis argues that the assumptions upon which coercion theory rests are: 1) unitary actors, 2) the rationality presumption, 3) the credible threat, 4) the coercer's wishes must be known to the coerced (demands), 5) the coerced can choose compliance vs. non-compliance.

Actors are here defined as unitary insofar as they are identifiable, they respond in a concerted and coherent way to an outer influence and are limited in numbers. The responses to ISAF use of force in Faryab and Kunduz were frequently well-organised and concerted, in particular in those areas that were perceived to be the Taliban heartland. However, the Taliban was also a fragmented movement characterised by inner tensions, and groups that engaged in in-fighting and competed for resources, power and influence. The Taliban brand was frequently high-jacked by actors who, from the outset, were not overly sympathetic to the Taliban cause, or used the brand for their own individual purposes. It is therefore questionable whether there was a united Taliban, but rather a number of Taliban groups that were intertwined in the local power dynamics in ways that were frequently inconsistent with the Taliban's strategic aims. This thesis consequently argues that the Taliban in Faryab and Kunduz cannot be perceived as a unitary actor as presupposed by the theory.

Coercion theory assumes actors to be rational insofar as their behaviour is guided by a means-ends logic, as argued by rational choice theory and economically derived cost-benefit models. This thesis argues that a narrow understanding of rationality is insufficient to explain insurgent behaviour, but that the actors were generally rational as presupposed by the theory. In most cases, their behaviour could be explained as a function of the interests of the actors, even though these interests were not necessarily material or could be framed within an economically derived cost-benefit model. The willingness to accept cost may challenge the presumption of rationality. However, this thesis argues that the Taliban perceived the ability to absorb cost as a strategic value that would increase their standing in the local communities.

The credible threat is here assumed to consist of two components: the coercer's ability to raise costs and the ability of the coerced to endure it. The threat is credible insofar as the coercer's ability to raise costs exceeds the ability of the coerced to endure it. This thesis argues that ISAF and the coalition generally were not capable of presenting a credible threat as long as the Taliban and its supporters were capable of absorbing more pain and suffering than the coalition were willing to inflict and capable of inflicting. The question can be raised, though, that even if ISAF and the ANSF had been willing to raise costs beyond the level of pain and suffering that was endurable by the insurgents, would this for most practical purposes have equalled brute force? The experiences from the Soviet occupation suggest that inappropriate use of force would have led to that existential component becoming more important and created greater sympathy for the Taliban cause. A likely outcome might have been an increase in the insurgents' - and probably the population's - ability to absorb cost.

The PRTs or ISAF in Faryab and Kunduz did not present clearly articulated demands to the Taliban as presupposed by the theory. It may have been that such demands were presented by Afghan forces or institutions, but the sources available cannot substantiate this. However, it is unlikely that the Taliban did not understand that a reduction of their violent activities would be consistent with the coercer's wishes. This thesis assumes that the overarching aims and objectives were known to or understood by the Taliban and it is unlikely that they did not understand that a reduction or cessation of violence would imply a reduction in activities and operations directed against the Taliban.

Finally, the data available for this thesis indicate that the insurgents perceived that they had real choices with respect to compliance or non-compliance as presumed by the theory. Circumstantial evidence – along with the increase in violent incidents - suggests that the coalition's coercive use of force did not generally limit the freedom of action of the

insurgents. There were temporary impacts during the major operations and there was a reduction in the number of incidents that coincided with the surge of 2010-11. The Orthepe valley operation did reduce the leeway for the insurgents by forceful engagements, a lengthy presence and a focus on local ownership and institution building.

A summary of the assumptions of theory relative to the actual situation on the ground is presented in table 5.4 below.

	<b>Assumptions of coercion theory</b>	<b>The situation on the ground</b>
1	Unitary actors	No
2	Rational actors	Yes, but theory's presumption is insufficient
3	A credible threat	No
4	Demands	Only implicitly
5	Choice	Yes
	<b>Conclusion</b>	Inconsistent with theory

Table 5.5, the assumptions of theory and the situation on the ground

This thesis consequently argues that coercion theory is based on assumptions that were absent or were only to a limited degree present in Faryab and Kunduz. Without these assumptions, coercion theory is of limited value to predict effects and outcomes in the conflict. Initially, it must be recognised that coercion is difficult from the outset, and that an alien actor aiming to coerce a domestic audience will face a range of obstacles (Jakobsen, 2011).

Of the five assumptions, two are particularly relevant. First, the fragmented nature of the conflict and the relative absence of unitary actors made coercion extremely difficult. Since motivations, loyalties, allegiances and constellations were highly fluid, it was a highly complex task for the coercer to figure out who to coerce in order to achieve what. Coercing one actor may easily lead to a range of unintended consequences with respect to other actors, as was frequently experienced by the Norwegian military. It was, in short, a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Second, it is intrinsically difficult to identify what constitutes a credible threat. Neither the kill or capture operations, nor the large scale focused operations had the desired long-term effects on insurgent behaviour. Whereas the case studies discussed in coercion theory assume the presence of a unitary actor, the fragmentation and complexities

of the Afghan conflict suggest that a credible threat is literally a moving target, which fluctuates based on situation and context.

### **5.3. Coercive success in Faryab and Kunduz**

This thesis argues initially that ISAF used force consistent with theory in Faryab and Kunduz on a number of occasions. The series of major operations that started in autumn 2007 with HKY II all entailed distinct elements of the coercive use of force. They intended to influence the behaviour of insurgent groups and formations to reduce or abstain from violence and to accept the authority of the legitimate government. The kill or capture operations, although not executed by Norway and Germany, are clear illustrations of force applied consistent with theory's notion of decapitation. This thesis further argues that the assumptions upon which theory rests were generally not - or only to a limited degree - met in Faryab and Kunduz. It therefore argues that, from the outset, coercion theory may be of limited utility to explain current or predict future outcomes in the Afghan conflict. However, the relevance of coercion theory derives not only from the degree to which its basic assumptions conformed to the distinct characteristics of the conflict, but if, in those cases where force was used consistent with the theory, it actually had utility or was successful. If this was the case, coercion theory may still be relevant to explaining outcomes in the Afghan conflict. The purpose of this chapter is consequently to analyse the degree to which the coercive use of force translated into success in Faryab and Kunduz.

Based on the discussion in the theory chapter and deduced from the above-mentioned disciplines, the relative presence of the following elements and factors is assessed to constitute coercive success: 1) moderate force levels, 2) compliance to demands or fulfilment of objectives, 3) behavioural and perception changes, 4) changes lasting beyond the immediate impact of military operations, and 5) negotiations taking place at the local and/or central level. The issue of negotiations will not be discussed because the sources available for this thesis do not indicate that negotiations with the Taliban were conducted on the local level. That does not mean they did not take place, but merely that their possible occurrence or outcomes cannot be substantiated here. This chronology will form the basis for the consequent discussion of coercive success in Faryab and Kunduz.

### **5.3.1. The application of force**

Theory argues that, insofar as the desired effects and outcomes are achieved, the relative success of coercion is inverse to the level of force applied. It is assumed that coercion is more successful if force is, to quote Schelling, “threatened, not used” (Schelling, 1966). Theory is, however, unclear as to how to qualify the level of force. Arguably, it will depend on the context in which it is applied and its relative impact. A prerequisite for coercive success is consequently that the level of force applied was low, and as a minimum stayed below the threshold of brute force.

What was the level of force applied by ISAF and the ANSF from the viewpoint of coercion theory? First, the actual presence of ISAF and ANSF security personnel remained relatively low compared to the proposition of COIN theory of the ratio between security personnel and population. In phase one, the PRTs in Faryab and Kunduz were small units with literally no capacity to project power. This changed substantially through phases two and three, but even when considering the influx of US units in 2010 and the increasing numbers of the ANSF, the numbers never reached the ratio recommended by COIN theory.<sup>56</sup> It should also be noted that relatively few of the ISAF military personnel in theatre faced Afghan society on a regular basis. This can be illustrated by the PRT in Faryab, which at most included around 500 personnel. The number of personnel that faced Afghan society regularly consisted broadly of the ISR units (MOTs) and the TU. In total, these units consisted of around 100 soldiers, but due to leave and crew-rest, the number of PRT soldiers that simultaneously and regularly operated outside the PRT perimeter was far fewer. During his missions in Afghanistan, the author experienced that, of the total number of ISAF personnel present in the region, fewer than 20% faced Afghan society on a regular basis (Skaar, 2010). Arguably, therefore, outside the conduct of major operations, the ISAF presence in the Afghan local communities was in real terms marginal and far below the recommendations of the COIN concepts.

Second, although the ANSF increased substantially in numbers throughout the timeframe, the ANP remained a highly localised and badly resourced force and the ANA preferred shaping and clearing operations to staying in an area for a prolonged timeframe. The

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<sup>56</sup> At its peak the total number of ISAF forces in the RC N AOR was around 12,000. The total number of ANSF forces is unknown, but estimates vary between 25-30,000 (Pike, 2015). However, as the main bulk of these were policemen in the ANP with little training it is doubtful



ANSF capacity to maintain continuous pressure on the insurgency was thus limited to the major cities and the areas in the vicinity of the Ring Road.

Third, ISAF application of force was never high. During the course of the major operations discussed above, ISAF and the ANSF applied substantial amounts of force and the operations included rough tactical engagements. However, apart from the Orthepe valley operation and to some degree the Halmazaq, the major operations were limited in scope, time and geographical outreach; hence, outside the conduct of such operations, ISAF use of force was limited. From 2010/11 onwards, ISAF focused increasingly on mentoring and capacity building, thus downplaying its offensive capacities. The conduct of SOF operations and the kill or capture operations of course added to the regular operations, but in total the application of force remained low in Faryab and Kunduz.

Arguably, therefore, coercion theory's prerequisite that the level of force should be limited and at least not go above the threshold for brute force was valid for Faryab and Kunduz throughout the relevant timeframe.

### **5.3.2. Compliance to demands and fulfilment of objectives**

Acknowledging that the application of force was generally low, and in any case below the threshold of brute force, the next criterion against which success is assessed is the compliance with demands and the fulfilment of operational objectives. The evidence available for this thesis cannot substantiate that demands in the form of "comply or else" articulations or tacit ultimatums were used or communicated in Faryab or Kunduz. That does not mean they did not exist, but the sources available for this thesis do not reveal any such thing. Still, even if demands were not put forward openly, it is unlikely that the Taliban and insurgent groups were unaware of the consequences of continued fighting and violence. With the relatively high profile of the international military and the substantial media coverage that came about as a consequence of its presence, it is likely that the Taliban and its supporters understood that if they abstained from violent activities this would be consistent with the overarching aims and objectives of ISAF and GIRoA.<sup>57</sup>

Rather than assessing the compliance with explicit or implicit demands or tacit ultimatums, it is consequently more relevant to assess the achievement of operationally

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<sup>57</sup> The author participated in various events involving the ANA 209<sup>th</sup> Corps and the 209 Northern region police that were well covered by the Afghan media. Even though demands or tacit ultimatums were not articulated, the aims of the coalition were addressed in these meetings, and were referred to by the press.

defined objectives as they were articulated in the ISAF operational plans and orders. The operational objectives covered all lines of operation, but those most relevant to assessing coercive success are drawn from the LOO security as these most clearly addressed the use of force. The overarching objective drawn from the LOO security was the creation of a safe and secure environment (Hennum, Eggereide, Rutledal, & Marthinussen, 2011). The articulations in the operational plans and orders of ISAF called for a neutralisation of insurgent leadership, disruption of their internal freedom of movement and containing and disrupting selected insurgent areas. Broadly, the desired outcomes of the operational aims and objectives were that the Taliban and the insurgents abstained from violent activities, recruitment efforts and other actions intended to destabilise the Afghan authorities.

There are indeed methodological and practical challenges to measuring the achievements of campaign objectives. The argument can be made that the common denominator of the operational aims and objectives was that the Taliban and the insurgents abstained from violent activities and other actions intended to destabilise the Afghan authorities. This thesis thus asserts that the most relevant indicator of the fulfilment of objectives was the reduction of violence measured by the occurrence and trend of violent incidents. This section will consequently assess the achievements of campaign objectives through discussing the development of violent incidents in Faryab and Kunduz.

### **Violent incidents, occurrence and trends**

The discussion of the development of violent activities in Faryab is based on data retrieved from the CIDNE database.<sup>58</sup> CIDNE was a US system used for systematising and aggregating intelligence data based on incident reporting by military units. CIDNE was used by ISAF to present a qualified view on the security development. It is based on the assumption that the occurrence and evolution of incidents reflect, at least to some degree, the actual situation on the ground, and that there is a correlation between the occurrence of incidents and the security situation. If the number of negative incidents increased, it would be interpreted as an indicator of a deteriorating security situation and that the military campaign was not succeeding.

An incident is basically any event perceived to be of interest to the military organisation. The CIDNE database divided incidents into the primary event type and the primary event category, the latter being a subcategory of the former.

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<sup>58</sup> I could access CIDNE data through the NDRE. The database is still classified but data is used at an aggregate level in accordance with NDRE practices.

Primary event types were:

- Counter Insurgency
- Criminal Event
- Economic
- Enemy Action
- Explosive Hazard
- Friendly Action
- Friendly Fire
- Non-Combat Event
- Reintegration
- Threat Report
- Threats
- Other

To each of the primary event types are connected a number of event categories.

Typically, enemy action could be hostile fire and explosive hazard could be IED detonation. Apart from the event types and categories, CIDNE allows for sorting according to district, year, month and day.

Input to CIDNE relied on ISAF units reporting, e.g. the MOT teams, as well as other sources used by the intelligence community, including the ANSF. Since the military upholds rigorous reporting routines, I assume that all incidents input to CIDNE actually occurred and that reporting is accurate. However, some potential biases do exist. First, only incidents that became known to ISAF were reported, and clearly there would be incidents that would not be known. In the early days in 2005/6, the PRT footprint was limited. In Faryab it consisted for all practical purposes of 4 -5 MOT teams of which a maximum of 3-4 were facing Afghan local communities at any given time. It would be impossible for the MOTs and the PRT information gathering system to have a complete overview of every incident in Faryab. It is also an issue that when the ISAF and ANSF footprint increased, it would be more eyes and ears in the field that would report incidents. It is unclear the degree to which this explains, at least partly, the increase in incidents. Second, CIDNE and national reporting contain a reference and validating system that may have been interpreted differently by different contingents, hence incident reporting may fluctuate throughout the various contingents. Third, it is not fully clear what the incident describing categories actually contain, and it may have been interpreted differently by various contingents. It may be that one contingent classified an

event as criminality, whereas a similar event might have been classified as enemy action by another contingent. Fourth, and finally, incidents were reported in absolute numbers; hence, the reporting does not fully adjust for the gravity of the incidents and the occurrence of incidents does not necessarily indicate causal connections relative to ISAF activities.

Acknowledging these biases, the CIDNE system was still the system that most systematically mapped events and incidents in Afghanistan; hence, it is assessed as providing data that are sufficiently reliable.

In order to assess the development of security with respect to insurgent related incidents, I have extracted event types that are assumed to be directly connected to insurgent related activity: Enemy Action, Counter Insurgency and Explosive Hazards. It may be the case that other event types are also connected to the insurgency, e.g. various criminal events may have been conducted by the Taliban, or in support of the insurgency. It is also the case that enemy action may have been conducted by actors with little or no connection to the Taliban, but rather involved in factional infighting. As such, extracting what appears to be insurgent related data is at best only indicative of the occurrence of insurgent actions. Given these limitations, the development of insurgent related incidents in Faryab from 2005 to 2012 was distributed as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
2005	19
2006	66
2007	89
2008	168
2009	235
2010	533
2011	283
2012	464
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,857</b>

Table 5.6, incidents in Faryab

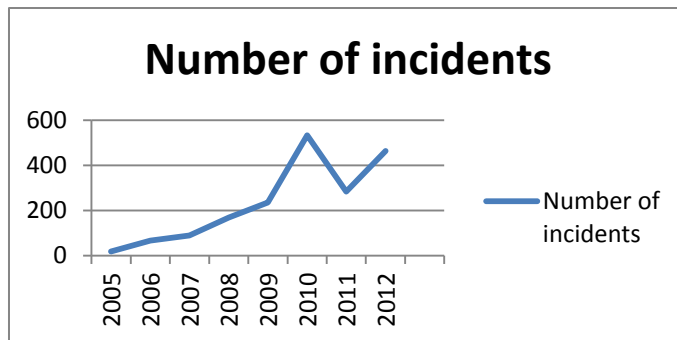


Figure 5.7

As shown in Figure 5.6, there is a steady but slow increase from 2005 to 2007, a marked increase from 2008, a similarly marked decrease in 2011 and finally a marked increase from 2012.

How are the incident statistics to be interpreted? Up to 2010, the number of violent incidents rose at an increasing pace, indicating that the ISAF and ANSF efforts did not translate into improved security. However, in 2011 there is a marked reduction in incidents that broadly corresponds to the US surge that started in 2010. By 2011, the practical impact of the increased number of military capacities became apparent, not least because the coalition now had the ability to cover larger geographical areas simultaneously. In Faryab the practical consequence was that the US units focused on the district of Ghormach, whereas the PRT could pay far more attention to the Orthepe valley. The hypothesis can therefore be made that for coercion to have utility in the Afghan conflict a certain level of force is required. The implied threat or low levels of force were not sufficient insofar as the Taliban and insurgent groups may have responded to actual pain more than to the prospect of pain. However, by 2012, the number of incidents had risen again. The military presence in 2012 was more or less equal to 2011, hence observation bias cannot account for the increase. The alternative hypothesis is therefore that the Taliban and their supporters adjusted to the increased military presence and found ways to circumvent the military pressure.

The discussion of incidents in Kunduz is broadly based on Koehler's research on security developments in Kunduz (Koehler & Gosztanyi, 2014). The occurrence of incidents reflected in Koehler's research is based on IMMAP incident data ("IMMAP homepage," 2017). Whereas the CIDNE database is based on the military reporting system, the IMMAP is based on input from NGO's, the UN and declassified military (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, pp. 72-73). The IMMAP database consists of data from a broader set of sources, and insofar as

different organisations may employ different collection routines and analytical tools, the CIDNE and the IMMAP data may not be fully consistent. It is also the case that there may be a classification bias in the type of data that is included. However, the incidents used by Koehler are termed as “negative” and include “IED explosions, all sorts of attacks, murder and kidnapping”, thus being partly consistent with the selection used above for Faryab. For the purpose of this thesis, the data quality is consequently assessed as sufficient for a comparison of the development of incidents between Faryab and Kunduz.

The distribution of incidents in Kunduz is presented in Table 5.8 and Figure 5.9 below (Koehler & Gosztanyi, 2014).

Year	Number of incidents
2007	68
2008	209
2009	310
2010	633
2011	369
2012	269

Table 5.8, incidents in Kunduz

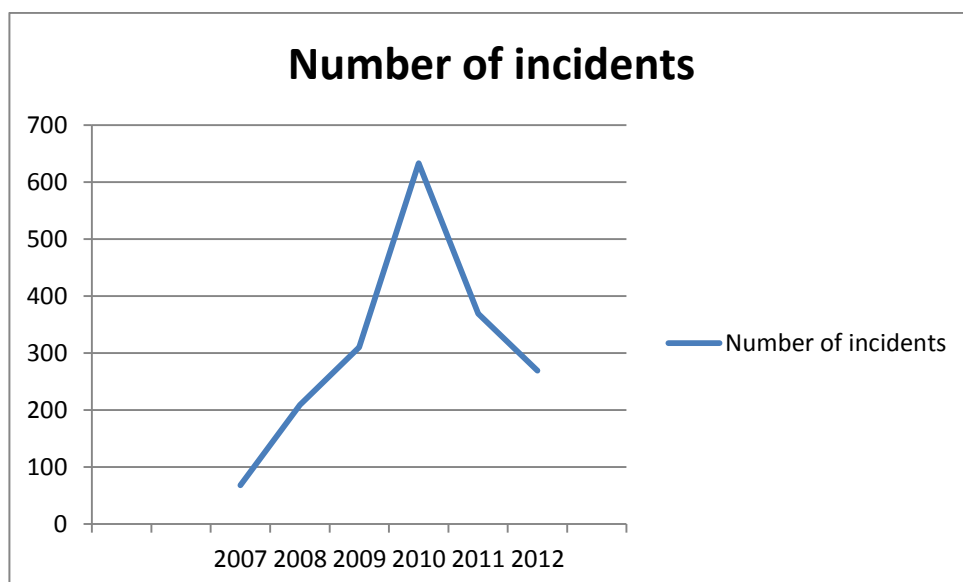


Figure 5.9

As shown in Figure 5.8, there is a steady but marked increase from 2007 to 2010, after which there is a marked decrease. The decrease corresponds broadly to the influx of US

forces in 2010, and the change in posture by the German military, illustrated in particular by the Halmazaq.

Until 2011, the developments in Faryab and Kunduz followed similar trajectories. However, there is a marked difference in 2012. Whereas the number of incidents started to increase again in Faryab, they continued to decrease in Kunduz. The argument can therefore be made that, everything else being equal, the combination of military operations and other efforts was more successful in Kunduz than in Faryab.

Why did the development of security-related incidents differ so significantly between Faryab and Kunduz in 2012? This is initially an issue that cannot be determined with certainty as the causal relationships between efforts and outcomes were highly complex. There were, of course, contextual differences between Faryab and Kunduz. Faryab included the remote province of Ghormach in which the coalition was never able to exert control in the areas south of the Bazar. However, Kunduz also included areas in Chahar Darah, the village of Ghor Tepa in the Kunduz district and areas in the districts of Imam Shahib and Archi that were never under the firm control of coalition forces. The Pashtun population in Kunduz was comparatively more numerous than in Faryab, and had occupied positions of formal authority, which was rarely the case in Faryab. However, without further evidence this thesis cannot substantiate that the contextual differences and the ethnic distribution were significant factors to explain the difference in incidents in 2012.

Can the difference be explained by a difference in aid and reconstruction efforts? Clearly Germany had more resources than Norway, and the Germans spent relatively more money in Kunduz than Norway did in Faryab ("Afghanistan, Situation and Cooperation," 2017; Godal, 2016). As noted by Norwegian PRT commanders, there was a certain bias in the distribution of aid and reconstruction efforts that disfavoured the Pashtu communities, an issue that was regularly raised in meetings between the PRT and the local communities. However, there is little empirical support for the connection between development efforts and the distribution of incidents. Although not valid for the year 2012, the BMZ evaluation report on the impact of development in North East Afghanistan 2005-2009 is still likely to be relevant when noting that: "we do not find evidence that development aid is positively, consistently and significantly associated with threat perceptions. More aid does not reduce threats" ("Afghanistan, Situation and Cooperation," 2017, p. 36). This is consistent with the NDRE perception studies in which there does not seem to be a clear and significant link



between aid and reconstruction efforts and security (Marthinussen & Nordli, 2013). Although potentially a factor, it cannot be substantiated that the difference in incidents was significantly influenced by a bias in aid and reconstruction efforts.

Was there a significant difference in the military presence in the provinces? There may have been local differences in the fielding of ANSF forces between Faryab and Kunduz. However, both provinces received a Brigade each of the 209<sup>th</sup> Corps, and these were in position and operable in 2012. The ALP programme was initiated in both provinces, but the distribution of forces may have been different between the provinces. There are no firm numbers for the ALP Taskhils and it may have been the case that the programme was better supported in Kunduz than in Faryab. Kunduz also has a history with relatively strong Provincial Chiefs of Police as illustrated by the late Said Kheely. However, there is little evidence supporting the notion that the ANSF in Kunduz was significantly better resourced and trained than in Faryab.

As a consequence of the US surge, Faryab and Kunduz received a battalion battle group each; hence, the US ability to project force as a consequence of the surge was not significantly different. However, the German Task Forces may have been a significant difference between the provinces.<sup>59</sup> The Task Forces enabled the Bundeswehr to project force on an hitherto unprecedented level, which was demonstrated through the Halmazaq. It also enabled continuous support to the ANSF on a level that could not be matched by the Norwegian Task Force or Mentoring Unit. Although the causal connections cannot be fully determined, the German ability and willingness to use its military forces offensively may, at least partly, explain the difference in violent incidents between Faryab and Kunduz in 2012. The German Task Forces enabled the Bundeswehr to project force on a hitherto unprecedented scale, and marked a break in the traditional German approach to which the Taliban and the insurgent groups had become accustomed.

### **5.3.3. Perception and Behavioural Changes**

The next factor to be discussed here is the degree to which the military operations led to 1) a perception and 2) behavioural changes consistent with the coercer's wishes. First, theory assumes that one factor that may indicate coercive success is that the population perceives that security has improved. There are in particular two studies that are suited to shedding light on the local population's perception of security. In Faryab, the NDRE did a

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<sup>59</sup> This includes both Task Force Kunduz and Task Force MeS.

series of 8 waves of so-called perception studies from 2010 to 2014, of which waves 1 to 6 are relevant for the timeframe studied here (Eggereide et al., 2012; Hennum et al., 2011). With respect to Kunduz, Koehler et al. have studied the International Intervention and its impact on security and governance in North-East Afghanistan (Koehler & Gosztanyi, 2014; Koehler & Zürcher, 2007). Both studies are based on big-N surveys and interviews, but since they do not share identical questionnaires and methodologies, they are not fully comparable. However, acknowledging the methodological and practical differences, both studies are assessed as suitable for providing valid information as to how the development of security was perceived in Faryab and Kunduz.

Second, behavioural changes are assumed by theory to be another factor that may indicate success. If the general population abstained from supporting the insurgency and the insurgents abstained from recruiting, training and conducting activities aimed at destabilising the government, this would generally amount to behaviour that was consistent with the coercer's wishes. This section will lean on the observations by the Norwegian and German militaries as to whether the activities and operations conducted by the coalition resulted in the desired changes.

### **Perceptions**

In Faryab, the NDRE studies, waves 1 to 6, covered the timeframe from April 2010 to November 2012 (Eggereide & Barstad, 2012a; Marthinussen et al., 2010). The surveys were conducted with sample sizes between 1,069 and 1,433 and each survey was conducted over a period of approximately two weeks through cooperation with the Afghan Centre for Socio-Economic and Opinion research (ASCOR) out of Maymaneh (Eggereide et al., 2012, p. 8). The surveys covered a wide range of subjects, but of particular interest to this thesis are the perceptions of the development of security.

The surveys indicate a steady decline in the perception of security from 2010 to 2012. In the first wave, more than 80% say that they are very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the security situation, whereas this has reduced to around 40% in wave 6. With respect to the potential impact of the international military to provide security, only around 1% perceived them to be the main provider of security. The main provider of security is persistently perceived to be the ANP, followed by the people themselves (Eggereide et al., 2012, pp. 17-18). The respondents generally had a good impression of the international military, but the visibility of the international military decreased significantly from wave 1 to wave 6. In wave

1, 16% said they saw ISAF less than once a month, whereas this had increased to 81% in wave 6 (Eggereide & Barstad, 2012a, p. 22)

In all waves, unemployment is consistently addressed as the most important problem. Otherwise, lack of water and poverty are consistently within the top 5 problems in the area. Lack of security is in the top 5 only in waves 4 and 6 (see Figure 5.10 below) (Eggereide et al., 2012, p. 23).

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6
1	Un-employment	Un-employment	Un-employment	Un-employment	Un-employment	Un-employment
2	Lack of electricity	Lack of water	Illiteracy	Lack of water	Lack of water	Lack of security
3	Lack of water	Poverty	Lack of water	Lack of security	Lack of electricity	Poverty
4	Poverty	Illiteracy	Poverty	Poor roads	Poverty	Lack of water
5	Corruption	Corruption	Lack of electricity	Poverty	Illiteracy	Illiteracy

Figure 5.10, the 5 biggest problems in Faryab

Why did the population perceive security to deteriorate? The results of the surveys do not provide convincing answers to this. However, they suggest that lack of the kind of security that could be provided through military means was less of an issue than expected. As the table above suggests, most people were more concerned with problems to which the use of force or the neutralisation of the Taliban provided no solutions. The surveys further suggest that the international military were not perceived to be a major contributor of security and they became increasingly less visible to the local communities. A likely conclusion is therefore that the international military did not have a significant effect on the local populations' perceptions of the development of security in Faryab and the military operations did not translate into an improved perception of security.

The study conducted by Koehler et al. covered around 80 villages and around 3,500 households in four to six districts in the provinces of Takhar and Kunduz from 2007 to 2013 (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, pp. 67-68; Koehler & Gosztanyi, 2014). The study shows that whereas in 2007 99% perceived security to have increased in their village, this had sunk to 18% in 2011, but it increased to 59% again in 2013 (Chiari, 2014). This broadly coincides

with the incident numbers for Kunduz, suggesting that a reduced number of incidents led to an improved perception of security.

A marked difference between Faryab and Kunduz is the perception of who had an impact on security. Whereas the respondents in Faryab perceived ISAF to contribute less than 1% of the security, similar figures for Kunduz vary between 80% in 2007 to 6% in 2011 and up to 16% again in 2013. The study also illustrates that in Kunduz there was an increasing sense of “value threat”, insofar as the number of respondents that perceived the foreign forces to “Threaten local customs and Islamic values in our community” rose from just below 30% in 2009 to above 80% in 2013 (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, p. 79).

According to Koehler, the study suggests that the ISAF COIN strategy did not lead to positive perceptions of the contribution on security of the international military, even though objective markers such as the occurrence of violent incidents decreased. Rather, Koehler argues “what seemed to work in the eyes of the population was the transition of security responsibility to official Afghan security forces” (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, p. 86).

Although the perception studies do not provide convincing results with respect to how the population perceived the effects of the use of force, they do provide at least two valid take-outs. First, the impact of the international military on popular perceptions of security was generally low. This applied particularly in Faryab, but from 2010 it also sunk considerably in Kunduz. As the NDRE studies illustrate, the local areas were rarely exposed to ISAF units, and generally they perceived their impact to be negligible. Second, there are no clear correlations between the COIN campaign and the perceptions of security, suggesting that offensive operations performed by ISAF did not add positively to the populations’ perceptions of security.

## **Behaviour**

Behavioural changes as a consequence of coercion are difficult to quantify or assess because of the immense complexity of Afghan society and the inherent challenges of causality. However, the observations of the Norwegian and German militaries provide some insight into how the Afghan population reacted to the presence and use of force by the coalition and in particular the international military. This section will draw on anecdotal evidence presented by military personnel with substantial field experience. It will first present a general assessment of Afghan behaviour in the face of the presence of the international

military in Faryab and secondly present an assessment of the behavioural consequences of the major operations.

Through their missions in the countryside, the Norwegian military faced the local Afghan communities on a number of occasions. They unilaterally report that, in their perception, the local Afghans became increasingly less supportive to ISAF from 2006/7 onwards. During the first phase, the MOTs were regularly welcomed and treated with curiosity and friendliness. In phases two and three, it became increasingly more usual that patrols were met with suspicion and a hostile attitude (NO03, 4 dec 2014; NO05, 21 January 2015). Several MOT commanders also note that the local communities eventually tired of being visited by a row of new MOTs asking the same questions without being able to contribute materially to whatever needs were relevant. The MOT commanders also note that they doubted that their presence had any significant effects on the population's support for the Taliban. It was generally acknowledged that a consequence of the modus operandi of the international military was that they could not provide the 24/7 security that was required in order to prevent the Taliban from exerting influence in the local communities. However, through the conduct of Key Leader Engagements and relation building efforts, some MOT commanders note that they were able to establish good relations with some local communities (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014). Through such activities, the MOTs perceived that it was easier for the local communities, at least temporarily, to take a stand against the Taliban.

The major operations of the HKY II type that were conducted in phase II did not result in any significant changes in behaviour. After the operations' active phases, the area in question was more or less left to itself, and the Taliban was able to re-enter the area. Clearly, operations that were highly limited in scope, time and geographical outreach had very little effect outside their active phases. Several officers note that they could not observe that the military operations translated to a better perception of security among the Afghan population, or that the operations improved security in real terms. In particular, some MOT commanders expressed a substantial scepticism towards the large scale operations like Harekate Yolo II and Vanguard Viper, which to their mind did not address the real issues of the conflict. According to a Norwegian officer speaking about operation Vanguard Viper, "It was a beautiful operation, performed to excellence and I was really impressed with what we could do tactically, but I am not really sure what it achieved" (NO01, 10 June 2014). The Norwegian military interviewees note unilaterally that, despite tactical successes, they could

not see that the HKY II, Vanguard Viper or similar operations had any significant positive effects when the operations were terminated. However, as one MOT commander noted of Vanguard Viper, it demonstrated the coercive potential of ISAF, and was as such useful when engaging in discussions with the local communities (NO01, 10 June 2014).

The Orthepe Valley Operation and to some extent the Halmazaq were different to the above-mentioned operations. The Orthepe Valley Operation combined a sequential approach with clear Afghan participation and eventually Afghan lead and emphasising institution building and reconstruction efforts. The outcomes of the Orthepe Valley Operation proved to be more sustainable than the earlier operations and seemed to be more convincing with respect to persuading people to side with the government. The Halmazaq also led to a more durable change in local behaviour through enabling the local villages to assume more responsibility for their security. Arguably therefore, operations that had a long time span, focused on local presence and combined military operations with institution building and reconstruction efforts had a greater impact on local behaviour than the HKY II type operations.

This, it may seem, is a trivial conclusion. After all, it must be expected that a long term commitment is more effective than the short term engagements represented by the earlier operations. However, from the HKY two in autumn 2007, it took approximately three to four years before the Orthepe valley operation was conducted, indicating that it takes time for the military organisation to adapt its operations to the reality on the ground.

### **Conclusion: perceptions and behaviour**

Did the military efforts lead to perceptual and behavioural changes among the local Afghan population and the insurgents that were consistent with the wishes of the coalition and in particular the international military? In Faryab, the NDRE perception studies suggest that, more than anything, the international military had limited impact on the population's perceptions of security. Most Afghans were rarely exposed to the ISAF presence in Faryab, and in any case perceived their impact on security to be negligible. The case of Kunduz is slightly different insofar as the local Afghans perceived the international military to be an important contributor to security in 2007, but this had changed significantly by 2011 when only 6% perceived ISAF to be a major contributor. Koehler argues that the COIN concept, as it was executed by the international military, did not lead to an improved perception of security.

The behavioural effects of the military presence and the larger scale military operations cannot be fully determined. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Afghans tired of the international presence, but otherwise were generally indifferent. The early large scale operations did not translate into a sustained change of behaviour, but the Orthepe Valley Operation and the Halmazaq seemed to have had more lasting effects. These operations did, to a far larger extent than the HKY II type operations, combine the use of force with sustained presence, institution building and development and reconstruction efforts.

#### **5.3.4. Duration of effects**

The effects of coercion, this thesis argues, must last beyond the actual conduct of military operations in order to be successful. It is not sufficient that effects, as for example a reduction in the number violent incidents, last only throughout the active phase of focused military operations. Theory is unclear as to how long changes should last and it cannot be expected that they would last indefinitely. This thesis asserts that a valid measure of a durable coercive success was that effects and outcomes that were achieved from, among other factors, coercive use of force, lasted until functional and sustainable systems of local governance and institutions that enabled the Afghan authorities to independently handle future security threats were in place.

In the previous sections, success is assumed to constitute a combination of a reduction in the occurrence of violent incidents, a positive perception of the development of security and behaviour consistent with the coercer's wishes. In those cases where success was achieved, did it last in accordance with the definition above? This section will discuss the duration of effects as a consequence of the major operations and the kill or capture operations.

The major operations of HKY II and VV did temporarily reduce the level of violence during their active phases, but as demonstrated by the NDRE surveys and noted by the Norwegian military, these operations did not have durable positive effects (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Svein E. Martinussen, 2015; NO01, 10 June 2014; Noetzel, 2010). From 2007 until 2010, the general pattern of the coercive use of force was that ISAF in cooperation with the ANSF conducted shaping and clearing operations limited in scope, time and geography as illustrated by HKY II and VV. The common denominator for these operations was that they entailed a lengthy shaping period followed by a short clearing period of 4 to 7 days. The clearing usually ended when the Taliban and insurgent formations fled the area or simply melted into the population. In any case, the coalition enjoyed tactical successes inasmuch as



the opposing forces no longer engaged in combat. However, as the case studies of HKY II and VV illustrate, the tactical successes did not translate into lasting changes. After HKY II, the coalition did not or was not able to capitalise on the tactical successes and the Taliban soon re-entered the area (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Noetzel, 2010). Acknowledging that effects should last beyond the immediate impact of operations, these major operations did not translate into coercive successes.

The Orthepe Valley Operation was assessed by the Norwegian military as a durable success. According to the Norwegian military, the operation successfully cleared the area of major insurgent formations and facilitated the establishment of durable institutions of security that lasted beyond the presence of the PRT. It has not been possible to extract statistics of the development of the level of violence in the Orthepe valley, e.g. incident reporting extracted from the CIDNE database; hence, the claim of its success cannot be substantiated through quantifiable data. However, there was a general consensus within the Norwegian military that the operation resulted in outcomes far more durable than operations like HKY II and VV. This thesis thus maintains that the Orthepe Valley Operation satisfies the theory's requirement of durability in order to be assessed as successful.

The way the Halmazaq was executed was that it took the form of a decisive battle that lasted for four days, after which the insurgents stopped fighting. In this respect, the Halmazaq did not deviate too much from the KKY II and Vanguard Viper. However, both prior to and in the aftermath of the clearing operations, the coalition forces worked intimately with the local population in order to gain support and acceptance. The operation further resulted in the provision of aid and reconstruction efforts that were coordinated with local requirements. Finally, following COIN theory, the hold and build phases were emphasised by establishing structures that would provide security in the aftermath of the clearing phase. However, as noted by some respondents, it is questionable how long the district of Chahar Darah remained under governmental control as the Taliban slowly re-entered the area. From the perspective of this thesis, the Halmazaq is assessed as partly successful.

It is unclear how the impact of the ISAF kill or capture campaign affected the insurgency. There is a general consensus that neutralising or removing the local Taliban commanders temporarily reduced their capacity to plan and conduct operations, and as such temporarily reduced the military potential of the local Taliban. However, as noted by the Norwegian military, it was difficult to assess any long term effects of these operations outside their immediate tactical outcomes (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). The

assessment of the Norwegian military was that removing a local commander impacted the group in question from three weeks to two to three months, depending on the standing, network and qualifications of the commander. Without substantial evidence, this thesis asserts that kill and capture operations may have had short-term and tactical effects, but it cannot substantiate that they had a durable impact on the insurgency.

Finally, and although outside the scope of this thesis, it seems clear that the effects of the ISAF presence after its departure are indeed questionable. Since the PRT departed from Faryab in 2012, the province has experienced an increasing number of attacks and there is a general consensus that security has deteriorated. The Taliban has re-established itself in most areas, and even the city of Maymaneh is assumed to be influenced by the Taliban. The recent years fighting over the control of the city of Kunduz indicate that the situation in Kunduz is no better. The Afghan authorities are, at the time of writing (March 2017), in control of the city, but there is a continual struggle between the Taliban and the government, suggesting that the structures that were created up to 2012/13 are no longer functional. The situation that materialised after the departure of the international military suggests that in Faryab and Kunduz coercive success depended on the presence of the international military. The institutions that were built and reinforced during the ISAF campaign did not seem to be sufficiently robust to function efficiently without international military support.

#### **5.3.5. Coercive success in Faryab and Kunduz, conclusions**

Coercive success is here defined as the relative and cumulative occurrence of moderate force levels, achievements of objectives, behavioural and perception changes, and the duration of effects.

The starting point for assessing coercive success is that the level of force applied does not rise above the threshold for brute force. The opponent must have real choices and the consequence of not yielding to the coercers wishes is not annihilation. As the sections above argue, the coalition forces never applied force on a level that would translate into brute force. The prerequisite of moderate force levels is consequently validated.

The discussion above suggests that the degree to which the military operations and activities translated into success is uncertain. The reduction of violent incidents in both provinces in 2011 correlates with the impact of the surge, and as far as other activities cannot account for the reduction; it is likely that the increase in coalition military activity resulted in a decrease in violence. However, as the occurrence of incidents rose again in Faryab in 2012, the causal relationship between coercive use of force and insurgent-induced violence is

unclear. The cause of the continued reduction in incidents in Kunduz in 2012 cannot be fully determined, but the impact of the German Task Forces may, at least partly, explain the development.

The major operations of the HKY II type did not translate into success, whereas the operations that employed a long-term and holistic approach, like the Orthepe Valley Operation and the Halmazaq, were more successful. However, the perception studies referred to above suggest that the population generally did not perceive ISAF to be a major contributor to security, and in particular in Faryab, ISAF was perceived to be of negligible impact on local security.

This thesis thus argues that, apart from temporary and tactical effects, ISAF use of force generally did not translate into success consistent with the propositions of theory, as illustrated in Table 5.10 below.

	<b>Assumption/prerequisite</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1	Moderate force levels	Yes	
2	Fulfilment of objectives	Partly	
3	Perception changes consistent with the coercer's wishes	No	
4	Durable effects	Partly	With the exception of the Orthepe Valley operation
5	Negotiations	Not applicable	

Table 5.11, coercive success in Faryab and Kunduz, conclusions

## **6. Conclusion: the utility of coercion theory in Northern Afghanistan**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This thesis has aimed to explore the utility of coercion theory in the Afghan conflict through examining the use of force by ISAF as it was conducted by Norway in Faryab province and Germany in Kunduz province. Military coercion is here defined as “the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors”. The basis for military coercion is thus the notion that it entails the contingent value of influencing the opponent’s behaviour. However, theory has not been overly concerned with complex contemporary conflicts where the issues at stake are fluid and not easily recognisable and the actors are difficult to identify and engaged in a constantly shifting play. Rather, theory has focused on inter-state conflict in which the parties to the conflict are easily identifiable, actors generally equal states and the objects of coercion are the states’ governments. The Afghan conflict cannot easily be compared to the conflicts that are mostly discussed in the coercion literature. The actors in Afghanistan were not states and were not easily identifiable. Their motivations, alliances and allegiances were fluid and constantly shifting and the issues at stake were highly context dependent. This thesis argues that the Afghan conflict was qualitatively different from the cases that have underpinned coercion theory; hence, examining its utility in this conflict will contribute to the development of theory.

The concluding chapter will address the following themes. First it will present a summary of the findings presented above. Second, it will discuss four factors that may explain the relative absence of success. Third, it will explore the degree to which the Afghan conflict was representative of contemporary or future similar conflicts, thus whether the thesis’ findings may inform the development of scholarship, research and policy. Fourth, it will assess the consequences for coercion theory and address the requirement for revision and development. Fifth and finally, it will present some lessons and recommendations for NATO on how force may be applied coercively in future similar conflicts.

## **6.2. Summary of findings**

This thesis is organised along three trajectories. First, it aims to explain coercion theory, identifies its central elements and defines what may theoretically constitute coercive success. Second, it presents the cases of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz and in particular how these nations applied force within the ISAF organisation. Third, it discusses the degree to which the cases represented application of force consistent with theory, whether the conflict adhered to the basic assumptions of theory and the degree to which coercion produced the desired outcomes.

The key findings of the thesis can be summarised by answering the following questions: 1) Was force used consistent with theory? 2) Did the situation on the ground conform with the basic assumptions of theory? 3) Did coercive use of force deliver the desired outcomes?

First, was force used consistent with theory? Neither Norway nor Germany had articulated coercive intentions or consciously pursued a coercive strategy. There was no explicit mention of coercion in any of the operational plans and orders, and, apart from the kill or capture operations, it cannot be substantiated that ISAF consciously pursued a coercive strategy. However, this thesis argues that in real and practical terms the Norwegian and German units applied force consistent with theory on a number of occasions. The articulations of the ISAF campaign plans support the notion that it was the intention of ISAF to persuade the insurgents to change their behaviour according to the wishes of ISAF and GIRoA. Words like ‘contain’, ‘suppress’ and ‘neutralise’ are indicative of the intention of ISAF to use military force to “stop or undo undesirable actions”. The presence of ISAF units, even the small unit patrols illustrated by the Norwegian MOTs, were not coercive instruments in their own right. However, they were representatives of the ISAF organisation and had the ability to call on ISAF firepower if required, thus representing an implied threat. The four large-scale operations discussed above all intended to use military force to influence the opponents to “stop or undo undesirable actions”. The coercive mechanism through which they were assumed to work was in most cases denial, through reducing the military capacity of the Taliban. Arguably, therefore, force was used consistent with theory.

Second, did the situation on the ground conform with the basic assumptions of theory? The basic assumptions upon which coercion theory rests are here defined as: 1) unitary actors, 2) the rationality presumption, 3) the credible threat, 4) the function of demands, and finally 5) the element of choice.

Actors are here defined as unitary insofar as they are identifiable, their response is concerted and coherent to an outer influence and they are limited in numbers. The responses to ISAF use of force in Faryab and Kunduz were frequently well-organised and concerted, in particular in those areas that were perceived to be the Taliban heartland. However, the Taliban was also a fragmented movement characterised by inner tensions and groups that engaged in in-fighting and competed for resources, power and influence. The Taliban brand was frequently high-jacked by actors that, from the outset, were not overly sympathetic to the Taliban cause, or used the brand for individual purposes. It is therefore questionable whether there was a Taliban, but rather a number of Taliban groups that were intertwined in the local power dynamics in ways that were frequently inconsistent with the Taliban's strategic aims. This thesis consequently argues that the Taliban in Faryab and Kunduz cannot be perceived as a unitary actor as presupposed by theory.

Coercion theory assumes actors to be rational insofar as their behaviour is guided by a means-ends logic, as argued by rational choice theory and economically derived cost-benefit models. This thesis argues that a narrow understanding of rationality is insufficient to explain insurgent behaviour, but that the actors were generally rational as presupposed by theory. In most cases, behaviour could be explained as a function of the interests of the actors, even though these interests were not necessarily material or could be framed within an economically derived cost-benefit model. The willingness to accept cost may challenge the presumption of rationality. However, this thesis argues that the Taliban perceived the ability to absorb cost as a strategic asset that would increase their standing in the local communities.

The credible threat is here assumed to consist of two components: the coercer's ability to raise costs and the ability of the coerced to endure it. The threat is credible insofar as the coercer's ability to raise costs exceeds the ability of the coerced to endure it. This thesis argues that ISAF and the coalition were generally incapable of presenting a credible threat as long as the Taliban and its supporters were capable of absorbing more pain and suffering than the coalition were willing and capable to inflict. The question can be raised, though, that even if ISAF and the ANSF had been willing to raise costs beyond the level of pain and suffering that was endurable by the insurgents, would this for most practical purposes have equalled brute force. The experiences from the Soviet occupation suggest that inappropriate use of force would have led to that the existential component becoming more important, and created greater sympathy for the Taliban cause. A likely outcome might thus have been the increase of the insurgents, and probably the population's, ability to endure pain and suffering.

The PRTs or ISAF in Faryab and Kunduz did not present clearly articulated demands to the Taliban as presupposed by theory. It may have been that such demands were presented by Afghan forces or institutions, but the sources available to this thesis cannot substantiate this. However, it is unlikely that the Taliban did not understand that a reduction of their violent activities would be consistent with the coercer's wishes. This thesis assumes that the overarching aims and objectives were known to or understood by the Taliban and it is unlikely that they did not understand that a reduction or absence of violence would imply a reduction in activities and operations directed against the Taliban.

Finally, the data available for this thesis suggests that the insurgents perceived that they had real choices with respect to compliance or non-compliance as presupposed by theory. Circumstantial evidence as well as the increase in violent incidents suggests that the coalition's coercive use of force generally did not limit the freedom of action of the insurgents. There were temporary impacts during the major operations, and there was a reduction in the number of incidents that coincided with the surge of 2010-11.

A summary of the assumptions of theory relative to the actual situation on the ground is presented in Figure 6.1 below.

	<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>The situation on the ground</b>
1	Unitary actors	No
2	Rational actors	Yes, but theory's presumption is insufficient
3	The credible threat	No
4	Demands	Only implicitly
5	Choice	Yes
	<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	<b><i>Inconsistent with theory</i></b>

Table 6.1, the assumptions of theory and the situation on the ground.

This thesis thus argues that coercion theory is based on assumptions that were absent, or present only to a limited degree, in Faryab and Kunduz. Without these assumptions, coercion theory was of limited value for predicting effects and outcomes in the conflict.

Finally, did the coercive use of force deliver the desired outcomes? The starting point for assessing coercive success is that the level of force applied does not rise above the threshold of brute force; the opponent must have real choices and the consequence of not yielding to the coercer's wishes is not annihilation. As the sections above argue, the coalition



forces never applied force on a level that would translate into brute force. The prerequisite of moderate force levels is consequently validated.

The discussion above suggests that the degree to which the military operations and activities translated into success is questionable. The reduction of violent incidents in both provinces in 2011 correlates with the impact of the surge, and insofar as other activities cannot account for the reduction, it is likely that the increase in coalition military activity resulted in a decrease in violence. However, as the occurrence of incidents rose again in Faryab in 2012, the causal relationship between coercive use of force and insurgent-induced violence is questionable. The cause of the continued reduction of incidents in Kunduz in 2012 is unclear, but the impact of the German Task Forces may, at least partly, explain the development.

The major operations of the HKY II type did not translate into success, whereas the operations that employed a long-term and holistic approach, like the Orthepe Valley Operation and the Halmazaq, were more successful. However, the perception studies referred to above suggest that the population generally did not perceive ISAF to be a major contributor to security and that, in particular in Faryab, ISAF was perceived to be of negligible impact on local security.

Table 6.2 below presents a summary of the assessment of coercive success.

	<b>Assumption/prerequisite</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1	Moderate force levels	Yes	
2	Fulfilment of objectives	Partly	
3	Perception changes consistent with the coercer's wishes	No	
4	Durable effects	Partly	With the exception of the Orthepe Valley operation
5	Negotiations	Not applicable	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>Partly successful</i>	

Table 6.2, coercive success, summary

The conclusion of the thesis findings are consequently as follows:

1. ISAF and the PRT used force consistent with theory in order to influence their opponents' behaviour. However, neither ISAF nor Norway and Germany had developed or consciously pursued a coercive strategy.
2. Coercion theory was of limited value to predict effects and outcomes, because the basic presumptions upon which theory rests were generally not, or only to a limited degree, present in the Afghan conflict.
3. When force was used consistent with theory, it was in most cases not successful. It did not provide effects and outcomes as suggested by theory. Coercive use of force was partly successful only in those cases where it was carefully adjusted to the local situation, it was combined with non-military efforts and local ownership was vital.

Arguably, therefore, coercion theory in its present stage is of limited value to predict effects and outcomes in the Afghan conflict. The study has revealed substantial lacunas in the potential of coercion theory to provide explanatory power to contemporary complex conflicts like the Afghan and further development of theory is required.

### **6.3. Four factors that may explain the relative absence of success**

Norway and Germany, or indeed ISAF, did not consciously pursue a coercive strategy, but applied force consistent with theory on a number of occasions. Coercive use of force was, at best, a partial success, and was not able or sufficient to influence the insurgency as presupposed by theory. After 7 years of operations that involved the Norwegian and German militaries in their most intense combat operations since the WWII and spending a vast amount of money and resources on military as well as civilian efforts, the outcomes hardly met expectations.<sup>60</sup> The absence of coercive success calls for some reflections on why this was the case. There may be, and obviously were, a number of reasons for its relative absence, but four potential causes will be discussed here: 1) shortage of resources, 2) the interaction between the PRT/ISAF and the Afghan population, 3) the battle orientation of the military and 4) the inherent characteristics of Afghanistan and the Afghan conflict.

#### **Resources**

From its early and groping start as a force that were to deal mainly with the situation in and around Kabul, ISAF rose to a major military operation which in its peak included more than 130,000 soldiers. The increase came about as a consequence of the commitment to include the whole of Afghanistan in the ISAF AOR, the deteriorating security situation, but also in the belief that more resources would enable ISAF to deal more efficiently with the insurgency (Baker, 2009; Bumiller & Landlernov, 2009). As such, the expansion of the ISAF operation fits neatly into the notion that more resources would fix the problem.

Historically, the potential impact of not having enough resources has been a recurring element when aiming to explain the lack of military success. The most prominent example may be the US efforts in Vietnam in which the US military consistently asked for more resources (Nagl, 2002). At its peak, more than 500 000 US soldiers served in Vietnam and the US air force had delivered more ordnance than it did during the Second World War. Still, the US was not able to achieve its political goals. Can lack of resources explain the relative absence of success in the provinces of Faryab and Kunduz?

Compared to the COIN dogma of a security to population ratio of 1:50, the coalition was never capable of establishing sufficient resources to conduct the hold and build part. ISAF in the north was not resourced to deal effectively with a rising insurgency insofar as the units that were able to project force or face Afghan society on a regular basis in the northern

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<sup>60</sup> Norway spent more than 18 billion Nkr combined on military and civilian efforts (Godal, 2016).

region amounted to no more than 2-3,000 soldiers at its peak. Clearly, ISAF had access to vast amounts of firepower if needed, but defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan was not first and foremost an issue of firepower. Establishing and maintaining a safe and secure situation literally required, as Kalyvas argues, the ability to physically control an area and a population, which for all practical purposes translated into boots on the ground (Kalyvas, 2006).

The Norwegian military argued that the ANSF, in particular the ANP, was not able to fill the void opened when the combat forces left the area (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; NO01, 10 June 2014). Neither ISAF nor the ANA had the resources to stay in the area indefinitely, and the ANA was doctrinally inclined to conduct offensive search and destroy missions (Giustozzy, 2015, pp. 206-208). The author was on various occasions presented with the view that the ANA always meant that holding an area and creating everyday security was a job for the ANP (Skaar, 2010). The ANP was not adequately resourced and suffered from low training standards and poor leadership. The ANP was in any case mainly locally recruited, and deeply intertwined with the local power dynamics in ways that frequently prevented them from effectively engaging with the Taliban or any other informal structures of power (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO02, 10 May 2014). Since neither the ANSF nor ISAF was able to create a durable security situation, it was very difficult for NGOs and other organisations to enter and operate in the contested areas and to conduct the mainly civilian tasks of reconstruction and development.

The lack of resources argument clearly has some merit. The US initiated surge initially resulted in a decrease in violent incidents in Faryab and Kunduz, and the efforts to bolster the ANSF capacities clearly improved their effectiveness. However, in Faryab, the number of incidents started to climb again in 2012, and the Taliban did not leave Kunduz, but slowly re-entered the district of Chahar Darah. Koehler argues that “the specific security indicators of foreign forces also do not improve as the COIN effort produces clear and intended results in terms of improved physical security” (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, p. 86). The NDRE perception studies suggest that the physical security that could be provided by the international military was assessed to be of little relevance by the Afghan population. Other challenges were more important.

The main challenge with respect to resources as a factor that may explain lack of coercive success may thus be that the issues that fuelled the insurgency could not be resolved by an increase of military resources. Rather, the dysfunctionality of the Afghan government, the continuous infighting and factionalism of the local strongmen and international

community's inability to deliver on expectations was more important. In the absence of other explanations, lack of resources may have been a factor, but cannot alone explain the limited degree of success.

### **The interaction between the international military and the Afghan population**

Throughout their mission, the Norwegian and German militaries established substantial networks and points of contact with various parts of Afghan society. The interaction between the PRT in Faryab and Afghan society amounted to a wide range of activities, from the PRT commanders' regular attendance at the Provincial Governor's Security Council every Sunday to a number of so-called Key Leader Engagements with senior representatives of the Afghan authorities and the ad hoc meetings between the MOTs and representatives of the local Afghan communities (Huse, 10 April 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014; NO04, 21 Febr 2015). The PRT in Kunduz made similar connections, and although the structures and occurrence of the meetings may have been slightly different, the military and civilian part of the PRT established and maintained a wide network of Afghan contacts on all levels of society (GE04, 28 Oct 2015; GE12, 18 April 2016).

The magnitude of the contact between Afghan society and the international militaries can be illustrated by the mission log for the PRT in Faryab. The operational activity of the PRT included a substantial number of missions where its units left the PRT camp and were visible to and communicated and interacted with Afghan communities. In 2010, the PRT recorded more than 17,000 missions outside the camp perimeter (Martinussen, 2014).<sup>61</sup> The NDRE perception studies suggest that the presence of the PRT was well known in the province. In 2010, more than 80% of the respondents reported that they saw ISAF units once a month or more, although the percentage decreased to less than 20% in 2012 (Eggereide et al., 2012).

However, the international militaries represented an alien force that did not share the cultural or religious preferences of Afghan society, could not speak the native languages and could easily be perceived as an unwelcome occupier. Their units travelled the Afghan countryside in armoured cars and used lethal force on a number of occasions. The way the ISAF units interacted with Afghan society could easily provide ample opportunities for

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<sup>61</sup> The mission log included all missions outside the camp perimeter, hence a substantial number of these missions would have been for logistical or other reasons not specifically intended to engage with local Afghan communities. However, even missions that did not include direct contact were observed by local Afghans and should be included in the overall footprint of the PRT.

groups and individuals that did not approve of the foreign presence to use it as a justification for their own use of violence. The Taliban regularly issued statements and video-clips that aimed to target the legitimacy of the foreign forces because of their behaviour and use of force. It is intuitive, therefore, that the mere presence of the international militaries and the way they approached Afghan society represented a behavioural and communicational liability that could influence the outcome of their activities. Initially, if the Western militaries had engaged in abusive use of force or used force in ways that were not legitimate according to international law or Afghan customs, this would clearly have been a factor that influenced the interaction with the Afghan communities. President Karzai was, for example, deeply critical of the use of airpower and the night operations conducted by SOF units (AlJazeera, 2013). It may have been the case that Norwegian or German units misbehaved or engaged in abusive behaviour, but as the author has found no evidence to support such allegations, they will not be part of this thesis. Consequently, the following factors will be addressed: 1) communicational challenges and 2) a flypaper theory of behaviour.

### **Communicational challenges**

Communication is difficult, almost by default, as everyone knows who has been in a relationship. Factors like different cultural and societal codes and backgrounds, language challenges, differences in educational level, to mention but a few, all contributed to the challenges of communication when Western military units interacted with and engaged local Afghan communities. The oral communication between Afghans and representatives of the Western militaries had to be simultaneously translated by interpreters, the quality of whose work was sometimes questionable. The author participated in numerous meetings with representatives of the ANSF, and found it immensely difficult to develop a common understanding of a range of aspects concerning military operations, while acknowledging that the level of education among the ANA officers was quite good by Afghan standards (Skaar, 2010). The Norwegian military noted that surely, they connected with Afghan society through their presence, and that people on some occasions showed their disapproval through e.g. throwing stones at the military vehicles (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014). This thesis asserts that the challenges of communication could lead to misunderstandings and the development of attitudes that had the potential to negatively influence the attainment of operational objectives.

There are two relevant studies that may illuminate the degree to which communication challenges explain the relative absence of coercive success: the NDRE perception studies and

the study conducted by Koehler et al. on the Afghan perspectives on ISAF. If communication challenges precluded the ability of the international military to achieve their aims, an expected finding in the perception studies would be that they did not have a very good standing in the local Afghan communities and that ISAF was perceived to be a threat to local values and customs.

The NDRE studies indicate that the perception of the international military generally was positive among the local Afghans (Eggereide & Barstad, 2012b). In 2010, more than 80% of the respondents had a very good or somewhat good impression of the international forces, whereas by spring 2012 this had sunk to around 60%. The study found a correlation between those that had a negative view of ISAF and those whose communities seldom or never saw ISAF units, suggesting that the challenges of communication did not negatively impact the relationship with those with whom they could actually communicate. There may be several explanations for the decrease in positive impressions, not least the wider current in Afghanistan of the population being increasingly tired of the war and the international military presence. However, the NDRE ascribes it predominantly to a reduction of external activity that occurred from 2011 onwards because of the focus on transition. The PRT commanders note that, generally, they perceived the relations with their counterparts to be good and that they could communicate quite openly (Berntsen, 25 April 2014; Huse, 10 April 2014; Solberg, 26 March 2014). The interviews with the Afghan interpreters support the notion that the Norwegian units were able to establish reasonably good working relationships with their Afghan counterparts, but also with the wider audience in the villages (AF01, 1 March 2015; AF03, 4 March 2015; AF05, 26 Feb 2015).

In his assessment of the Afghan perspective on ISAF, Koehler discusses the potential threat that the international military might pose to Islamic values and local customs (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, pp. 78-81). The study shows that the part of the population that perceived the foreign forces as posing a threat to local values decreased from just above 40% in 2007 to below 30% in 2009, and then increased again to around 85% in 2013. Of relevance to this thesis is also the fact that the findings of Koehler's research illustrate that the perceptions of the population are not so much based on personal experiences, but on rumours and hearsay, such as the burning of the Quran, abusing women prisoners and mocking the prophet (Koehler in Chiari, 2014, pp. 78-81). The findings of Koehler suggest that there was a war of perceptions and credibility going on and that the foreign forces were not very successful in winning it.



How did the Norwegian and German militaries perceive communication with the local Afghan communities? Generally, their perception was that after some time, usually one to three months, they were able to communicate on a functional level and they did not perceive differences in language or culture to represent a major obstacle. There were, of course challenges, but they were ascribed to the conduct of and consequences of operations more than communication in its own right. For example, as noted by several Norwegian MOT commanders, it was a challenge that the MOTs were not perceived by the Afghans as actually doing anything substantial. They did not bring resources or engage in reconstruction and development, and their contribution to security was questionable. A Norwegian MOT commander noted that when a MOT returned for the fourth time, asking the same questions as the first time, and nothing substantial had happened in between, it generally led to a lack of trust and confidence (NO03, 4 December 2014). The MOT commanders argued that the repeated visits of the MOTs without leading to visible results may have disillusioned the local communities.

Another anecdote from a Norwegian MOT commander illustrates how the Norwegian military connected with their Afghan ANSF colleagues. The Norwegian officer explained how he passed a wadi (small river) on foot looking for mines or IEDs together with an ANA company commander (NO01, 10 June 2014). The procedure deviated completely from the standard procedures, and was indeed a very risky business. However, when the two had done this “the Afghan way”, the MOT commander proved that he was a man of honour that could be trusted, and they enjoyed a close relationship throughout his tenure.

One Norwegian MOT commander noted that the absence of communication with the opposition may have been more influential than communication challenges with the local Afghan communities. According to this MOT commander, the official ISAF policy, as he comprehended it, was that the ISAF units were to engage with and support the formal structures of power, and not to engage with the opposition. This again, he noted, may have led to the alienation of a local Taliban commander in Ghormach that had shown an interest in approaching ISAF for talks. However, another Norwegian military source claimed the MOTs talked to the opposition as well, indicating that at least some communication occurred between the PRT and the Taliban (NO01, 10 June 2014). The purpose of such talks, the MOT commander argued, was to gather information, but also to engage in the play of the various actors, the Taliban included, in order to facilitate outcomes that were consistent with the operational objectives.

It may also have been the case that the foreign militaries did not have the information, or the understanding of Afghan culture and society, that enabled them to communicate with the actors of influence. This challenge was addressed by a German interviewee by noting that the PRT in Kunduz approached the representatives of formal authority without necessarily being aware of the networks of which these actors were a part and the consequences thereof (GE06, 11 March 2016). Another interviewee noted that representatives of the West might acquire a good working knowledge of Afghanistan, but to gain deep insights and operationalise them would most likely require being brought up in the country (GE07, 3 April 2016).

Without further evidence, it cannot be substantiated that communication challenges led to lack of coercive success in their own right. There were, of course, challenges, but generally the evidence in the form of surveys and interviews suggests that the Norwegian and German militaries were able to establish good working relationships with their Afghan counterparts and the local Afghan communities. However, what may have been an issue was that, although the communication that occurred was of sufficient quality, the foreign militaries were only able to communicate on a superficial level. Henceforth, there were substantial pieces of relevant information that remained hidden from the foreign forces. The shortage of in-depth knowledge of the distinct characteristics of Afghan society and the local communities precluded the exchange of information, thus being a factor that may explain the relative absence of success.

### **A flypaper theory of behaviour**

The flypaper theory of behaviour suggests that groups and individuals that strongly opposed the presence of the foreign forces and the GIRoA, would seek opportunities to engage them in order to prove their cause and gain legitimacy within the wider Afghan audience. Rather than explaining violence as a function of grievances, or structural or ideological reasons, the flypaper theory of behaviour explains violence as a function of the presence and availability of targets. Attacking the foreign forces is good in its own right and is not necessarily connected to instrumental or strategic causes, like e.g. the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate.

The flypaper theory suggests that the Western militaries and their manoeuvre units represented welcome targets for the Taliban and other groups that, for a variety of reasons, found it opportune to attack them; the Western militaries were “the good enemy”. It presumes that the reason they were targeted was their mere presence; the manoeuvre units would, like

flypaper, attract the attention and focus of those who, for any reason, found it served their interest to target them. Kilcullen illustrates what may be termed as a flypaper incident when describing how a whole village joined the Taliban engaged in a fight against a US unit without being connected to the Taliban or having issues with the US (Kilcullen, 2009, pp. 39-41). Suhrke and others have also argued that ISAF represented welcome targets to elements opposing GIRoA, and thus contributed to the increasing violence through its mere presence (Suhrke, 2011). If flypaper was a factor, the expected outcome would be that there was a correlation between military activity and the number of incidents. The following discussion is based on data provided by the NDRE on the relation between missions and incidents in Faryab, the perceptions of the Norwegian and German militaries and the perception and rhetoric used by the Taliban and the clergy that sympathised with them

If insurgent behaviour was a consequence of the flypaper theory of behaviour, one would expect to see a correlation between the presence of ISAF units and incidents. The following discussion is based on data collected and processed by the NDRE and applies to the operations in Faryab only. In Table 6.3 and Figure 6.4 below, the relation between missions and incidents from 2008 to 2012 is illustrated ("ISAF CIDNE database," 2014; Svein E. Martinussen, 2014).

Year	Missions	Incidents	Incident/mission rate
2008	6,972	168	0.024
2009	12,474	235	0.019
2010	17,149	533	0.031
2011	10,566	283	0.027
2012	11,335	464	0.041

Table 6.3, the mission/incident ratio in Faryab

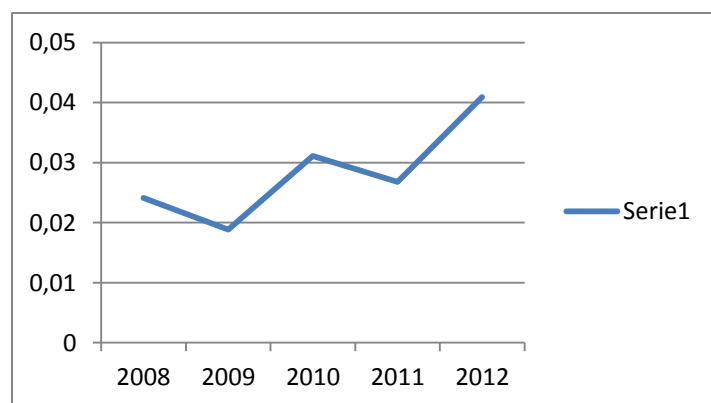


Figure 6.4

The mission vs. incident ratio shows that the number of incidents increased relatively faster than the increase in the number of missions. The ratio does not indicate that there is a direct and causal connection between missions and incidents. Rather, it illustrates that there is a correlation between presence, measured in terms of magnitude of missions, and the occurrence of incidents. Is the relative increase in the incident vs mission ratio indicative of a flypaper effect?

The NDRE argued that the increase in incidents could predominantly be explained by the fact that more sensors on the ground allowed for more observations and reports of incidents.<sup>62</sup> The logic underpinning the increased occurrence of incidents is that the ratio would develop exponentially and not linearly, one additional sensor on the ground would normally result in more than one additional observation, hence it is not a 1:1 relationship.

Another NDRE analysis indicated that there was a weak, but negative correlation between MOT operations and incidents, suggesting that MOT operations actually had a cooling effect on violence (Svein E. Martinussen, 2015). With respect to the major operations, there are clearly more incidents during the operations' active phases, but since the purpose of the operations was to engage the Taliban, it is logical that they also resulted in an increase of incidents. Although the statistical material is not robust, the available data does not support the occurrence of a flypaper theory of behaviour.

However, the Norwegian and German militaries perceived that, on a number of occasions, they drew the attention of the Taliban in ways that suggested the presence of a flypaper effect. Norwegian military officers noted that they did attract the attention and in consequence the fire of the opposition (NO01, 10 June 2014; NO03, 4 dec 2014). In particular, the TU represented a high value target that would provide substantial credibility if it was engaged (Ibid). In Ghormach, south of the Bazar, it was an acknowledged TIC line, the crossing of which would regularly result in fire fights, and the PRT units experienced a similar TIC line in the Orthepe valley (NO04, 21 Febr 2015; NO05, 21 January 2015). As noted by a Norwegian MOT commander, "If we were static for more than one hour, we would be attacked" (NO04, 21 Febr 2015). Generally, the perception of the Norwegian military was that they were attacked when 1) they entered areas assessed to be of vital importance to the Taliban, 2) as part of the Taliban strategy for expanding their area of influence and 3) when they represented welcome targets of opportunity.

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<sup>62</sup> The NDRE, through researcher Svein Erlend Martinussen in conversation with the author.

From autumn 2008 and during spring 2009, the security situation in Kunduz had deteriorated and incidents became more usual, with the initial peak being the ambush on a patrol from the PRT in April 2009 that resulted in one German casualty and several wounded. On June 23, the PRT lost three soldiers when their armoured vehicle collapsed into a ditch and the unit came under fire (GE02, 27 October 2015). The PRT in Kunduz was also being increasingly attacked by rockets and it became clear to the PRT leadership that they had to deal actively with the situation in the neighbouring areas. Henceforth, the Bundeswehr started to patrol the districts of Kunduz more vigorously. The increased patrolling led to the German QRF being attacked and ambushed on a number of occasions through the spring and summer of 2009 (GE02, 27 October 2015). The Bundeswehr did not use force offensively during these patrols, but force was used substantially for self-defence.

Although anecdotal, the experiences of the Norwegian and German militaries suggest that their units were ambushed and attacked for reasons that cannot be fully explained as part of a well-developed strategy or within a means-ends logic. It was, or must have been, evidently clear to the opposing forces that they would not be able to beat the coalition forces through military engagements or in battle. Still, as suggested by one of the German respondents, during the Halmazaq, the opposing forces were able to maintain the fight for four days, thus proving to everyone that they were a capable force to be counted on in the future (GE06, 11 March 2016).

Finally, the rhetoric, information and propaganda distributed by the Taliban, either in the mosques, in the media or on the internet supported the notion that fighting the international military was good in its own right (reference). The following passage may serve as an illustration of the rhetoric that on occasion was used in the mosques. In a so-called “Mosque report” of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011 from Maymaneh district, Mawlawi Shaikh Rahmatullah spoke against the international coalition (ISAF, 2011):<sup>63</sup>

“Everybody should know that our country is being occupied by Western infidels, especially the British, who are a former enemy of ours. President Karzai is a puppet and foreigners play with him like a plastic toy and since he is always drunk they use him for whatever they want. Even though we have “Islamic” in our country’s name,

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<sup>63</sup> The Mosque reports were a result of the holistic approach to intelligence adopted by ISAF. Rather than focusing only or mostly on the enemy as had been the traditional focus of the intelligence community, the establishment of the so-called fusion centres aimed at compiling information about the insurgency as well as the Afghan population, criminal groups, etc. in order to get a better understanding of the currents in Afghan society.

you can't see any Islamic programmes on TV, especially Tulog or Aryana TV. As a Muslim nation we are not united and it is the responsibility of all religious leaders to teach people the difference between right and wrong and what is bad for our religion, therefore we must burn those TV stations sometime soon. 2. Because we are an Islamic country we are not allowed to drink, yet during the Eid celebrations there were many young men and women who were caught drinking or had alcohol in their vehicles. These people should be punished by Islamic law. 3. As a parent you should know where your young daughters and sons are going when they go out, but it appears nobody knows what they are doing because they are drinking and having illegal sex, which is Haram (not allowed) in Islam. Some of them have already been caught in the act and will be punished accordingly. 4. There is always fighting between Arbaki and the ANP, which means we have Muslim brothers killing each other all because the British armed both groups and make them fight each other. Please wake up and look around so you can see what the foreigners are doing in our country as it tearing us and our religion apart, which is what they want to do".

The report may not entail an accurate quote of the Mawlawi's speech, but rather serve as minutes that sum up the main parts of his message. It is an illustration of speeches that were critical of the international coalition, and includes recurring elements: the inadequacy of the Karzai government, the degradation of morale through alcohol consumption and illegal sex, and the negative impact of the infidels. The reference to "the British" is somewhat peculiar since the UK left Faryab in 2005, but one may assume that it serves as a recognisable term for anything "foreign". The speech does not mention the Taliban explicitly, but Mawlawi's message concurs nicely with the Taliban agenda.

In another Mosque report, Mawlawi Jaylan in the Masjet Jamai Arab Khana Mosque in Maymaneh district explicitly supported the Taliban (RC N Mosque report, 10 September 2011):

"I am a religious leader and now I want to fight the infidels as Jihad. There are a lot of ways to help the fight. You can provide shelter and food for the Taliban when they are in your city".

Although anecdotal, these Mosque reports illustrate some of the religious and political sentiments well received in segments of the population and resonated positively with widespread public perceptions. Although the ISAF mapping indicated that no more than

around 14-20% of the Mosque speeches were hostile to the Western military, they may have served as legitimising vehicles for attacking ISAF units.

This thesis consequently maintains that the increase in violence at least partly occurred because of the flypaper effect. The Taliban encouraged attacks on the international forces and the Norwegian and German militaries perceived that they were attacked partly because they were welcome targets of opportunity and provided the insurgents with ample reasons to use violence. The Taliban propaganda and the rhetoric of the clergy suggest that attacking the international military provided opportunities for glory, honour, status and in some cases the possibility of martyrdom. The flypaper effect thus contradicts the notion of coercion theory, since threats or the use of force may have exactly the opposite effect of their intentions. It is as such an illustration of the wicked problems of Rittel et al. insofar as the ISAF presence and its consequent use of force resulted in perverse and unintended consequences (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The mere presence of threats or the use of force functions as a motivator for the use of force, rather than the opposite as prescribed by theory.

### **The inclination of the military to seek battle**

The Norwegian and German militaries deployed for Afghanistan equipped with national concepts and doctrines that had conditioned them for warfare against an opponent that looked more or less as themselves; a uniformed army that could be defeated on the battlefield. The doctrinal and conceptual basis for the Norwegian and German militaries was manoeuvre theory and the notion of winning the tactical engagements as the focal point and purpose of the military endeavour (*Forsvarets fellesoperative doktrine, del B operasjoner*, 2000; Forsvarsstaben, 2007; GE08, 8 March 2016).

The early major operations basically conformed to such an understanding of the purpose of military operations. Both the HKY II and the Vanguard Viper were intended to deliver decisive results, and they were indeed tactical successes. The operations aimed at finding “the enemy”, deliver a decisive blow to his military capacities and thus facilitate reconstruction and development efforts that would ensure lasting effects. However, as is illustrated above, neither of these operations resulted in lasting effects. Rather, the situation deteriorated in the aftermath of the operations’ active phases, and the coalition was not able to capitalise on the tactical gains. The HKY II and the Vanguard Viper represented a current in the planning of offensive operations in Northern Afghanistan, and are illustrative of the prevalent military thinking at the time.



The argument can be made therefore that the military inclination to seek battle resulted in a range of operations that were not able to deliver sustainable successes and in consequence resulted in the relative absence of coercive successes.

### **Inherent characteristics and challenges of Afghanistan and the conflict**

Were there inherent characteristics of Afghanistan and the conflict which as a consequence meant that the ISAF mission was “mission impossible” from the outset? There is a current in the literature that portrays the Afghans as particularly difficult to influence due to their “proud warrior culture that has repelled invading armies for more than two thousand years” (Seth G Jones, 2009). Arguably, Afghanistan has not been particularly hospitable to foreigners that used force against it, and the Anglo-Afghan wars and in particular the battle of Maiwand have a special status as a mobilising narrative in the Afghan national mythology (R. Johnson, 2011). The “fierce warrior culture” was nurtured during the Soviet occupation, and clearly has some merit, although there were ample examples of the Mujahidin being as busy fighting each other as they were fighting the Soviets.

The narrative of the warrior culture indicates that there are inherent characteristics of the Afghans and Afghanistan that make influencing them a particular challenge for an external actor. There is indeed much to say about the warrior culture of the Afghans, and it clearly cannot be dismissed. The author was told a story by a battalion commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain division of an engagement against Afghan insurgents in the Kunduz region (Skaar, 2010). After days of intense fighting, the opponents finally met to negotiate or engage in talks. The US units had done well tactically, and during the course of their discussion it became clear that, from the Afghan commander’s perspective, he talked about the battle as if it was a sports event. He acknowledged that the US had done well tactically, and were good fighters, but now that the fighting was over, they should meet as friends and let bygones be bygones. The anecdote suggests that, from the Afghan’s perspective, the fight served a purpose in its own right, as a football match or sports event. It was not as tightly knit to an aim or end state as would be the norm within Western military organisations, thus supporting Simpson’s notion of the Afghan conflict not being political in the Clausewitzian sense (Simpson, 2012). If it is the case, as the anecdote above suggests, that there is an Afghan culture of gravitating towards possibilities for combat and fighting, it would surely complicate the coercive use of force by an external actor.

However, authors like Johnson argue that Afghans are only as hostile to invaders as anyone would be and that there is little empirical support for the graveyard theory (R. Johnson, 2011).<sup>64</sup> Rather, Afghans have, Johnson argues, willingly engaged in alliances when they assumed these would serve their interests, hence the history of Afghanistan is a history of alliances and pragmatism as much as a history of conflict and fighting.

The sources available for this thesis cannot substantiate that the ISAF mission in Faryab and Kunduz was “mission impossible” because of factors like a warrior culture. That does not mean it did not exist or was not influential, but the Norwegian and German militaries did not emphasise it as a cause of the developments in the province. Rather, they emphasised structural, pragmatic and, to some extent, ideological causes as far more important.

In Faryab, the structural causes emphasised by the Norwegian military were mainly connected to 1) the biased allocation and distribution of resources, 2) the dysfunctionality of the Afghan system of governance and 3) the factional infighting of warlords and powerbrokers. The allocation and distribution bias referred in particular to the Uzbek-Pashtun divide that resulted in the disfavour of the Pashtun communities. When the MOTs visited the Pashtun communities, they were regularly confronted with an imbalance with respect to resource allocation. The Uzbek communities showed little interest in allocating resources to the Pashtuns and on occasion showed a degree of contempt for them. The dysfunction of the Afghan system of governance is well documented and, if anything, meant that Afghans expected little from their government. The factional infighting of the warlords and powerbrokers implied that Afghans were caught in their constant struggle for resources, power and influence.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the Taliban represented an ideologically motivated insurgency that would be alien to any order in which they were not a substantial party or they assessed as being fundamentally un-Islamic. The Norwegian and German militaries assessed the insurgency to be partly ideologically motivated, and there surely were contacts between the central Taliban leadership and the cadres of Faryab and Kunduz that had real impacts on the ground.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a comprehensive assessment of all the relevant aspects of society and culture in Northern Afghanistan that may have influenced the

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<sup>64</sup> The Graveyard of Empires refers to Isby's term in which he suggests that Afghanistan has historically been particularly difficult to subdue due to inherent characteristics with the country and its population (Isby, 2010).

potential for coercive success. This thesis argues that there were inherent characteristics within Afghan society and conflicts that obscured the possibility for positive outcomes from the perspective of the international coalition and GIRoA. However, these characteristics were not connected to semi-mythological factors like the warrior culture. Rather, they were connected to a mixture of resource allocation and distribution, complex power dynamics, personal and group animosities and ideology. These factors arguably influenced the potential for coercive success insofar as understanding the complexity and being able to handle it purposefully was a task that went beyond the capacity of the foreign forces.

### **Conclusion: four factors that may explain the relative absence of success**

The relative lack of success in Afghanistan is a recurring theme in a vast and growing amount of literature. Several explanations have been put forward: the graveyard theory, the shortcomings of COIN, the militarisation of efforts, lack of resources and the Western alliance's limited ability to comprehend the distinct characteristics of the conflict and of Afghan society (P. T. Bergen, Katherine, 2013; Bird & Marshall, 2011; Egnell & Ucko, 2013; Farrell, 2010; Isby, 2010; Simpson, 2012; Suhrke, 2011). All these explanations may have some merit, and the absence of success can surely not be simplistically attributed to one or a few factors. The factors that are discussed here relate to the absence of success on the local level and include the following factors: resources, interaction, knowledge, the inclination to seek battle and characteristics.

This thesis acknowledges that limited resources were a factor. It was always possible for the Taliban and its supporters to flee or to melt into the population when the military pressure became too strong. Acknowledging the vast geographical areas to be covered, the distributed settlement patterns, the issues of language and the cultural and societal complexities, it was beyond the capacity of ISAF in Faryab and Kunduz to control the provinces or the population in any meaningful way. This was, arguably, not the task of the PRTs and the Task Forces anyway, but the military operations in which they participated suggest that they at least tried. The amount of resources necessary to control the provinces, following the logic of Kalyvas, would in any case be far beyond what was theoretically and practically achievable by the international coalition.

This section argues that, apart from limited resources, the lack of coercive success may be explained by one of or a combination of three factors: 1) how the PRT and ISAF related to Afghan society, 2) the consequences of the military inclination to seek battle and 3)

if there were inherent characteristics with Afghanistan that negatively impacted the potential for success.

With respect to 1, this thesis cannot substantiate that communication challenges or provocative behaviour impacted outcomes negatively. According to the NDRE studies, the Afghan population generally had a good impression of the international forces, and the Norwegian military perceived that they were able to communicate well with their Afghan counterparts in the ANSF and GIROA as well as the general population. The German units were, at least in the early phases, well regarded in Afghanistan. The author was on various occasions reminded of the special relationship between Germany and Afghanistan, both being Arian nations.<sup>65</sup> However, even though communication challenges did not preclude outcomes directly, it was inherently difficult for the Western militaries to comprehend the complexities of Afghan society. It may, therefore, have been the case that they were not able to comprehend these complexities to a sufficient degree of depth and granularity as to enable a more successful use of military force.

The flypaper theory of behaviour assumes that the Taliban and their supporters would attack the Western militaries because they represented possibilities of personal and group gain that were not connected to a strategic means-ends relationship. Following this line of thought, the Western militaries were attacked first and foremost because they were there. It cannot be substantiated through statistical methods that flypaper was a factor, but the perceptions of the Norwegian and German militaries as well as the statements of the Taliban and the clergy suggest that it was a factor. Attacking the Western militaries was legitimate and good in its own right, regardless of whether it served a strategic purpose. The flypaper effect thus contradicts coercion theory insofar as it assumes that the presence of an alien force that applies coercive measures will justify the use of violence in its own right by the coerced to achieve their own aims.

The military inclination to seek battle in order to deliver decisive results may have been a factor to explain the absence of coercive success. Delivering decisive effects during the course of engagements that lasted a few days proved futile, and were most probably counterproductive with respect to facilitating lasting change.

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<sup>65</sup> The reference to Arian nations should not be confused with its use prior to and during WWII by the German Nazi Party. It refers to the understanding, quite common in Afghanistan, that Germany and Afghanistan have a common ancient history of being the Arian people. The term Arian is, for example, used in the name of the Afghan airline, Ariana.

Finally, this thesis argues that the inherent characteristics of Faryab and Kunduz fundamentally challenged the coercive use of force. However, it does not abide to the warrior culture mythology, but rather suggests that these characteristics were a combination of structural and ideological factors which, in their totality, fundamentally prevented the potential for coercive success.

#### 6.4. Representativeness

Was the Afghan conflict in general and the cases used in this thesis representative of contemporary armed conflict? The question may initially justify a brief discussion on what is meant by representative. Rather commonsensical, the Afghan conflict can only be representative for a particular body of conflicts. Although, all wars share some common denominators, what Clausewitz argued was embodied in the nature of war; wars are classified based on certain parameters and characteristics. It makes little sense to compare for example the First World War to the drug related wars in South America. As such, if the Afghan conflict is representative, it is representative for a group of conflicts that share some definitional characteristics. The Afghan conflict was a conflict of a non-international nature that occurred inside the borders of a state in a third world country. It was a conflict in which an armed insurgency aimed at overthrowing the recognised government that in turn was supported by an international coalition. The insurgency was, as illustrated by this thesis characterised by complex actor structures and a combination of material, ideological and religious issues.

The representativeness of the Afghan conflict will be discussed through discerning whether the Afghan conflict entailed distinct elements and characteristics that positioned it within currents and trends discussed in literature as characteristic to similar contemporary conflicts.<sup>66</sup> There is a range of literature that, based on the study of various post-Cold War conflicts, argues convincingly that they entail certain characteristics and commonalities across the spectrum. In particular the “New Wars” literature and the literature discussing insurgencies and how to deal with them have addressed such characteristics.<sup>67</sup> Rupert Smith argued in *The Utility of Force* that future conflicts would occur “amongst the people” and the conventional interstate “industrialised wars” of “men and machinery” was something for the past (Smith, 2005). Emile Simpson argued in *War From the Ground Up* that conflicts like the Afghan are apolitical in the sense that the Clausewitzian perception of strategy as a means-ends relationship is unsuitable to explain motivations and behaviour in the Afghan and similar conflicts (Simpson, 2012). Kaldor argued in *New Wars Old Wars* that a distinct characteristic with the so-called new wars is combatant self-financing (Kaldor, 2006). The way such

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<sup>66</sup> Contemporary similar conflicts are here broadly defined as wars and conflicts of a non-international nature that occurred after the termination of the Cold War.

<sup>67</sup> The “New Wars” paradigm has been questioned by a range of authors arguing that the newness of the post-Cold War conflicts is not as new as the authors’ claims. Rather, the new wars entail recurring elements that have been consistent through time (Maaø in Haug, 2011; Berdal in Strachan, 2011).

conflicts are financed, Kaldor argues, makes them self-perpetuant in ways that obscures the means-ends relationship. Although Kaldor's thesis of the "New War" paradigm has been questioned by amongst other Berdal, Maaø and Strachan, her observation of the financial drivers of modern conflict is not without merit (Maaø and Strachan in Haug, 2011; Berdal in Strachan, 2011). In *New wars*, Münkler argued along similar trajectories as Kaldor, although his view on the newness of the new wars is slightly more nuanced (Munkler, 2005).

The newness of the post-Cold War conflicts is of lesser interest to this thesis, but the way in which this literature aims to encapsulate the distinct characteristics of such conflicts surely is. Henceforth, the question of interest here is whether the Afghan conflict, as it unfolded from 2005, included elements and characteristics common to such conflicts that would position it within a wider current of conflicts in ways that may inform the development of scholarship, research, theory and policy?

In order to establish an analytical framework for discussing the degree to which the Afghan conflict is representative the propositions put forward in *The Utility of Force* is a useful point of departure as they amalgamate some of the main arguments of the new wars and insurgencies literature. In *The Utility of Force*, Smith argues that there are "six basic trends that make up the paradigm of war amongst the people" (Smith, 2005, p. 269):

1. The ends for which we fight are changing from hard objectives that decide the political outcome to those establishing conditions in which the outcome may be decided
2. We fight amongst the people, not on the battlefield
3. Our conflicts tend to be timeless, even unending
4. We fight to preserve the force rather than risking all to gain the objective
5. On each occasion new uses are found from old weapons and organizations which are the products of industrial war
6. The sides are mostly non-state, comprising some form of multinational grouping against some non-state party or parties.

A potential weakness with Smith's trends is that "we" and "our" translates predominantly to the western militaries. They do as such not address the trends of conflicts in general, but rather what western militaries can expect when engaging in contemporary and



future conflicts. However, arguably some of the arguments are equally relevant for non-western states as well as non-state actors.

According to the first trend, the ends for which we are fighting can no longer be termed within a simplistic and dualistic notion of winning or losing. Rather, Smith argues, that the end is to “create a conceptual space for diplomacy, economic incentives, political pressure and other means to create a desired political outcome of stability” (Smith, 2005, p. 270). As this thesis argues, the notion of success or winning was problematic in the Afghan conflict. It was not at all clear what success would look like, and even though the phrase “we are here to win” was used in COMISAF’s tactical directive of 2009, it was complicated to establish what winning meant in real terms. It surely could not be translated to the total and unambiguous defeat of the Taliban, and, as frequently stated by the ISAF leadership and a range of western leading politicians; “there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan”. The military operations thus took the form of combatting insurgents and conducting operations in order to decimate their fighting capacity, support good governance and reconstruction and development and by so doing, winning the hearts and minds of the population. This, it was argued, would eventually lead to the establishment of working and sustainable institutions of official, legitimate and democratic authority. Arguably therefore, the Afghan conflict is illustrative of Smith’s argument.

The second trend argues that “we fight amongst the people, not on the battlefield”. Firstly, the notion of the traditional battlefield as a defined and confined area on which organised military formations clash without affecting the general population has been of limited validity for decades. The major battles on the eastern front during the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW occurred in populated areas, and the wars of decolonisation as well as the Vietnam war was not limited to defined battlefields. However, Smiths notion of “amongst the people” goes further than that just observing that fighting occurs in populated areas. Rather it suggests that the issues of distinction and identification has become intrinsically difficult. The opponent lives and moves with, dresses like and acts like the general population. He can choose to fight at the time of his deciding, but can easily melt in with the population when necessary for recuperation and survival.

In a sense, large portions of Afghanistan became “a battlefield”. Fundamentally, the battlefield was wherever there was a connection between the insurgency and the general population. The battlefield became villages, settlements, roads, footpaths and geographic areas that could provide popular support and tactical benefits to the insurgents. Most

importantly, as this thesis suggest, it was fundamentally difficult to separate the insurgents from the people. As noted by one Norwegian military; “it was my belief that the insurgents were in most cases local people that have lived here always” (NO03, 4 dec 2014). The Afghan conflict thus illustrates that the COIN doctrine of separating the people from the insurgents was an almost impossible task. The insurgency was the people, but as this thesis argues, individuals and groups fluctuated in and out of the domain of the insurgency based on a range of contextual, societal and individual reasons.

However, as the cases of southern Ghormach and Chahar Darreh suggest there were some geographical areas that were more defined and that when approached by the international military or the ANSF, would almost certainly result in armed resistance and fire-fights. These were areas that were perceived to be of vital interest to the Taliban as for example the southern parts of Ghormach district and the areas surrounding the village of Chahar Darreh. These areas were defended through the establishment of defensive positions, warning systems and coordinated fires and entailed certain similarities of the traditional battlefield. However, on the whole, the Afghan conflict clearly occurred “amongst the people”.

The third trend Smith proposes is that “our conflicts tend to be timeless, even unending”. “Our” must here be translated to the conflicts involving the western nations, but it is equally relevant to a range of other conflicts in which the west plays a marginal role. It cannot be determined now the final outcome of the Afghan conflict, but insofar the US and NATO has been and still are involved in the conflict more than 16 years after the US lead attack in 2001, thus making it the longest conflict the US has ever been fighting, it is long lasting by any measure. This has consequences also for other nations. Norway has for example open-endedly agreed to continue its presence with staff officers and Special Forces in the post-ISAF operations in Afghanistan.

The forth trend argues that “We fight to preserve the force rather than risking all to gain the objective”. Smith argues that apart from the “body bag effect”, the reason can be found in the cost and political consequences of war (Smith, 2005, pp. 292-297). It is questionable though the degree to which this was symptomatic for the western engagement in Afghanistan. Clearly efforts were taken to avoid casualties, but on the whole, the offensive operations were conducted with resolve and intention to win. A factor may be that, although the Taliban put up fierce resistance and inflicted substantial casualties, they were no real

match for the western militaries in the tactical engagements, henceforth; preserving the force through avoiding combat was never a pressing issue for the international coalition.

But, preserving the force was most certainly an issue for the Taliban. As this thesis illustrates, the major operations in the North, almost without exception ended when the Taliban left the battlefield and melted into the population. Through such behaviour, the Taliban was always able to preserve the force in order to fight another day.

The fifth trend proposes that “on each occasion new uses are found from old weapons and organizations which are the products of industrial war”. The most articulate example of this trend in the Afghan conflict may be the use of US strategic bombers like the B-1, originally intended for nuclear attacks deep inside enemy airspace, in the close air support role.

The sixth trend proposes that “the sides are mostly non-state, comprising some form of multinational grouping against some non-state party or parties”. As this thesis illustrates, the Afghan conflict was characterised by a range of actors, state and non-state, whose motivations, alliances and allegiances were highly fluid.

The discussion above illustrates that the “paradigm of war amongst the people” thesis put forward by Smith most certainly had merit in Afghanistan. In particular the fluid composition of the insurgent formations and the way in which individuals and groups rotated in and out of the insurgency suggest that it was an almost impossible task to separate “the insurgency” from “the people”. The Afghan conflict thus on many aspects became a text book example of Smith’s thesis entailing obvious elements of the type of conflicts addressed by Smith and the “New Wars” literature.

There are however some characteristics of the Afghan conflict that may limit its representativeness. The new wars literature discussed above is based on a limited number of cases. For example both Kaldor and Smith present their argument based on their experiences and findings from the Balkan wars in the 90s. The literature on insurgencies tends to focus particularly on the British experiences in Malaya, the US experiences in Vietnam and recently the Afghan experience (Greenhill & Staniland, 2007). There is a risk that the search for representativeness results in a “one size fits” all approach to conflict, thus disregarding the distinct and unique character of every conflict. Although the Afghan conflict generally

provides convincing arguments supportive to Smith's thesis, one should be cautious in taking the argument too far.

The distinct characteristics of the Afghan conflict that may limit its representativeness pertains to at least three issues. First, the contemporary Afghan conflict cannot be detached from the near history of Afghanistan, and in particular the consequences of the Soviet occupation. There is a general consensus among historians that there is a clear causal connection between the brutal suppression of the Afghan society by the Soviets and the present situation (Barfield, 2010; Rubin, 2002; Tomsen, 2011). The fragmentation of social structures that occurred during the Soviet occupation and the consequent civil war that in turn facilitated the rise of the Taliban were unique to Afghanistan and has impacted the character of the post 2001 conflict.

Second, Afghan society entails and is construed around certain characteristic building blocks. It is a society based on affiliation to family, village, clan and tribe, and to some degree the state. However, the way these blocks function and relate was different in Afghanistan than for example in Iraq for which the COIN doctrine of the US FM 3-24 was developed. The "one size fits all" approach of the FM 3-24 did not deliver the desired outcomes, and the principles upon which the 3-24 was based had less utility in Afghanistan than expected.

Third and finally, the Taliban represented an insurgency that was based on a religious conviction in which the requirement for its followers to conduct Jihad was explicitly articulated. The requirement to conduct Jihad against the infidels was communicated through whatever information channels the Taliban information possessed. As illustrated above, the Friday prayer was used for such purposes, and the Taliban produced a huge number of patriotic videos showing the ill faith of the infidels when being attacked or blown up by IEDs. The potential impact of religious factors is not deeply addressed in the New Wars literature, and if anything, may limit the representativeness of the Afghan conflict to conflicts that share similar ideological and religious characteristics. One should be cautious therefore to apply the experiences from the Afghan conflict to conflicts in which religion is not a substantial factor.

### 6.5. How does coercion theory need to be updated in light of the thesis?

Acknowledging that the Afghan conflict entails elements that are representative for a particular type of conflicts as discussed above; how does it impact the development of coercion theory? Clausewitz argued in *On War* that war is an art as much as it is science not least due to factors like “fog and friction” and the element of chance (Clausewitz, 1984, pp. 75-89). Unlike the later Jomini, Clausewitz believed that it was highly difficult to calculate the outcome of war: “the very nature of its interaction is bound to make it unpredictable” (Ibid). The schools of thought established by respectively Clausewitz and Jomini has since been highly influential in the development of military theory and thinking. It is little doubt that the most cited theorist the last two decades is Clausewitz, but in real terms, the Jominian emphasis on calculation and positivist science has been even more influential. When comparing military capacity, there has been and still is a strong tendency to compare the availability of military hardware on each side in order to determine military strength and potential outcomes.<sup>68</sup> An outcome of this thesis’ discussion of coercion theory is that it belongs fundamentally within the positivist school of thought; it is possible to calculate outcomes. Theory rests on the presence and magnitude of certain assumptions and factors; e.g. the unitary actor, the presumption of economically derived rationality and the function of the credible threat. If the opposing actor perceives that the potential of pain, threatened or inflicted, exceeds his ability to endure it, he will yield to the coercer’s wishes as a matter of consequence. Coercion theory thus argues that it is possible to calculate the amount of pain it is necessary to threaten or inflict in order to gain the desired concessions of the opponent.

However, this thesis questions the utility of theory’s assumptions and propositions in complex contemporary conflicts. As illustrated above, the central elements of coercion theory, which presence is required for theory to have utility, was not or only to a limited degree present in the Afghan conflict. This thesis thus argues that the linear logic of calculus underpinning coercion theory cannot provide it with sufficient utility. It is not the ambition of this thesis to propose a revised and coherent theory of coercion as such. The way coercion theory is framed here as “a set of empirical studies, analysis, propositions and presuppositions that deal with the potential of military force to change the behaviour of an opponent”, suggests that developing a coherent theory is not achievable. Rather, it proposes that theory

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<sup>68</sup> The two Gulf Wars may be cases in point. Prior to all these wars the media was comparing the international coalition and Iraq with respect to the number of aircraft, tanks, artillery pieces and manpower. At least on paper, the Army of Iraq seemed to be a formidable opponent due to its huge number of military capacities.

should be updated through: 1) revising its underpinning assumptions and propositions in order to adapt them to the complexities of contemporary conflict and 2) develop a revised view on theory's notion of coercive mechanisms.

### **6.5.1. The assumptions and propositions underpinning coercion theory**

In chapter 2, the central elements of coercion theory are presented. Of these five elements, the most relevant are the assumption of the unitary actor, the rationality presumption and the credible threat. This section will outline how these elements should be updated in order to be more relevant to contemporary conflict.

#### **The Unitary actor**

In section 2.5.1, unitary actors are framed as; 1) actors are identifiable, 2) actors act united, coherent and predictable and 3) the number of actors is limited. In section 5.2.1, this thesis argues that neither of these prerequisites was present in any degree in the Afghan conflict. Actors were on the whole difficult to identify, in particular the rank and file. Separating the Taliban from the general population remained a substantial challenge throughout the conflict. Although organised and coherent structures existed, the kaleidoscopic nature of the conflict resulted in a relative absence of coherent and predictable behaviour. Finally, the conflict did not satisfy the theoretical presupposition of polarity or highly limited number of actors. A consequence of these findings is that the presumption of the unitary actor should be left as a prerequisite for coercion theory in the Afghan type of conflicts. The challenge is: what should replace it?

George identified, at least partly, the challenge by arguing that there is a need to: “replace the simplistic assumption that adversaries are “rational, unitary” actors with more specific “actor specific behavioural models” essential for understanding and attempting to influence different adversaries” (A. George, 2003). However, George's article does on the whole not address the particular issues that follow from the fluidity of and complex relations between actors in the Afghan conflict. Byman and Waxman discuss the complexities of coercing non-state actors, but, apart from addressing the problem of complex actor structures, proposes no clear solution to the challenge (Byman & Waxman, 2002, pp. 190-193). On the whole, the existing literature is vague on the matter and provides no convincing solutions.

This thesis thus proposes two solutions. First, and rather self-explanatory, the presumption of the unitary actor should be abandoned. Coercive use of force in contemporary conflicts cannot rest on the assumption that actors adhere to the unitary presumption. Second, the assumption of unitary actors should be replaced with the more nuanced view that actors

behave and act as a consequence of their position in and relation to complex social realities. Actors, whether they are individuals or groups, cannot be dispatched from the societal context in which they function; they are not static actors that play a role based on a manuscript that is given to them. A consequence of this view is that the notion of linearity underpinning coercion theory should be abandoned in favour of the view that actors will react and behave differently based on wide range of socially and contextually based factors.

Coercion then, cannot bluntly assume that it is possible to identify particular nodes within an insurgent formation, and thus assume that by influencing these nodes, it will influence the entire organisation.

### **The rationality presumption**

The rationality presumption is discussed in section 2.5.2. In short, it argues that coercion theory is predominantly a theory of how decisions are made and consequently may be influenced. It “rests heavily on the assumption that actors make rational decisions based on economically derived cost-benefit analysis”. Theory’s notion of rationality is predominantly based on Rational Actor Theory (RAT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT) which, in short, argues that decisions and behaviour are guided by a conscious analysis of what and how means should be applied in order to achieve certain ends. It is a normative theory in that it “tells us what we ought to do in order to achieve our aim”, not what the ends should be (Elster in Cook, 1990, p. 20). According to Riker, rational choice implies that an actor: “try to choose the best means to their end” (Riker, 1995). RAT and RCT thus suggest that decisions are results of a conscious analysis of what ought to be done in order to achieve the desired ends.

In section 5.2.2, the rationality presumption is discussed relative to the Afghan conflict. In particular this thesis suggest that decisions and behaviour came about as a result of a range of reasons, some might very well be the consequence of a deliberate and conscious process, but the findings of this thesis suggest that this often was not the case.

In particular the tensions that occurred because of the incompatibility of the Taliban central agenda and the local struggle for power and influence that resulted in factional infighting suggest that the linear means ends relationship was blurred. This does not imply that actions of local groups were irrational; usually they were not. But, the fluidity and instability of the Afghan society and the nature of the conflict resulted frequently in decision making processes that were based on what seemed opportune at any given time. The information provided by the Norwegian and German military suggests that the central Taliban



leadership developed a strategy on how to achieve their objectives in Northern Afghanistan and that this strategy was communicated to the local Taliban cadres. However, the activities of insurgent groups on the local level indicate that the decision making processes of these groups on many occasions departed from what would be appropriate in order to achieve the desired ends established by the central Taliban leadership. This thesis therefore argues that the rationality presumption requires development in order to fit this and similar conflicts. What is lacking is an evolved understanding of rationality that includes the multi-layered and fluid composition of decision making processes as well as an appreciation that non-material matters as pride, rage, feuds and not least ideology and religion may be equally relevant to decision making as the classical notion of rational choice.

### **The credible threat**

The credible threat is usually defined as a product of the availability of military capacity and the perceived will to use it. The threat is assumed to be credible insofar the coerced perceives the gain of yielding to exceed the cost of not yielding. The credibility of the threat is consequently a function of the coercer's ability to inflict cost and the coerced's ability to endure it.

This thesis argues that the insurgents in the north were willing to endure relatively high, but not indefinite, amounts of pain and suffering. In face of the possibility of total defeat or disproportionally big losses, the Taliban usually retreated or melted into the population. However, this thesis further argues that the international coalition and the ANSF were never able to raise costs to a level that was unacceptable to the Taliban. The ability to inflict pain and suffering never exceeded the Taliban's ability to endure it. The reason for this may of course be that ISAF and the ANSF simply did not have enough resources to credibly coerce the Taliban, or that the Taliban represented a force that was fundamentally insusceptible to coercion. However, as the major operations discussed above suggest, when the Taliban operated within the framework of a coherent organisation, they were susceptible to coercion. They did not in any case fight to the last man, but always made an effort to keep the organisation and its resources relatively intact.

The credible threat fundamentally presupposes polarity between a coercer and a coerced. If however, as was the case in Afghanistan, both the coercer and the coerced in fact were composed by multi-layered, fluid and contextually based actor structures that interacted on various levels, this substantially complicated the potential of presenting credible threats. The question put forward in section 5.2.1 with respect to the so-called spaghetti slide "who

should coerce who in order to achieve what” may thus at least partly explain the relative absence of a credible threat.

The consequence with respect to coercion theory is that presumption of a polarised coercer – coerced relationship should be abandoned in Afghan type conflicts as a prerequisite for presenting a credible threat. The multi-layered, fluid and complex actor structures suggest that threats can only be credible against certain actors in particular contexts and limited in time and space. The findings of this thesis suggest that the Norwegian and German military, because of their military potential, were able to influence local cadres that were aligned with or sympathetic to the Taliban, and that this, at least for some time, had local effects. However, local developments had little impact on the decision making of the Taliban central leadership. It was of course also possible to threaten the central Taliban leadership through for example drone strikes or similar instruments, but it cannot be determined with any certainty how this would influence the local cadres of the Taliban.

#### **Updating the basic assumptions and presuppositions of coercion theory,**

A consequence of the findings of this thesis is that the assumptions and presuppositions of coercion theory did not fit the characteristics of the Afghan type of conflict as proposed in table 6.4.

<b>Current state of affairs</b>		<b>Revised assumptions and presuppositions</b>	
<b>Unitary actors</b>	1) Actors are identifiable, 2) Actors act united, coherent and predictable 3) The number of actors is limited.	<b>Complex actor structures</b>	1) Actors are inherently difficult to identify 2) Actors act based on a number of motivations, perceived self-interest, and alliances and allegiances fluctuate 3) Many, sometimes almost indefinite number of actors
<b>Rationality presumption</b>	Actors make decisions and behave based on economically derived cost-benefit analysis	<b>Complex decision making processes</b>	Actors make decisions and behave based on their position in and relation to complex social and contextually based realities.
<b>The credible threat</b>	A function of the coercer’s ability to inflict cost and the coerced’s ability to endure it. Strategic objectives.	<b>The credible threat</b>	Contextually based, limited in time and space and directed against specified actors. Limited objectives

Table 6.5; The revised assumptions and presuppositions

Rather than assuming unitary actors, classical rationality and presenting credible threats within the framework of a polarised contest, this thesis propose that the underpinning assumptions and propositions of theory should be updated in order to reflect the complexities that are the actual realities of this type of conflicts as proposed in table 6.4 above..

### 6.5.2. Coercive mechanisms

A central element of coercion theory is how an opponent can be influenced through certain mechanisms and instruments (Byman & Waxman, 2002; Pape, 1996). Coercive mechanisms are “the processes by which the threat or infliction of cost generates adversary concessions” (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 48). Coercive mechanisms can, using the typology proposed by Pape, be divided into four types; Punishment, Risk, Decapitation and Denial (Pape, 1996).<sup>69</sup> The discussion on coercive mechanisms feeds into the classical debate of whether the military potential works best against the opponents will or his physical ability to fight.

Coercion by punishment means, according to Pape, raising costs to the civilian population (Ibid, p.13). Through raising the cost of the civilian population, the purpose of punishment is to raise “the societal costs of continued resistance” (Ibid, p.18). Punishment strategies are frequently connected to or illustrated by aerial bombing, first proposed by Giulio Douhet, and later through the bombing campaigns of the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW. Risk, Pape argues, is a subset of Punishment, in which the strategy is to slowly raise the cost of the civilian population. Both punishment and risk targets the civilian population in order to make them put pressure on their own authorities to seek concessions and to accommodate to the coercers wishes. The central mechanism, through which punishment and risk works, are that they aim to influence the opponent’s will to continuous fighting, and as Pape convincingly argues, they have rarely been successful.

Decapitation and denial, Pape argues, works through influencing the opponents ability to fight. Decapitation means reducing the state’s political and military leadership to lead; to cut the head of the snake. Decapitation can be illustrated by the US Air Force attacks on Saddam Hussein in the early hours of the Gulf War in 2003. Decapitation rests on the assumption that without a functioning leadership, the state will not be able to control or direct its military; hence it will be put in a vulnerable situation susceptible to negotiations. Denial means reducing the state’s military potential through attacking the opponents fielded military.

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<sup>69</sup> Byman and Waxman offers a slightly different typology, but, as also stated by Byman and Waxman, the typology used by Pape is “quite evocative”, I will use Pape’s typology here (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 50).

Of these strategies, Pape argues that denial is the mechanism that stands the best chance of succeeding. Neither punishment, risk nor decapitation has historically delivered the expected outcomes.<sup>70</sup>

### **Coercive mechanisms in contemporary conflicts**

The central questions to analyse the impact of mechanisms are (Byman & Waxman, 2002, p. 59): 1) “Does the mechanism in question affect decision making in the way that the coercer desires” and 2) “Can the coercer successfully trigger the mechanism”? Acknowledging the typology proposed by Pape, the mechanisms that could potentially coerce the insurgency in Afghanistan were either punishment or denial strategies.

Punishment strategies, which here include risk, are directed against a populations will to continued resistance and works through inflicting cost on the population. In Afghanistan this would imply that the international coalition and the ANSF targeted the Afghan population as such in order to create animosity against the Taliban and thus influence the population to put pressure on the Taliban to abstain from further opposition. There are several challenges with such an approach. Firstly, in those cases where collateral damage occurred, this did usually not translate to the Taliban being alienated. Rather, excessive use of violence tended to increase the support of the Taliban even though efforts were taken to explain to the Afghans that they were not the target. There is also no support for the notion that targeting the civilian population negatively influenced recruitment to the Taliban. Secondly, the defined centre of gravity for the ISAF operation was the consent and support of the Afghan people (McChrystal, 2010). Targeting the population one claims to support makes indeed little sense. Third, the Afghan war was, as probably most wars, an information war. The Taliban and the international coalition were engaged in a battle of information dominance in which they aimed to influence their target audiences. If applied, punishment strategies would have played directly into the information war and most probably severely damaged the efforts of ISAF. Fourth and finally, punishment strategies would in most cases be a violation of the Law of Armed Conflict. Deliberately targeting non-combatants is illegal according to the Geneva conventions and would in any case not be accepted by the troop contribution nations to ISAF. Coercion by punishment is therefore not assumed to be a viable strategy.

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<sup>70</sup> Although generally acknowledged as one of the most comprehensive and convincing studies of coercion, Pape has been critiqued for being too narrow in scope (E. A. Cohen, 1996), whereas Bratton argues that Pape; 1) holds punishment strategies to a higher standard of success than denial strategies and 2) confuses effectiveness with utility (Bratton, 2003).

Denial strategies imply either removing or neutralising the organisations leadership (decapitation) or the decimation of the opponent's military capacity. Contrary to punishment strategies, denial came to use in Afghanistan. The kill or capture operations were in many cases directed against the local or regional mid-level leadership, whereas the major operations targeted the local Taliban cadres' military capacity. The discussion above of the effects of the efforts to decimate the Taliban military capacity suggests that they had some impact in the short term perspective. However, in particular the early operations that were limited in space and time like Harekate Yolo II and Vanguard Viper had little if any impact in the long run. Evidence from the Afghan ground suggest that in most cases, the effects of denial, either through decapitation or through reducing the military capacity of the Taliban were difficult to sustain absent developments in other areas such as the establishment of functioning institutions of Afghan authority and the remediation of grievances. Contrary to punishment strategies though, denial strategies had some utility, as illustrated through the Orthepe valley operation. Absent coercive measures, it is unlikely that the ISAF forces, the ANSF and the Afghan authorities would have been able to create the security and stability that denied the Taliban access to the area and allowed for institution building and reconstruction and development efforts.

What was incredibly challenging in Afghanistan was to identify, understand and consequently be able to influence the opponent's decision making cycle. A central argument of this thesis is that, although the Taliban entailed certain characteristics of being a coherent organisation as argued by Sinno (Sinno, 2008), it was also highly fragmented with distinct tensions both locally and between the local groups and the central leadership. A consequence of the fragmented organisation and the complex actor structures was that it was highly difficult to "successfully trigger the mechanism". The kill or capture operations did certainly reduce the military capacity of the local Taliban groups, but after some time, a new leader emerged and the groups regained their fighting power. Even though the Taliban groups on several occasions were susceptible to coercion, the effects were, with few exceptions, short lived. The challenge of "affecting decision making" and "trigger the mechanism" may therefore, at least partly, be allocated to the absence of unitary actors and that decisions and behaviour was based on the actors' position and relation to complex social and contextually based realities and not the classical notion of rationality. Coercion theory's notion of mechanisms should therefore be revised in order to encompass the complexities of modern conflicts.

There are at least two challenges with theory's notion of mechanisms in contemporary conflicts. First, theory assumes that behaviour can be influenced through a simplistic mechanism of raising costs through threats or the infliction of suffering. The assumption departs from the notion of rational choice theory implying that actors will aim to avoid suffering by accommodation. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the assumption that classical rationality is the main driver for behaviour and decisions have been questioned (Cook, 1990; Zuckert, 1995). Rather, and although raising cost indeed has immediate behavioural consequences, there is a strong argument for suggesting that influencing behaviour outside an immediate effort to reduce suffering and pain are dependent on far more complicated processes (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002; Kelman, 1958; "The Theoretical Underpinnings of Strategic Influence," 2005). Social Identity Theory and Influence Theory convincingly argue that lasting change are most likely to occur when there is a process of identification and internalisation in addition to the process of compliance (Kelman, 1958). The outcomes of raising cost through for example the mechanism of denial must thus be expected to be short lived and its effects cease to exist when the guns are no longer pointed at the coerced ("The Theoretical Underpinnings of Strategic Influence," 2005). Kelman argues that "when an individual adopts an induced response through compliance, he tends to perform it only under conditions of surveillance" (Kelman, 1958, p. 54). The findings from the Afghan ground support the hypothesis put forward by influence theory that, absent other incentives, coercion will be effective only as long as the coercive effort is maintained.

Second, although mechanisms are discussed without alluding to the number of actors and the complexity of actor structures, the underpinning assumption of coercion theory is that actors operate in a bipolar system of coercer and coerced. The Afghan conflict was characterised by complex actor structures in which actors did not have a static position relative to other actors. This thesis uses the image of the kaleidoscope to illustrate this fluidity. The mechanism of denial suggests that a viable approach to influence an opponent is to target his military capacity or neutralise his leadership. However, insofar actors were engaged in a constant interplay of shifting alliances and allegiances identifying whose military capacity should be decimated in order to achieve what was a highly complicated task.

An updated version of coercion must remedy these challenges. Firstly, it must acknowledge that the theoretical notion of mechanisms is overly simplistic and unlikely to produce the desired outcomes. What is needed is an appreciation of the role of coercion as one of a number of contributors to an effort that aims to influence the processes of compliance,

identification and internalisation. Secondly, the complex actor structures suggest that targeting military capacity (denial) or leadership (decapitation) has limited utility unless accompanied with other efforts. What is needed is an understanding of how military force can carefully manipulate the cost of those actors identified as spoilers while at the same time avoid alienating the general population. Experience from the Afghan ground suggests that the latter is a highly complicated task in which more research is required.

A revised model of coercion in complex contemporary conflicts is proposed in figure 6.6 below.

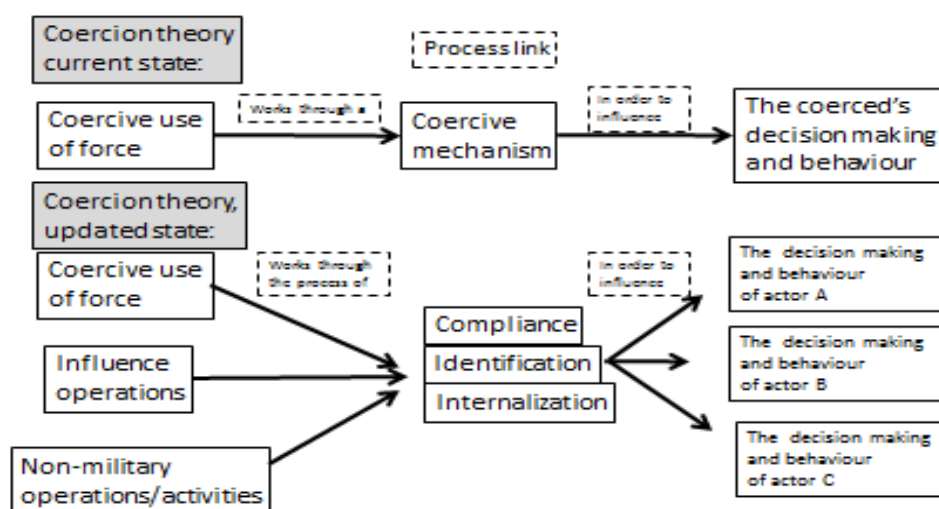


Fig 6.6; A revised model of coercion

Figure 6.2 illustrates that the simplistic and linear notion of theory should be replaced with a model in which coercion has utility when applied in conjunction with other efforts, which works through the processes of compliance, identification and internalisation in order to influence a number of actors.

The model assumes that the actors subject to influence may require different efforts based on an assessment of factors like their individual interests, position within the local and central power dynamics and their ideological and religious affiliations.

The model does not provide suggestions as to how the processes of identification and internalisation should be addressed. The literature on the Afghan conflict, as well as the



findings of this thesis suggest that it would be highly difficult for an alien organisation like ISAF to be able to influence such processes (Zaeef et al., 2010). It is likely therefore that these processes are most likely to result in desired outcomes in cases where they are pursued by organisations, institutions and individuals that enjoy a particular legitimacy within the domestic population.

## **6.6. Lessons for NATO and recommendations**

As several scholars of coercion have noted, making someone behave in a way they would otherwise not have done through threats or the adapted use of force is difficult (Jakobsen, 2011; Wijk, 2005). Most attempts of military coercion have, with some exceptions, either been failures, or resulted in limited and short lived successes. The experiences from the Afghan conflict suggest that coercion is even more difficult in conflicts in which the actor structures and issues at stake are as complex and fluid as they were in this conflict. What then are the possible lessons for NATO in terms of how and when coercion may be useful in similar conflicts? The findings of this thesis suggest that at least 5 lessons are valid;

1. Coercion is difficult, and its potential to induce lasting change in a domestic population should not be over-estimated.
2. Military planning should acknowledge that actor structures are complex and fluid. Actors cannot be defined within the simplistic and polarised notion of friend or foe.
3. Sustainable change is dependent on the ability to integrate with and support national and local actors in order to influence the processes of compliance, identification and internalisation.
4. Successful outcomes require holistic approaches that include non-coercive efforts in addition to coercion.
5. In-depth knowledge is a must.

### **Coercion is difficult**

It is generally acknowledged that making someone change their behaviour through threats or the use of force is harder than just maintaining status quo. This is why coercion is assumed to be more difficult than deterrence (Jakobsen, 2011). If this is the case in conventional inter-state conflicts, it is even more true in complex conflicts like the Afghan. The question raised by this thesis; who should coerce who in order to achieve what, remains a central issue. The difficulty is caused by reasons like the complex and fluid actors structures and power dynamics, the tensions between the local and central entities of the insurgency, the number and types of issues at stake, the inability of the domestic authorities to be assessed as credible providers of services and governance and the unlikelihood that a foreign force will

ever been assessed as a welcome and legitimate actor. This thesis further maintains that coercion is difficult because it only addresses the process of compliance and not the processes of identification and internalisation. It is therefore likely that coercive successes that come about through coercion alone tend to be short lived.

Most similar scenarios will include elements of the complexities that have characterised the Afghan conflict, and these complexities will almost by default be highly difficult to understand and penetrate by a foreign actor. Even if the complexities were understood, as arguably was, at least partly, the case of the Norwegian and German militaries after some time in Afghanistan, the ability of these militaries to operationalise their knowledge into operations and activities that resulted in the desired outcomes, remained poor. The first lesson for NATO is therefore the mere acceptance that coercion is difficult.

### **Friend or foe isn't**

Western militaries tend to apply a polarised view to actors; one is either friend or foe, the latter is to be contained, neutralised and suppressed, or even decisively defeated. The Afghan conflict suggests that this may be an ill-suited approach. Defeating the Taliban was not like fighting the Wehrmacht in 1945. Rather, the Afghan conflict suggests that most actors could not be framed within a simplistic understanding of being e.g. “the enemy”. Actors were sometimes friends, sometimes opponents and sometimes had little interest in choosing side. Which side they favoured or became a part of was more often than not, pragmatical decisions based on reasons of survival, material interests, social belonging, but also matters of ideology and religion. Which side an actor favoured was also frequently rather short lived decisions; it was usual that actors changed sides if they assessed it as serving their interests or of reasons of survival. On the whole, the Afghan conflict suggest that defining and targeting actors through processes of group affiliation or membership approaches would easily result in perverse consequences.

The second lesson for NATO is consequently the acceptance that it will be difficult in similar conflicts to separate those that should be the object of coercion from those who should not. Rather, NATO should prepare concepts that are particularly designed to apply force in order to neutralise spoilers and to prevent undesired behaviour. Such concepts have more in common with police work or of gendarmerie type of forces than classical military operations (Van Creveld, 1991). Central to this line of thought is the notion, illustrated by this thesis, that the purpose of the military endeavour is not the engagement or the battle. Rather it is the

careful projection of power in order to prevent the activities of spoilers and groups and individuals that actively and violently opposes the legitimate government.

### **Sustainable change requires local ownership**

The purpose of coercion, this thesis argues, is to make the opponent to act in ways consistent with the coercer's wishes. It is not sufficient though that the changes last only as long as the gun is pointed at the coerced; changes should last until the situation achieved through coercion is assumed to represent the new and sustainable situation. A coercive success is a success in which the new situation is broadly accepted and lasting. However, influence theory argues that changes brought about through compliance processes alone tend to be short lived (Kelman, 1958). Sustainable change requires that the change of behaviour is a result, not only of compliance, but also of the processes of identification and internalisation.

It cannot be expected that a domestic population will identify with, let alone internalise the values, behaviour or social structures of a foreign force. The experiences from Afghanistan suggest that the international military was perceived as and always remained strangers. They never became an accepted and integrated part of Afghan political, social and ideological reality. That does not mean that the international military was not welcomed by large segments of the population; various surveys suggest that many Afghans saw the need for international military support (Eggereide et al., 2012). Rather, the possibility of the international military to influence processes of identification and internalisation remained poor.

The lesson for NATO is that the potential to induce real and lasting change through military means is limited. This will arguably require the effort of national and domestic institutions and leaders. However, the Afghan conflict suggests that foreign militaries can play a role in facilitating the processes of institution building and the implementation of good governance. NATO then, should be prepared to identify and support those actors that are legitimate within sufficiently large and relevant parts of the domestic population and who identify with some core values acceptable to western democracies. Sustainable change then may occur as a consequence of domestically lead processes, but in which the international military support is perceived as legitimate and necessary. It should be noted though, that the track record for international militaries to successfully support and facilitate such processes is poor (Nagl, 2002).

### **Successful outcomes require holistic approaches**

The sections above strongly suggest that coercion is difficult, and the potential for successful outcomes are limited. In Afghanistan, the coercive use of force as a stand-alone tool, limited in time and space, never delivered in the desired outcomes. The experiences from the Orthepa valley operation and partly the Halmazaq suggest though that coercive use of force may contribute to successful outcomes if applied in conjunction with other efforts. What characterised these operations was their relatively long term perspective, in particular the Orthepa valley operation, the integration of military and non-military efforts and not least local ownership. Arguably, the comprehensive approach did not deliver on expectations as a whole, but within some areas, its results was more promising (Dyndal & Vikan, 2014).

The lesson for NATO is that military coercion applied as a stand-alone tool does nothing more than temporarily decimate the military capacity of an opponent. If this is not sufficient, and in the type of conflicts discussed here it rarely is, successful outcomes are dependent on the sustained combination of military and non-military means, the application of which is coordinated and concerted. The same caution should be mentioned here as in the section above; a well-designed and executed comprehensive approach is no guarantee for successful outcomes.

### **In-depth knowledge is a must**

Neither Norway nor Germany was particularly knowledgeable about Afghanistan and the Afghan conflict prior to their assumptions of leadership responsibilities in Faryab and Kunduz. What is indeed remarkable was the scepticism in the Norwegian military and political leadership towards acquiring information outside the formal structures. Although already in 2004/5, there was a large amount of literature available and various research institutions had focused on Afghanistan for years, the Norwegian decision and initial plans were almost entirely based on “in-house” information; the intelligence community and the units that served with the British prior to September 2005 (Diesen, 26 June 2014). The German position was not greatly different, hence both Norway and Germany departed for Afghanistan with limited in-depth knowledge of the nature and challenges of the undertaking. Clearly, knowledge developed through the mission, and the Norwegian and German militaries had developed remarkable insights by the time of their withdrawal. However, the argument can be made that it is wise to apply a variety of sources, including those that may not agree with or even be very sympathetic towards the military venture, in order to gather in-depth knowledge and insights prior to departure and during the mission. Without such knowledge

and the training that is based on it, military units are inclined to do what is already in their genetic make-up: conduct the type of operations they have otherwise trained and prepared for.

But the knowledge argument goes beyond the mere preparation of military forces. It also reflects the core of the decision making process and the political debate. Without a decision making process that is firmly based on knowledge it is always the risk that political decisions and priorities will be based on a range of factors that have little to do with achieving positive outcomes in the conflict in question. There is no evidence indicating that Norwegian and German politicians, with a few exceptions, had thought through the potential for military force to achieve effects in the Afghan conflict. Contrary to e.g. the debate in the Dutch Parliament prior to the Dutch assumption of leadership in Uruzgan province, the two Norwegian parliamentary debates in spring 2005 did not contain a single question with respect to risks, potential achievements, strategy or the actual role of the military.

The lesson for those nations that contributes to and participates in out of area operations like ISAF is quite obvious. Nations should prioritize and make substantial efforts in gaining, analysing and distribute information. It is vital, this thesis argues, that information is gathered also from sources that may not be very sympathetic to the military endeavour.

## **7. Appendices**

### **A. Interview forms**

#### **a. Interview guide, Afghan interpreters:**

Dear Sir,

The purpose of the interview is to reveal perceptions and behaviour in local communities in Faryab province that may be connected to the presence of the international military: ISAF and the Norwegian PRT.

As an Afghan citizen translating for Norwegian and ISAF forces, you followed ISAF/the Norwegian Military closely in operations, whereas your background from Afghanistan provides a unique insight into how ISAF operations and activities were perceived, discussed and assessed. It is important to understand that it is your story, based on your observations, I am interested in.

Below are presented a number of topics of interest to my thesis. This must be understood as a starting point or guideline, so other issues may be of interest as well, depending on your experiences and viewpoints.

1. The timeframe in which you served as an interpreter for ISAF/the Norwegian forces
2. Your background from Afghanistan (home place, family, etc):
3. Your role as an interpreter (I will not discuss classified issues):
4. Discussions and perceptions of ISAF activities and operations in local Afghan communities
5. Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) like the Taliban
6. Your observations of perceptions and behaviour when ISAF forces entered/operated in the local communities



7. Your thoughts/assessments on how ISAF presence and use of force (conducting military operations) affected local Afghan communities and AOGs/the Taliban
8. Any other issues/topics you find relevant.

The interview will be recorded, and stored on a computer accessible only to me.

### **How Information is Treated/The issue of anonymity and confidentiality**

All Afghan participants will be anonymised in the publication. It will not be possible to trace information to you, nor will it be possible to use the information to identify either you or your family.

All information related to you will be treated confidentially. Access to personal information will not be distributed to others apart from Steinar Skaar and supervisors Dr Alex Marshall at the University of Glasgow and Dr Karl Erik Haug at the Air Force Academy.

All information will be protected by the use of password and access control. Notes, questionnaires and other material that can be connected to respondents' replies will be stored in a safe place and locked up.

Data and identifiers will be locked in separate filing cabinets accessible only to me. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) will not have access to information on who is participating or any data collected through the interviews.

Similarly, no other governmental or private institutions will have access to either personal information or data. This also applies to the Norwegian Ministry of Defence.

b. Interview form, Norwegian military

**Interview guide NOR PRT personnel, PRT Meymaneh, Faryab Province**

**(Replies will be treated in confidence)**

		<b>Remarks/ anonymisation code</b>
<b>Date of interview:</b>		
<b>Name:</b>		<b>Code:</b>
<b>Date of Birth:</b>		
<b>Period in Afghanistan</b>		
<b>Position in PRT</b>		
<b>PRT number</b>		
<b>Prior number of missions in Afghanistan:</b>		
<b>Can your name be revealed in the dissertation?</b>	Yes ..... No .....	
<b>Is recording the interview okay?</b>	Yes ..... No .....	
<b>Contact information:</b>		<b>Data consent status:</b>
		..... <b>Sign:</b>

**Formalities:**

All material gathered for this project is subject to the usual and generally acknowledged norms of ethical research and law. Data will be collected and stored according to procedures agreed with the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee.

The questions asked in this survey will only be used for the purpose of this project. All quotes will be checked and approved by the interviewee before submission. All information will be anonymised unless otherwise agreed; the dissertation will not reveal individual statements unless positively agreed upon.

**About the project:**

ISAF represents a case where the intervening power is not a geographical neighbour, does not share a common language or have similar cultural or societal preferences, thus bearing similarities to many instances of Western military intervention since 1990.

In this project, I will examine the utility of ISAF use of coercive measures in the Afghan conflict, more precisely the case of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz. I aim to explore the causal connections, if any, between ISAF operations/activities and behaviour within insurgent and affiliated groups.

Using military force by an external actor in order to induce behavioural change within domestic communities is a challenging endeavour that is not well covered by research. This project aims to expand existing theory on the utility of force in contemporary complex and fragmented conflicts.

The thesis will to a large extent be based on interviews with various actors with experience of the Afghan field.

The project's working title is:

*The Utility of Coercive Theory in Contemporary Conflicts, A case study on Afghanistan.*

The research question to be answered is:

*How relevant is coercion theory in order to explain effects and outcomes in the conflict in Northern Afghanistan from 2005 to 2012?*

### **About the interview:**

The interview will be semi-structured, covering six main topics: your preparations, knowledge transfer, actors, operations and activities, observations and assessments and redeployment/lessons learned. Throughout the interview, I may ask you to elaborate on certain aspects within the overarching thematic.

### **Topics:**

#### **1: Your preparations and pre-conceptions:**

How did you prepare yourself for the mission with respect to background material, training, official briefings/information, etc, with particular respect to ROE, kinetic operations, COIN doctrine/procedures, partnering and understanding/assessing effects?

#### **2: Knowledge transfer (from previous PRT to yours when arriving in theatre):**

How did you comprehend the initial challenges with respect to criteria for success and mission accomplishment? What was the key challenge according to the previous PRT?

#### **3: Actors.**

Who were the most important friendly/neutral actors (individuals/groups/institutions) in Faryab during your tenure? What was the relation between them and how did you/the PRT relate to them?

Who were the relevant opposing actors? How did you comprehend their modus operandi and how did you relate with/deal with them?

#### **4: Operations and activities.**

What were the main operational focus and dominant activities throughout your tenure? If possible, refer to two-three focused operations (which operations, aims, objectives and how these were to be achieved), how these operations tied into the operational objectives as stated by higher command (RC N) and how they tied into national and PRT-developed aims and objectives.

How did the ISAF's developed aims and objectives correlate with Norwegian policy, and how did you deal with potential differences?

#### **5: Observations and assessments:**

Your observations/perceptions of the effectiveness/success of operations/activities (framework and focused operations) and the degree to which ISAF operations influenced behaviour within insurgent and affiliated communities.

#### **6: After redeployment**

Your assessment of what was achieved and how this was fed back into future contingents and the military institution.

c. Interview form, German military

**Interview guide German military personnel, PRT Kunduz, Kunduz**  
**Province**

**(Replies will be treated in confidence)**

		<b>Remarks/ anonymisation code</b>
<b>Date of interview:</b>		
<b>Name:</b>		<b>Code:</b>
<b>Date of Birth:</b>		
<b>Timeframe in Afghanistan</b>		
<b>Position</b>		
<b>Total number of missions in Afghanistan:</b>		
<b>Provided that you can control the content/ formulation of all quotations which refer to you – can your name be put as a reference/source in the dissertation?</b>	Yes ..... No .....	
<b>Is recording the interview okay?</b>	Yes ..... No .....	
<b>Contact information:</b>		<b>Data consent status:</b>

**Formalities:**

All material gathered for this project is subject to the usual and generally acknowledged norms of ethical research and law. Data will be collected and stored according to procedures agreed with the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee.

The questions asked in this survey will only be used for the purpose of this project. All quotes will be checked and approved by the interviewee before submission. All information will be anonymised unless otherwise agreed; the dissertation will not reveal individual statements unless positively agreed upon.

The dissertation will be unclassified, hence I will not ask you to reveal any classified information.

### **About the project:**

ISAF represents a case where the intervening power is not a geographical neighbour, does not share a common language or have similar cultural or societal preferences, thus bearing similarities to many instances of Western military intervention since 1990.

In this comparative study, I will examine the utility of ISAF's use of coercive measures in the Afghan conflict, more precisely the case of Norway in Faryab and Germany in Kunduz. I aim to explore the causal connections, if any, between ISAF operations/activities and behaviour within insurgent and affiliated groups.

Using military force by an external actor in order to induce behavioural change within domestic communities is a challenging endeavour that is not well covered by research. This project aims to expand existing theory on the utility of force in contemporary complex and fragmented conflicts.

The thesis will to a large extent be based on interviews with various actors with experience of the Afghan field.

The project's working title is:

*The Utility of Coercive Theory in Contemporary Conflicts, A case study on Afghanistan.*

The research question to be answered is:

*How relevant is coercion theory in order to explain effects and outcomes in the conflict in Northern Afghanistan from 2005 to 2012?*

### **About the interview:**

The interview will be semi-structured, covering 4 themes: 1) Preparations, 2) Situation and regional and local issues, 3) The nature of your mission, the use of force and observations and assessments, 4) Other relevant issues. Throughout the interview, I may ask you to elaborate on certain aspects within the overarching thematic.

### **Topics:**

#### **1. Preparations and pre-conceptions:**

- a. Official training/Unit preparations
- b. Individual preparations
- c. Pre-knowledge:
  - i. The situation in Kunduz province
  - ii. ISAF and national concepts/doctrines/tactics
  - iii. The official German perception of the conflict (as you perceived it)

#### **2. The situation/issues in Kunduz province**

- a. Local issues/concerns (cultural/social/material/political/actors)

- b. Frequently addressed issues
- c. Actors (GIROA/Official/Warlords/strongmen/Criminals/Armed Opposition Groups (Taliban etc.)/Other
- d. The Taliban in Kunduz: who, where, modus operandi, development
- e. Other opposing groups: who, where, modus operandi, development

**3. The nature of your mission, operations, activities and effects/outcomes:**

**a. The nature of your mission (s)**

- i. Your position/tasks/role
- ii. Your exposure to the Afghan field and actors (how, who and frequency)
- iii. Your understanding of the Taliban/ opposing groups (where, who, what and how), ref to above.
- iv. Relevant operations/activities by your unit

**b. The use of force**

- i. In order to influence the behaviour of Taliban/insurgents: How important was the very presence of ISAF in and by itself?
- ii. Other than self-defence, what governed the use of force and the way it was used?
- iii. Other than self-defence, was the link between force and objectives clear to you? If “yes”, what was the link between force and objectives?
- iv. How important was the actual use of force in order to achieve your objectives?
- v. How was the use of force discussed or thematised in your unit?
- vi. If force was used with a coercive intention, could you more precisely describe its nature/conduct?

**c. Effects and outcomes:**

- i. Taliban/insurgent/local behaviour relative to ISAF (and/or ANSF) with respect to:
  - 1. Large-scale operations
  - 2. Routine operations/MOLT team operations
  - 3. Kinetic activity
  - 4. Non-kinetic activities
  - 5. Other
- ii. Local behaviour relative to the Taliban/insurgent/opposing groups
- iii. Your assessment of the utility of force in the Kunduz province with respect to effects, achievements and behavioural impact

**4. Other relevant issues/observations/assessments**

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