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The course of co-option: Co-option of local power-holders as a tool for obtaining control over the population in counterinsurgency campaigns in weblike societies. With case studies on Dutch experiences during the Aceh War (1873-c. 1912) and the Uruzgan campaign (2006-2010)

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Publication date

2016

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Kitzen, M. W. M. (2016). *The course of co-option: Co-option of local power-holders as a tool for obtaining control over the population in counterinsurgency campaigns in weblike societies. With case studies on Dutch experiences during the Aceh War (1873-c. 1912) and the Uruzgan campaign (2006-2010)*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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Part III

The Uruzgan campaign

Chapter 8

Chapter 8: Afghanistan, Uruzgan, and the War from 2001 until 2006

8.1 Introduction

In this part we will study the use of co-option in the reality of contemporary counterinsurgency warfare. As argued in Chapter Three (section 3.5) today's campaigns can best be described as neo-classical counterinsurgency adapted to the specifics of the current operational environment. Domestic pressure demands intervening foreign counterinsurgents to establish, consolidate, and transfer control to a preferably democratic host-nation government, (re-)constructed by the counterinsurgents themselves, and all this within a limited time frame and with limited resources only. The situation on the ground, however, thwarts the implementation of this concept as target societies in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan are characterized by a complicated weblike structure and a weak or even absent connection to a modern central state government capable of controlling such a society as a whole. Consequently contemporary counterinsurgency with its limited time and resources aims at establishing control at the grassroots level in the various locales of the target society and transferring this control to a host-nation government capable of providing basic security and services to the population in those locales, while wider state-building efforts are delivered through long-term stability and reconstruction. Today's counterinsurgents, therefore, seek to establish and consolidate control over the population at the local level and transfer this control to a local administration - representing the host-nation's government- capable of maintaining security and addressing the people's basic needs. This all has triggered the re-invention of co-option of local power-holders for obtaining control over the populace and establishing a durable connection with the local administration.

The next chapters provide an analysis of the four-year (2006-2010) Dutch mission in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province in order to obtain an insight in the application of co-option in the daily reality of contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns. The Dutch Uruzgan campaign is exemplary for today's counterinsurgency warfare as it was shaped by domestic pressure to focus on stabilization and reconstruction of this war torn province -as part of a modern Afghan state governed from Kabul- with limited resources and within a limited time frame, while the soldiers on the ground were confronted with an insurgency rooted in a complicated weblike society only weakly connected to the tottering structures of the new Afghan state.¹ Consequently the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) adopted neo-classical counterinsurgency ideas as its *Leitmotif* and gradually incorporated recent field

¹ See, among others, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way', Ton de Munnik, Martijn Kitzen, 'Planning dilemmas in coalition operations', 150-158, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D approach and counterinsurgency, a mix of defence, diplomacy, and development, The case of Uruzgan' (Thesis, Leiden University, 2009), 51-53, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'Deadly embrace? The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand' (Doctoral Dissertation, Leiden University, 2015), 146-148, Leendert Johan Hazelbag, 'Politieke besluitvorming van de missie in Uruzgan: een reconstructie', *Research Paper no. 90* (Breda: Netherlands Defence Academy, 2009), 34-35, 40, George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, 'The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21:3 (2010), 431-432.

innovations such as for instance Key Leader Engagement (KLE, see 3.5.4), measures to mitigate the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) threat, and counter-network methods for disrupting or destroying the local Taliban. Of course we will focus on the implementation and execution of KLE as this concept embodies co-option in modern campaigns. For a thorough analysis of co-option in the TFU campaign we will distinguish between the initial phase of the campaign in which the Dutch accepted and developed neo-classical counterinsurgency ideas on population centric warfare as the underpinning of their operational framework and the advanced phase in which the campaign gained momentum as an adapted neo-classical counterinsurgency campaign. The June 2007 battle for Chora district is considered the campaign's hinge point as this provided 'a real adaptive moment' after which enhanced neo-classical counterinsurgency became solidly anchored in both TFU's overall campaign plan and day-to-day operations.² Therefore, we will first discuss co-option during the TFU campaign from its onset until the battle of Chora and its aftermath (2006-2007, Chapter Nine), and subsequently scrutinize the more advanced phase of the campaign (2008-2010, Chapter Ten). We will conclude this case study with a discussion of the findings on co-option during the Dutch Uruzgan campaign in the light of the analytical framework for understanding co-option as a tool for controlling the population in weblike societies (Chapter Eleven). Thus this part will add to our understanding of co-option in the reality of contemporary counterinsurgency warfare through a thorough analysis of co-option during the four-year Uruzgan campaign.

Before immersing in the daily reality of practicing co-option at the grassroots level in Uruzgan province we have to address the background of the Dutch campaign as it was embedded in the larger Afghan campaign. This brings us to another feature of contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns; their multinational dimension. Although the United States' (US) armed forces have borne the brunt of the burden in both the Iraqi and Afghan campaigns, modern counterinsurgency is typically carried out by multinational coalitions.³ Especially the campaign in Afghanistan, where the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has commanded the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since 2003 -as opposed to Iraq, where the United States commanded the multinational coalition-, has demonstrated the extent this international cooperation can possibly take in modern counterinsurgency warfare.⁴ The ramification of this multilateral character of contemporary counterinsurgency

2 Frans Osinga, James A. Russell, 'Conclusion: Military Adaptation and the War in Afghanistan', 293-294. See also Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 722.

3 See for instance Isabelle Duyvesteyn, Paul B. Rich, 'Insurgency and counterinsurgency, some conclusions', 365-366, Andrew Mumford, 'Sir Robert Thompson's Lessons for Iraq: Bringing the 'Basic Principles of Counter-Insurgency' into the 21st Century', *Defence Studies* 10:1-2 (March-June 2010), 178-179, Sean Kay and Sahar Khan, 'NATO and Counter-insurgency: Strategic Liability or Tactical Asset?', *Contemporary Security Policy* 28:1 (April 2007), 177-178, David H. Petraeus, 'Reflections on the Counter-Insurgency Era', *RUSI Journal* 158:4 (August/September 2013), 86-87.

4 Sten Rynning, 'ISAF and NATO: Campaign Innovation and Organizational Adaptation', *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, ed. Farrell, T., Osinga, F., Russell, J.A. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 83, Jens Ringsmose, Peter Dahl Thruelsen, 'NATO's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Afghanistan: Are Classical Doctrines Suitable for Alliances?', *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 22 (2010), David Auerswald, Stephen Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan, Fighting Together, Fighting Alone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1-22, Christopher Coker, 'Between Iraq and a Hard Place, Multinational Co-operation, Afghanistan and Strategic Culture', *RUSI Journal* 151:5 (October 2006), 14.

is that the overall campaigns are easily hampered by a lack of unity of effort as individual contributing nations tend to prefer their own agenda over the campaign plan and thus essentially are fighting separate campaigns. In Afghanistan this problem was tackled as part of the 2009-2010 surge by General Stanley A. McChrystal who actively sought to improve unity of effort by synchronizing the mission and ensuring a shared understanding of the mission throughout ISAF's forces as well as enhancing the coordination with the Afghan Government and other international actors, including liaison with NATO and national capitals of contributing countries.⁵ By 2011 these measures had given the Afghan campaign a renewed momentum, yet the multinational dimension remained a complicating factor as NATO collectively agreed on a transfer of responsibility to the Afghan government by 2014, but various contributing countries held different visions on the moment of withdrawal of their own troops. In some cases the most significant national contribution had already been ceased before this discussion, as was the case with the Dutch mission in Uruzgan that ended in August 2010.

At the grassroots level, where counterinsurgents seek to control the local population, the consequences of this international dimension of modern counterinsurgency campaigns are twofold. First, variations in national troop contributions can cause a transfer of authority over a specific locale between intervening countries. A national counterinsurgency force might find itself deploying to a specific area in order to take over from another contributing country, and transfer this locale to yet another country after a certain amount of time -as demanded by national politics. This so-called transfer of authority over operating areas has been commonly observed in Iraq as well as Afghanistan. In Iraq, for instance, Dutch forces took over the southern province of Al Muthanna from US Marines in August 2003, and in spring 2005 handed over the province to British and Australian forces.⁶ For the Uruzgan campaign a similar pattern evolved as Dutch forces took over authority over the province from a US Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in August 2006 and the TFU transferred its authority to a combined American and Australian force in August 2010.⁷ Especially in the NATO-led ISAF campaign, which evoked a vivid debate on burden sharing within that alliance, a pattern of frequent transfers of authority over various of Afghanistan's 34 provinces revealed itself when one contributing country took over from another.⁸ The second consequence of the multilateral character of today's campaigns for the grassroots level concerns the combined

5 Stanley A. McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment* (Kabul: ISAF, 2009), 2-14, see also Rudra Chaudhuri, Theo Farrell, 'Campaign disconnect', 272-275, 287-290.

6 On the Dutch mission in Al Muthanna see Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, Arthur ten Cate, *Missie in Al Muthanna, De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in Irak, 2003-2005* (Boom: Amsterdam, 2010), Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, Arthur ten Cate, 'A gentle occupation: unravelling the Dutch approach in Iraq, 2003-2005', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:1 (2012), and Arthur ten Cate, Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, *A Gentle Occupation: Dutch military operations in Iraq, 2003-2005* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014).

7 See among others, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge, A Year with the Pashtuns in the Heartland of the Taliban* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2012), 177-182, Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', *Statebuilding in Afghanistan, Multinational contributions to reconstruction*, ed. Nik Hynek, Péter Marton (London: Routledge, 2012), 79, Christ Klep, *Uruzgan, Nederlandse militairen op missie, 2005-2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), 66.

8 Marion Bogers, Robert Beerens, 'Mission Afghanistan: Who Bears the Heaviest Burden', *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 19:1 (2013), 32-35.

composition of task forces or sharing of a local area of operations between countries. At the end of its mission in 2010 the Dutch-led TFU, for example, mainly consisted of Dutch and Australian units, but was further augmented by elements from the United States, France, Singapore, and Slovakia.⁹ Additionally, Australian, Dutch, and US Special Forces under direct command of ISAF's special operations branch were active in Uruzgan Province, while also vast numbers of Afghan National Army (ANA) troops and Afghan police officers were operating alongside coalition forces.¹⁰

Unsurprisingly both the continuous transferring of authority and concurrently operating in the same area of operations brought forward issues of coordination and differences between countries. Although this study does not focus on these problems concerning the counterinsurgents' unity of effort, we here have to deal with the impact of these consequences of today's multinational counterinsurgency campaigns on the interaction between counterinsurgents and local population. The people of a locale and their power-holders are confronted with subsequent national contingents as well as with soldiers from different intervening countries simultaneously. While we will address the latter in our next two chapters on co-option during the Dutch Uruzgan campaign, we will start the exploration of the former consequence of the internationalization of counterinsurgency campaigns in this chapter. The 2006-2010 TFU campaign largely took place before McChrystal's review and synchronization of the overall ISAF campaign when different countries were still effectively fighting separate campaigns. At the grassroots level the differences between succeeding countries could have disastrous effects for the local population, as Haji Abdul Rahman, a tribal elder from Sarobi district (65 kilometres east of Kabul) experienced after French soldiers took over from Italian troops in July 2008:

'When the country [nationality of the forces] changed and the French came here there was a big attack on them. We knew the Taleban came to the city and we knew they didn't carry out attacks on the Italian troops but we didn't know why.'¹¹

For the local populace a benign environment had turned hostile overnight due to the change of nationality. In this case the underlying cause for this deterioration was that the Italian secret service had cut a deal with local warlords and Taliban commanders in which they paid tens of thousands of dollars for keeping the area quiet. As the French were unaware of this

9 Sjo Soeters, Tom Bijlsma, Gijs van den Heuvel, 'Trust thy Ally, Multinational military cooperation in Uruzgan', *Mission Uruzgan, Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, ed. Beeres, R., Van der Meulen, J., Soeters, J., Vogelaar, A. (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2012), 162.

10 Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau, Het moderne Korps Commandotroepen, 1989-2012* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 279-327.

11 Tom Coghlan, 'French troops were killed after Italy hushed up 'bribes' to Taleban', *The Times*, October 15, 2009, www.timesonline.co.uk (accessed October 19, 2009), see also Tim Reid, 'United States admits tackling Italians over payments to the Taleban', *The Times*, October 17, 2009, www.timesonline.co.uk (accessed October 19, 2009).

deal, and payments had stopped when the Italians left, local actors picked up their weapons and started fighting again.

In the case of Uruzgan the so-called Hand-Over-Take-Over (HOTO) between the US and the Dutch highlighted significant differences in the approach to control the population by influencing the local political landscape. Whereas the US opted to control Uruzgan's society through dominant local power-holder Jan Mohammed Khan (commonly known among western troops and diplomats as JMK), the Dutch chose to distance themselves from this predatory warlord who had marginalized and even alienated large parts of the local population while favouring his own people.¹² Although many of Jan Mohammed's rivals started to exploit this new opportunity and actively collaborated with the TFU, the former remained a highly influential agent in Uruzgan throughout the Dutch campaign. In order to fully grasp this situation we need to explore both Uruzgan's societal background as well as the American intervention in this local society prior to the HOTO in 2006. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Uruzgan is just one of 34 Afghan provinces of the new Afghan state and that it's society is part of the larger weblike society in Afghanistan as a whole. Therefore, we will also address this wider context and the connection between the Kabul-led Afghan state and its weblike society. Consequently the 2001-2006 US Uruzgan campaign will also be discussed in relationship with the larger war effort in Afghanistan, which additionally serves to sketch the background for the involvement of NATO and especially the Dutch deployment in 2006. Thus, this chapter seeks to provide a thorough understanding of the situation at the grassroots level in Uruzgan and the background of the TFU campaign through an analysis of Afghanistan and its society as a whole and Uruzgan's societal landscape in particular as well as through a subsequent discussion of the Afghan War from 2001 until 2006 with special attention for the US involvement in Uruzgan province. Furthermore we have to mention here that at the end of Chapter Ten we will touch upon the HOTO between the TFU and the combined Australian and US task force in 2010 and at that place we will also discuss the ramifications of this transfer of authority for ISAF's control over the local society. But let us now start with describing Afghanistan and its weblike society as well as the specific societal situation in Uruzgan in order to capture the local background against which the four-year TFU campaign took place.

8.2 Afghanistan, its weblike society, and the local societal landscape in Uruzgan

Today's Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked country of some 647,500 square kilometres, an area rather larger than France, or about the size of Texas.¹³ In the south and

12 See, among others, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, 203-204, Astri Suhrke, *When More is Less*, 138, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king: The Challenges to Strengthening Governance in Uruzgan* (The Hague: Clingendael, 2010), 34, Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 241-242, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 731.

13 This paragraph is based on Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 3-7, Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of Its People and Politics* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 1-4, Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan, A Military History From*

the east it shares a 2,430 kilometres border with Pakistan, while in the north Turkmenistan (744 kilometres), Tajikistan (1,206 kilometres), and Uzbekistan (137 kilometres) are its neighbours. In the north east there is also a short border with China (76 kilometres), and in the west Afghanistan is bounded by Iran (936 kilometres). This geographical interposition at the crossroads of the Iranian Plateau, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent has long rendered Afghanistan's location of strategic importance. Despite the rugged terrain consisting of snow-covered mountains, unforgiving deserts, and vast steppe, it has always been the primary land passage connecting these regions and their great powers, as the nearby Himalaya range forms a rather impassable barrier. Consequently, the country has always drawn foreign attention and has witnessed countless invasions since ancient times. The local population has historically responded to such interventions by mounting a people's war in which they confronted powerful regular armies with guerrilla tactics that allowed them to exploit their superior knowledge of the difficult terrain and local circumstances. Testimony to the effectiveness of this method is that Alexander the Great's generalship met its biggest test when confronted with a guerrilla in the Persian satrapies of Bactria and Sogdania (covering a large part of present-day Afghanistan) that forced him to adapt the organization and tactics of his troops.¹⁴ Later, Marco Polo -who thus not only visited Aceh, but also Afghanistan- also observed the traces of many wars as well as the local population's preparedness to defy foreign invasions.¹⁵ In the colonial era the Afghan corridor was the theatre of the so-called Great Game between the British and the Russian empires, while the 1979-1989 Soviet invasion and the current Afghan War are the most recent examples of foreign intervention in the country.

Unsurprisingly, present-day Afghanistan has been hugely shaped by all these historical conflicts, with the current Islamic Republic of Afghanistan only being the result of the latest foreign intervention. Acquiring a thorough understanding of modern Afghanistan thus requires us to delve deeper into the way the wars of the past have moulded the country and its society. Therefore this section first explores this historical dimension before we engage in a more detailed discussion of Afghanistan's current weblike society and the local societal landscape in Uruzgan province.

8.2.1 The becoming of present-day Afghanistan

As we have seen Afghanistan has a long track record of foreign interference harking back to antiquity. For understanding modern Afghanistan, however, it is the latest epoch, which

Alexander the Great To The Fall Of The Taliban (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 1-5, Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard Of Empires*, 3-8.

14 J.F.C. Fuller, *The Generalship Of Alexander The Great* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 116-117.

15 Marco Polo, *Rustichello Of Pisa, The Travels Of Marco Polo, The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition, Volume I* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 157-163.

begins in the second half of the nineteenth century, that matters most.¹⁶ It was at this time that the Great Game between the British and Russian empires led to the establishment of Afghanistan as a buffer state between those empires.¹⁷ Following the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880) and a Russian advance towards Afghanistan, a joint commission of British and Russian officials agreed upon a Russo-Afghan frontier which was demarcated in 1887, while in the following years the British intent not to share a common border with the Russians led to an expansion of the Afghan buffer state towards the east to the border with China which was completed in 1895.¹⁸ As northern British India was harassed by Pashtun tribes living in the eastern and southern part of Afghanistan, there was also a demand of a more clear boundary between Afghan and British influence spheres. In 1893 the foreign secretary of British India's government, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, therefore, delineated the furthest border of British control along the so-called Durand line, which cut straight through the Pashtun heartland. Afghanistan's ruling authority, the Amir of Kabul and its Dependencies, 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, reluctantly accepted this division of the Pashtun tribes.¹⁹ Present day Afghans still report that the Amir only signed the agreement as the British lured him into drunkenness by feeding him a tremendous amount of port.²⁰ An increase of the yearly British subsidy from 1.2 to 1.8 million rupees as well as a promise not to hinder the import of weapons and ammunition, however, provide more realistic reasons for 'Abd al-Rahman's consent. Although the Durand line has remained disputed ever since, its demarcation was completed in 1897, and by 1901 all boundaries of Afghanistan, including that with Iran, had been defined.²¹ Thus, the geographical contours of present-day Afghanistan became clear at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Simultaneously to the setting of the geographical borders, the British managed to seize control over Afghanistan's foreign policy in return for considerable support in the form of money, weapons, and -if necessary- military support to the Amir of Kabul as arranged by the 1879 so-called Gandamak Treaty 'of eternal peace and friendship'.²² The consecutive influx of British resources to the Kabul government enhanced an already ongoing transformation of the Afghan state from a tribally based empire towards a more modern centralized entity.²³ Although the Afghan empire state had been a centrally ruled kingdom under Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747-1773) in the eighteenth century, rivalry and internal power struggles within

16 Willem Vogelsang, 'Naar een zelfstandig Afghania?', *Militaire Spectator* 176:12 (2007), 543.

17 For a thorough background on the Great Game, see Karl E. Meyer, Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows, The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

18 On the Anglo-Russo definition of Afghanistan's borders see, among others, Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 269-270, Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 105-108.

19 The title of the Amir was later changed into Amir of Afghanistan and Dependencies. Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 261.

20 Willem Vogelsang, 'Naar een zelfstandig Afghania?', 545.

21 On the Sistan boundary with Iran see Richard Tapper, 'Introduction', *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Tapper, R. (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 34.

22 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 260-261, see also Edgar O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars, 1839 to the present* (London: Brassey's, 2002), 41-42. At the time of the signing of the treaty Ya'qub Khan was Amir of Kabul.

23 Richard Tapper, 'Introduction', 35.

the ruling Durrani confederacy of the Pashtun tribe led to a protracted civil war that corroded the state's centre.²⁴ As a result the central administration in Kabul could rally significantly less resources and had to fall back on other methods for consolidating its authority. Under Amir Dust Muhammed Khan (r. 1826-1863), the state reverted to establishing control through a series of alliances and co-optive ties with local tribes and warlord-like local power-holders, among whom many of the Amir's closest relatives. It has to be mentioned that the British defeat during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842) and its aftermath greatly added to Dust Muhammed's capabilities -both in the form of a boost of reputation and an increase of resources- for engaging and dominating accommodations with Afghanistan's various local segments.²⁵ Consequently, while essentially remaining an imperial entity consisting of various autonomous segments and a centralized administrative authority, the process of renewed centralization of the Afghan state, which was further enhanced by the influx of British resources after the Second Anglo-Afghan War, had already begun after the First Anglo-Afghan War. Let us now take a further look at how this centralization process influenced the becoming of present-day Afghanistan.

'Abd al-Rahman Khan assumed the office of Amir of Kabul and its Dependencies in 1880. He was empowered by the British, who originally intended to maintain their influence in Afghanistan through divide-and-rule politics, encompassing the acknowledging of both the Amir as well as of various local princes. Soon, however, the British realized that for Afghanistan to remain an effective buffer state without too much costly interference, a strengthened state would be a better solution. This change of policy opened the road for 'Abd al-Rahman 'to extend his power and strengthen central authority, with the financial backing of the British and without fear of foreign intervention'.²⁶ In twenty years time 'Abd al-Rahman managed to definitely transform Afghanistan into a centralized state through a policy that drastically curtailed the position of local power-holders and sought to break with many traditional aspects of Afghan life. Unsurprisingly, this invoked much resistance of traditional local power-holders which was ruthlessly dealt with, winning 'Abd al-Rahman the nickname of 'Iron Amir'; he personally estimated that his quest for control had cost the lives of some 120,000 of his subjects by 1894.²⁷ When the Amir died in 1901 the central administration in Kabul effectively exerted control over the peoples living within the newly established Afghan borders. The beginning of the twentieth century, thus, not only marked the emergence of the geographical contours of present-day Afghanistan, it also saw the establishment of a more modern centralized state within those boundaries.

24 Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan, The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826-1863)* (London: Routledge, 2008), xiii-xiv. The Durrani-led state was originally dominated and ruled by kings of the Sadozai branch of the Popalzai sub-tribe. From its onset, however, there was a vivid rivalry between the Sadozai and the Muhammedzai, a branch of the Barakzai sub-tribe. By 1818 the decline of power of the Sadozai dynasty provoked the Muhammedzai to take over control of the Durrani-state. Tapper, 'Introduction', 31-32.

25 Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan*, 248-251, see also Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 254-256.

26 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 263. See also Tapper, 'Introduction', 31-36.

27 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 268.

The 'Iron Amir' was succeeded by his son Habibullah (r. 1901-1919), whose reign -thanks to his father's repressive policy- was characterized by the absence of internal unrest. Therefore Habibullah could embark on a policy that reached out to traditional religious leaders and tribal chiefs (the latter being commonly referred to as *khans*) and placated them by enhancing their role in the state's administration through, among others, the institution of a state council for tribal affairs.²⁸ In addition to these predominantly rural traditionalists within Afghan society, an urban modernist faction, mainly consisting of a growing group of civil servants and others whose interest lay with the central state, arose during the first two decades of the twentieth century.²⁹ Amanullah (r. 1919-1929), Habibullah's son who took over when his father was killed in 1919, was an advocate of the modernization of Afghanistan and immediately set out to reform the Afghan state in order to bring about social and economical change.³⁰ Inevitably this policy brought Amanullah on a collision course with both the traditional leaders and the British, who still were supervising Afghanistan's foreign policy. To begin with the latter, the Amir started the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919. After one month of fighting an armistice was declared and by subsequently signing the Treaty of Rawalpindi the British agreed that the Afghans would resume control over their own foreign policy, which allowed the latter to embark on an international course in support of intentional social change at home.³¹ The opposition of the traditional faction fully revealed itself when Amanullah in 1923 presented Afghanistan's first written constitution that aimed to turn the country in a modern nation-state. The constitution discarded the idea of tribal affiliation and religious influence in the administration. For many of the traditional religious and tribal leaders this interfered too much with their interests and traditions. Confronted with rising discontent and a tribal rebellion in Khost in 1924, the Amir called for a *Loya Jirga* in order to endorse his reforms -ironically the new constitution had abandoned the idea of exactly such tribal participation. Although Amanullah assumed the title of King in 1926, stepped up his reforms inspired by a trip to Kemal Atatürk's Turkey and Reza Shah's Persia, and held another *Loya Jirga* in 1928 in order to explain his ideas, he gradually lost the connection with the traditionalist faction representing the many tribally living Afghans. As Amanullah also failed to develop an army capable of quelling tribal rebellions, his fate was sealed. In 1929 the King was forced to abdicate; Amanullah's plan for modernization of the Afghan state had failed because, despite his 'real genius for state-building formula', and support from the urban modernist faction, he failed to acknowledge 'the realities of [traditional] tribal power'.³²

Amanullah's successors Nadir Shah (r. 1929-1933), Zahir Shah (r. 1933-1973), and Daud Khan (prime minister 1953-1963, president 1973-1978), turned out to be more adept in balancing a

28 Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 111, Tapper, 'Introduction', 36.

29 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 273-274.

30 Ibid., 276, Tapper, 'Introduction', 36.

31 Edgar O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, 69, Tapper, 'Introduction', 36.

32 Tapper, 'Introduction', 36-37, see also Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 280-282.

policy of careful modernization against the interests of the tribes dominating local life in rural Afghanistan -still the better part of the country. The Afghan state constructed by these rulers imposed an external administrative structure on Afghan society and thus 'encapsulated rather than confronted social resistance'.³³ This encompassed an accommodation to traditional tribal leadership, who ruled the countryside, as well as the incorporation of the urban modernist elite into the state's administration. Consequently, the Afghan state was highly dependent on local power-holders for its control over rural Afghanistan, while its executive apparatus was almost exclusively controlled by the modernist elite. This precarious balance was codified in the 1964 Constitution which turned Afghanistan into a constitutional monarchy, acknowledging a shift in power from the monarch to the modernist elite as well as the strategy of encapsulating traditional local institutions who by now were represented in the centre by a democratically elected parliament.³⁴ The key driver of this state was the influx of foreign resources to the state's centre. Although the Afghan kings initially tried to create an export economy based on rural products, this was insufficient to support the state-building effort.³⁵ After the British withdrawal from India, the Cold War opened a new episode of Afghanistan's strategic importance as both the Soviet Union and the United States vied for its allegiance. The resulting aid (from 1955 to 1978 the Soviet Union gave \$1.27 billion economic aid and \$1.25 billion military aid, while the United States donated \$533 million for economic aid) allowed the Afghan state to build a 100,000 men army, schools, roads, bureaucracy, etc., independent from the realities of tribal power that threatened the state in the past. This foreign support, however, was also instrumental in encapsulating traditional local leaders, who were tied to the central government through a system of patronage. The Afghan state thus came to rely on a system in which the modernist elite in Kabul acted as an intermediary for redistributing foreign resources to the various local segments of Afghan society. This system did not try to enhance state penetration at the local level -i.e. beyond the traditional local leaders-, and consequently the Afghan state failed to create a popular basis. Moreover, the various local segments did not need to organize in a larger (tribal) alliance as they were connected to the state through individual ties between their leaders and members of the national government that allowed them to optimize their advantage.³⁶ Thus, the Afghan state that emerged during the rule of Nadir Shah, Zahir Shah, and Daud Khan was characterized by the absence of a popular basis due to a high degree of political fragmentation; instead the state's modernist elite was connected to society through a Kabul-based patronage network that mediated the distribution of foreign resources to the leaders of local societal groups.³⁷

33 Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 20, Tapper, 'Introduction', 37. All three rulers were members of the Musahiban family which descended from a brother of Amir Dust Muhammed Khan.

34 Tapper, 'Introduction', 38, Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 294-295.

35 Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 20-21, see also Tapper, 'Introduction', 37-39.

36 See also Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24.

37 Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 21.

Whereas in the past resistance of the traditional tribes of the countryside had posed the biggest threat to the Afghan state, the end of the Durrani-led state was caused by the left wing of the modernist elite. When in 1973 Daud Khan usurped the throne of Zahir Shah in order to found a republic, he enjoyed considerable back up from leftist-orientated military officers and Marxist elements.³⁸ Daud, however, continued the practice of encapsulating local traditional leaders and increasingly sought to reduce his reliance on the left wing as well as the Afghan state's dependency on the Soviet Union. On April 27th 1978 the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power with help from the Soviet-dominated Afghan tank corps and air force in the so-called *Saur* revolution (27 April corresponds to the seventh of the month of *Saur*).³⁹ The PDPA had only a small power base that was 'almost entirely urban-based, and fatally ignorant of affairs in the countryside'.⁴⁰ This lack of popular support combined with internal conflicts and power struggles within the PDPA led to growing opposition and unrest in the country. In December 1979 the situation had become so unstable that the Soviet Union launched a full-scale military invasion in support of the communist regime.

The Soviet intervention, however, did not succeed in diminishing the opposition against the communists. Although the urban elite organized protests and demonstrations, the bulk of the resistance against the communist government and the Soviet invasion came from the countryside.⁴¹ A kaleidoscope of different local fighting groups emerged, as well as an increasingly growing number of external parties led by Afghans who had fled abroad -predominantly to Pakistan.⁴² Consequently the Afghan resistance was characterized by a lack of unity as its 'structure would be difficult to fit into a line-and-block chart and there was never a central leadership that was critical to the cause'.⁴³ Those different groups, however, coalesced under the banner of Islam, as -despite differences in interpretation- they all considered themselves as *mujahideen* (literally those fighting a Jihad) fighting the infidels of the communist regime and their Soviet assistants. Another binding factor was the growing importance of foreign support that was predominantly channelled through Pakistan.⁴⁴ As the local groups started to ally themselves with external parties in order to secure a hard-needed influx of supplies and weapons the position of Afghan leaders from abroad became increasingly powerful. Yet, in the end, the *mujahideen* remained far from a unity, which caused the Kabul regime and the Soviet forces unconquerable difficulties, as it proved impossible to

38 See, among others, Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Afghanistan, Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), 17.

39 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 304, Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Afghanistan, Politics, Economics and Society*, 26-31, Tapper, 'Introduction', 39.

40 Tapper, 'Introduction', 39-40.

41 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 49-56.

42 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 311-317.

43 Ali Ahmad Jalali, Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (Quantico, VA: United States Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division, 1995), 401. See also William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 51.

44 In addition to a focal point for the deliverance of material support Pakistan itself also provided a sanctuary in which *Mujahideen* groups could (re-)organize, train and recuperate. On the various dimensions of external support to an insurgency see Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism, From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), 142-148.

defeat this splintered resistance. This lack of success forced the Soviets to withdraw with a significant loss in lives, resources, and national prestige in 1989.⁴⁵ Afghanistan was left with a Soviet-sponsored communist regime under President Dr. Muhammad Najibullah and a whole range of disunited, but very vivid *mujahideen* factions.

Whereas traditionally Afghanistan's stability had been the result of a precarious balance between the authorities in the state's centre and the traditional rulers of the rural locales, the remnants of the Soviet intervention did much harm to this system. One of the responses to the fragmented, localized nature of the resistance had been the slaughtering of local tribal leaders, which left a power vacuum at the grassroots level that was filled by either opportunistic military leaders or *ulama* such as the local religious leader, the *mullah*.⁴⁶ These new types of local power-holders were instrumental in the emergence of two defining forces that still have a major impact on Afghanistan and its society; respectively the warlords and the Taliban. Initially the Kabul regime remained in control of major parts of the country due to a successful policy of divide and rule that exploited disunity among the *mujahideen* and co-opted many of the local commanders and their militias with help of resources donated by the Soviets.⁴⁷ With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 this steady influx of resources faltered and the end of the communist rentier state under President Najibullah now became a matter of time. In March 1992 a group of northern militias under command of Abdul Rashid Dostum rebelled against the government and after joining forces with famous *mujahideen* commander Ahmad Shah Massoud they marched for Kabul (with many local militias and deserted Afghan soldiers joining them along the way), which fell on April 25.

Kabul thus came in the hands of the northern militias who put forward professor Burhanuddin Rabbani as the new president.⁴⁸ Although we will come back to the ethnical differences in Afghanistan in the next section of this chapter, it should be mentioned here that the northern militias were composed of non-Pashtun ethnicities such as Uzbeks (Dostum) and Tajiks (Massoud, Rabbani). The Pashtun thereby were not represented in the centre, a situation unprecedented in recent history and unacceptable to this major ethnical group. The Pashtun, however, were too divided to make a serious thrust for Kabul, and the group that posed the most formidable threat to the northern militias was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's *Hezb-I Islami*. Internally, however, the coalition of northern militias was also facing problems as there were tensions between the various fractions. As the fighting for Kabul continued the government lost its grip over the country and opportunist local commanders started to act

45 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 106-111, Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 235-236.

46 This was further enhanced by the fact that many of the traditional leaders opted to flee abroad or proved to be incompetent military commanders. See, among others, William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 51. Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 149-153, 215-220. Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 34. Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 119-130, Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban, Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 17-30.

47 Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics And Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 176-185, William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 140-161, Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 322-325.

48 On Afghanistan under the Rabbani government see, among others, William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 162-181, Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 271-278, Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 324-325.

as predatory warlords. In some parts of the country this warlordism took a flight beyond the local level as larger, regional polities emerged such as Dostum's six-provinces fiefdom around Mazar-i Sharif in the north and Ismail Khan's self-proclaimed Emirate of Herat covering three provinces in western Afghanistan.⁴⁹ The Afghan state thus had totally collapsed which was reflected in the decision making of the various parties who now fought each other in rapidly changing alliances in order to secure their self-interest 'in a situation in which there was no state to provide an overarching guarantee of security' and even to preserve their position by preventing 'any such state from taking shape'.⁵⁰

It was in this unstable situation that the Taliban first entered the Afghan political arena. Since 1992 Kandahar province had become a hotbed of social unrest as various warlords vied for power and banditry and anarchy ruled daily life. The Taliban originated as one of several *mujahideen* groups looking to end this situation. However, the difference with other fighters was that the Taliban embraced an agenda on strictly religious grounds that distanced themselves from the warring parties and won them the moral high ground in this disturbed society. From its onset the movement aimed at restoring peace, disarming the population, enforcing Sharia law and defending the Islamic character and integrity in Afghanistan.⁵¹ The name Taliban itself refers to *Talib* which is Arabic for religious student, a term commonly used for the thousands of Afghan and Pakistani Pashtun who have gone through the Pakistani *madrassas* (religious schools) and are thus closely connected and led by the *ulama*. In 1994 the Taliban, under command of the notoriously pious Mullah Omar, demonstrated their sincerity in several cases in which they fought against warlords and their militias who reportedly had abducted and dishonored girls or quarreled over a young boy they wanted to sodomize. As the Taliban defeated the warlords, freed the innocent victims, and punished the immoral behavior of the perpetrators these actions brought them popular support, as well as -not unimportant- significant quantities of weapons and ammunition. Supported by Pakistan, which saw the Taliban as a client for securing its interest in Afghanistan, the movement gained momentum and in November 1994 it controlled Kandahar, with adjacent Uruzgan and Zabul province following within a couple of weeks. Over the next years the Taliban grew into a formidable fighting force (including an estimated number of 80,000 to 100,000 Pakistani fighters between 1994 and 1999) that effectively employed a mix of coercion, exploitation of the population's resentment against the warlords as well as the use of money 'to win the hearts and pockets' of its opponents.⁵² Kabul fell in September 1996 and by 1999 the Taliban had seized control over virtually all of Afghanistan except for the northeast where Massoud's forces successfully opposed the Taliban until the end of their regime.

49 With regard to the north it has to be mentioned that the system of warlord polities that emerged in the 1990s bore remarkable similarities with the traditional Uzbek system of devolved polities known as the Chingizid appanage system in which the power of the centre was severely constrained. Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 38-39.

50 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 167-168.

51 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, 22, 17-30 on the emergence of the Taliban and its ideology see also, Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan*, 117-124, Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 326-331, William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 182-189.

52 Ahmed Rashid, 'The Taliban: Exporting Extremism', *Foreign Affairs* 78:6 (November-December 1999), 27, Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 327.

The Taliban's religious character reflected in its anti-modernist stance on statehood; Afghanistan was governed as an Islamic emirate, a proto-state with limited instruments. Urban centres such as Kabul were considered 'Cities of Sin', in which the religious police exercised close control over the population, while the rural countryside was considered naturally secure and therefore could be controlled through co-option of local commanders (with unsuitable commanders being discarded or assassinated).⁵³ Although the Taliban failed to establish a state-like economic system, they hugely benefited from their control over a criminalized economy that brought them a considerable income from smuggling and opium taxes -contradistinctive to their religious purity. All together these revenues combined with Pakistani assistance allowed the Taliban to maintain a firm grip on Afghanistan's fragmented society through a balanced approach of coercion and co-option. The collapse of the Taliban government, however, was ushered by the presence of another foreign sponsor, Osama Bin Laden. In 1996 Bin Laden, who was a strong believer in the early Wahhabist branch of Islam to which the Taliban's Deobandi interpretation is closely related, offered Mullah Omar his unconditional support and financial backing in return for shelter and protection by the Taliban government.⁵⁴ From his Afghan sanctuary Bin Laden reorganized and trained Al-Qaeda and planned and ordered various terroristic attacks, among which the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in East Africa, the attack on the USS Cole, and of course the attacks of 11 September 2001 on US soil. Although we will address the US reaction that toppled Mullah Omar's regime in section 8.3, this is the place to remark that the collapse of the Taliban government again led to a rise of locally-based power centres independent of Kabul.⁵⁵

To conclude, the historical background of present-day Afghanistan was dominated by a continuous struggle for enhanced centralization -and most times also modernization-under influence of imperialism, the Cold War, and armed conflict, in all of which externally provided resources fulfilled an essential role. Yet, the forces of centralization never succeeded in overcoming the importance of local powers as throughout its recent history Afghanistan has always been characterized by a substantial degree of decentralized rule. In order to obtain an understanding of this natural disposition towards decentralization that has persisted until today, we will now take a closer look at Afghanistan's societal landscape.

53 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars, 196-198*, Abdulkader Sinno, 'Explaining the Taliban's Ability to Mobilize the Pashtuns', *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Crews, R.D., Tarzi, A., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 82-87. The strategy of co-option was used throughout the country, but originated from the Pashtun dominated areas on which the Taliban held extensive knowledge of the societal landscape. Hamid Karzai's father Abdul Ahad Khan Karzai was assassinated as he was deemed unsuitable for co-option.

54 Charles Allen, *God's Terrorists, The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), 292-294. Deobandism is named after the town of Deoband near New Delhi where its first *madrassa* was founded in 1867. The ideology itself is a conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam and fiercely opposed to Shi'ism. See also Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, 88-90, Robert D. Crews, Amin Tarzi, 'Introduction', *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Crews, R.D., Tarzi, A., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 42-44.

55 Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending, Afghanistan: 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 313.

8.2.2 Afghanistan's weblike society

The history of present-day Afghanistan reveals that Afghan society as a whole could only be controlled through a system that acknowledged the independence and autonomous position of the various local societal segments. This high degree of fragmentation and the corresponding heterogeneous nature of control that have survived until today qualify Afghan society as a weblike society. In this section we will explore the origins of this fragmentation by analysing the political system of Afghan society, which means that we will also have to deal with the societal institutions of kinship, economy, and religion as they have a defining impact on a society's political constellation (see Chapter Two, section 2.2). In this chapter's next section we will continue this analysis and provide a more specific background for the Uruzgan case study as we will zoom in at the grassroots level of Afghan society by providing a sketch of the societal landscape in Uruzgan province. But let us now start with a more general overview of Afghan society as a whole.

The most obvious division in Afghan society is that between the different ethnic groups making up Afghanistan's population of more than 31 million people.⁵⁶ As aforementioned the Pashtun are by far the largest group making up some 40 to 50 percent of the total population.⁵⁷ Although research has revealed that there are more than 50 different ethnicities coalescing in twenty main groups, most scholars agree that after the Pashtun, the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras are the most important groups.⁵⁸ Geographically, the Pashtun dominate the south and east of the country, the Tajiks the northeast, the Uzbeks the north, and the Hazaras central Afghanistan.⁵⁹ Furthermore there are considerable differences with regard to language (with Pashto and Dari being the official languages) and religion (Sunni versus Shi'a, Sufism, and even non-Islamic religions) between the various ethnicities. The most important ethnic cleavage, however, has centred on the confrontation between the Pashtun and the other groups as those have all suffered from Pashtun expansionism and dominance of the Afghan state since the days of the Durrani empire. Despite this still vivid antagonism and all other ethnic differences, ethnicity itself cannot explain the high degree of fragmentation that characterizes Afghan society, as even within ethnic groups there are huge variations between communities. Afghan society, therefore, is 'in no sense homogenous' as it encompasses 'a kaleidoscopic collection of 'micro-societies', with porous and flexible boundaries'.⁶⁰ Such an endogenous 'micro-society' is the basic unit for political participation and better known as a *qawm*, a solidarity group protecting the interest of its members.⁶¹ Afghan society, thus, is

56 In July 2013 the total population was estimated at 31,108,077. See the Afghanistan entry in CIA, *The World Factbook*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>.

57 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 16.

58 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 9, Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 4.

59 For a complete oversight of the peoples of Afghanistan see Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 16-39.

60 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 8-9.

61 See also Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending*, 10-11, Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 20, Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 12.

essentially a network of these solidarity groups. Obtaining an understanding of this society consequently requires us to vet the societal structure of these solidarity groups as well as the interactions between those groups.

The sociological basis of a *qawm* is either true or constructed kinship such as for example, tribe, extended family, profession, residence etcetera. Especially among the Pashtun the tribal system with its institutions, values, customs, and rights encoded in the *Pashtunwali* traditionally provides a strong ground for the formation of solidarity groups on the basis of (sub-)tribal allegiance.⁶² As the *qawm* historically emerged in order to protect the interest of its members and address their strategies for survival, solidarity groups formed around a range of topics such as the necessity to deal with the state, ecological conditions as for example irrigation, or religious differences.⁶³ Although we will discuss the *qawm* as a distribution network here below, it should be noted at this place that a solidarity group might follow a non-territorial pattern as for instance the inhabitants of several villages in a valley can be divided along tribal or religious lines. As a matter of fact many present-day villages in the south and centre are non-homogenous due to the fact that tribal differences are more important than spatial coherence. Yet, in times of need even such heterogeneous groups might align in order to form an alliance, as has been the case throughout Afghanistan's recent history. More specifically, the Soviet-Afghan war revealed that such bonds often followed the administrative division of the Afghan state (from province to sub-district level) as local solidarity groups sought to secure the allocation of resources through state channels.⁶⁴ Here we again touch upon the *qawm* as an economical distribution network. Therefore we will now first delve into this role.

As we have learned from the recent history of Afghanistan, the distribution of foreign resources was the Afghan state's key mechanism for dominating the various local segments. Unsurprisingly, those local segments have always been striving to maximize the influx of those resources, while simultaneously minimizing state encroachment.⁶⁵ The central state itself stimulated this process as it sought to divide larger societal segments (such as tribes) in smaller solidarity groups which were less capable to contest state dominance. With the kin-group as basic unit this system evolved into an extend patronage network in which personal ties between a *qawm*'s leadership and government officials guaranteed the allocation of resources. Whereas kin-unit leadership historically was based on egalitarian principles or the competency to protect the group, the ability to deal with the government and the leadership of other (competing) *qawms* has become an important trait of local power-holders ruling over solidarity groups.⁶⁶ *Khans*, *maliks*, and other solidarity group leaders have typically

62 Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 12, see also, Thomas J. Barfield, 'Weak Links On A Rusty Chain: Structural Weaknesses In Afghanistan's Provincial Government Administration', *Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan, Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Nazif Shahrani, M., Cranfield, R.L. (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 171.

63 Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 11.

64 Ibid., see also Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 25.

65 Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 20, Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 215.

66 See for example, Antonio Giustozzi, Noor Ullah, "'Tribes' and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980-2005', 3-4.

established themselves as patrons overseeing the distribution of state resources addressing the strategies of survival of the members of their *qawm*. Thus state co-option empowered the position of *qawm* leaders as their economic power base prospered due to their exclusive access to state resources. As a result solidarity groups have become more hierarchical, and the power of local power-holders is rooted both in kinship as well as in their economic position as patrons overseeing the distribution of state resources within their respective *qawms*.

The last institution that completes the mesh determining a society's political structure is religion. Islam in Afghanistan has many different faces as both Sunni and Shi'a branches are present and there is also a huge influence of local Sufism. At the grassroots level Islam provides the people with a structure for everyday life and interaction with other solidarity groups and the state. Religious agents like the village *mullah*, the *sayyad* (descendant of the Prophet) or *pir* (Sufi spiritual guide) are more or less independent societal actors who typically mediate between communities and thereby act as the lubricant of Afghanistan's weblike society.⁶⁷ A *mullah* presiding over a village mosque, for instance, might be the crucial link between the village's *qawms*, as those solidarity groups all belong to his parish and visit his mosque, but are strictly segregated in every other aspect of life.⁶⁸ Due to their independent position the religious agents are commonly placed outside the tribal structure or regular solidarity groups. This explains why religious agents, despite their important roles, traditionally do not exert political authority. As aforementioned, this recently changed when the Taliban *mullahs* assumed power in the turmoil after the collapse of the Afghan state in the early 1990s. To fully understand this we need to discuss the role of the higher and more educated clergy, the *ulama*.⁶⁹ Although Islamic scholars abstain from politics, the well-respected Afghan *ulama* -as elsewhere- historically provided the state with religious legitimacy as they generally supported the rulers in Kabul. Due to the weak position of the Afghan central state this additional legitimation was more than welcome. However, when the state became stronger during the twentieth century, it started to explore other legitimation grounds (such as the constitution) and the power of the *ulama* declined. This changed again during the Afghan-Soviet War in which the *ulama* played a crucial role in the resistance as they sought to affect a religious repositioning of the political order.⁷⁰ In 1996 a gathering of 1,200 *ulama* sanctioned the Taliban regime and thereby it created legitimacy for a government ruled by 'a poor village *mullah*'.⁷¹ In addition to the role of religious agents operating as grass-roots mediators between the various Afghan solidarity groups, the *ulama* thus also act as a binding agent due to their ability to enhance state legitimacy. The current Afghan state and its international

67 See, among others, Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 30-38, Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of Its People and Politics*, 7-9, Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 31-32.

68 Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 11.

69 Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 44-50.

70 Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 17-19.

71 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, 41-42.

sponsors have acknowledged this reality by involving the national council of *ulama* in the state-building process.⁷²

The societal institutions of kinship, economy, and religion together define the political structure of a society. Based on our exploration of Afghanistan's weblike society thus far we can conclude that the basic political unit, the *qawn* -or kin-based solidarity group- is led by local power-holders who have gained their political power by establishing a patronage system that redistributes state resources. Interaction between the solidarity groups is generally characterized by rivalry and competition, but if necessary groups will also align in order to secure their interest. The influence of religion on political authority is most obvious in the legitimizing power of the *ulama*, but on the grassroots level religious agents typically fulfil the role of mediator and do not exert political power. Thus, Afghanistan's weblike society is a complicated mesh of various kin-based solidarity groups that protect the interests of their members. Albeit ethnicity is not the main cleavage in Afghan society, kin-units of course are related to an ethnic group. As this study focuses on Uruzgan province in the Pashtun-dominated southern part of Afghanistan, we will now provide a brief sketch of Pashtun society -also the major part of Afghan society- and its local power-holders.

Most Afghan Pashtun belong to either the Durrani or Ghilzai confederations of the Pashtun tribal structure.⁷³ Although the Durrani have traditionally dominated Afghanistan, they are outnumbered by the Ghilzai who are estimated to be twice as many. The confederations are far from a unity as they are subdivided in a whole range of tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and even smaller kin-units on the basis of a segmentary lineage structure in which the various descent groups form an interlocking tribal organization. Pashtun *qawms* usually correspond to the tribal or sub-tribal level, but may also refer to lower levels as even the smallest kin-units feud with each other in order to secure access to scarce resources or even fight over seemingly trivial immaterialist matters such as sex -yet, important as it guarantees reproduction.⁷⁴ While tribal segments will unite under external pressure, as has been the case during Afghanistan's many wars, the protection from competing kin-units is the default situation. As we have seen this principle is echoed throughout Afghan society as by basic rule a *qawm* -in absence of an external threat- considers the next *qawm* the main danger.⁷⁵ Traditionally Pashtun kin-ship groups were egalitarian solidarity groups with leaders being elected or empowered by tribal councils consisting of all adult males, the *jirgas*. Although consensus-building remains an important feature of Pashtun life, tribal notables such as the *khans* and *maliks* have gradually obtained a more hierarchical role. Especially the *khan*, the most important tribal leadership institution, over time became a hereditary feudal-like office in which leaders succeeded to develop extensive clienteles as a result of

72 Suhrke, *When More is Less*, 201.

73 Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, 21-28, see also Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 28.

74 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province' (Kabul, 2006), 5, Dupree, L., 'Tribal Warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan', 267-269.

75 Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 215.

their access to state resources. Yet, Afghan Pashtun society -unlike Pakistan's (see Chapter Two, section 2.2.2)- was not truly feudal as despite the dependency on the *khan* as a patron, commoners were not regarded as subjects of those lords, but rather seen as participants in complex local politics.⁷⁶

Local Pashtun politics also explain the emergence of a new type of *khan* during the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1980s, the 'tribal entrepreneur'.⁷⁷ Due to the destabilisation of the tribal environment at that time, protection against outsiders once more became the most important aspect of the kin-unit. As the old *khans* by now were predominantly economically-based authorities, a new generation of tribal leaders proficient in commanding fighters and thus protecting their kin-group took over. Although essentially a highly localized dynamic, this soon spread out as the tribes sought to unite against the external security threat. The tribal entrepreneurs were the strongmen 'who claimed tribal leadership on the basis of a real or alleged unifying role within the tribes or tribal segments'.⁷⁸ These strongmen rose to power thanks to foreign sponsors such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States and filled the vacuum left by the old *khans*. Furthermore, they started exploiting the cultivation of poppy as a source of revenue and thereby gave rise to the illicit drugs economy that still persists in Afghanistan today.⁷⁹ Some of these tribal entrepreneurs can best be described as tribal warlords, who not only were capable of defending their kin-group by waging war, but also possessed the skills to exert tribal leadership -as opposed to ruling their own warlord polity. After the war the new *khans* consolidated their position through a continuation of the same feudal-like patronage system used by the old elite. Although this structure was interrupted during the 1994-2001 Taliban rule, it quickly re-emerged in 2001 with the US government as main foreign sponsor.⁸⁰ Moreover, contrary to the warlord polities in the north and west that since 2001 have been perceived as a threat to the new Afghan state, the fragmented tribal structure of the Pashtun did not allow for the emergence of a single dominant leader. Therefore the strongmen and tribal warlords ruling the Pashtun solidarity groups were capable of underkeeping good relationships with both the international community and Kabul, which further strengthened their position as they obtained a steady access to (aid) resources. Thus political authority in Pashtun solidarity groups nowadays rests with tribal entrepreneurs who have established themselves as patrons capable of dealing with each other, the central Afghan state, and the international presence. Let us now turn to the specific case of Uruzgan province in order to see how this political constellation materializes in the reality on the ground of one of Afghanistan's weblike society's many locales.

76 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 10.

77 Antonio Giustozzi, Noor Ullah, "'Tribes' and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980-2005', 5.

78 *Ibid.*, 5

79 See also Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'Peacekeepers Among Poppies: Afghanistan, Illicit Economies and Intervention', *International Peacekeeping* 16:1 (2009).

80 Antonio Giustozzi, Noor Ullah, 'The inverted cycle: Kabul and the strongmen's competition for control over Kandahar, 2001-2006', *Central Asian Survey* 26:2 (June 2007), 172.

8.2.3 An Afghan locale: Uruzgan's societal landscape⁸¹

Uruzgan is a rural and mountainous province located in the Pashtun dominated greater Kandahar region of south Afghanistan (Kandahar, Helmand, and Zabul also are part of this region).⁸² Administrative boundaries in this region were adjusted various times by successive Kabul governments in order to divide important tribal groups and enhance state influence. Uruzgan province itself was established in 1964, while the largest recent border shift occurred in 2004 when the Hazara majority communities in the north were separated from the Pashtun dominated south and formed into Daikondi province.⁸³ As this case study deals with the Dutch mission in Uruzgan from 2006 until 2010, we will here focus on the societal landscape in the southern part. Albeit we will deal with some events that occurred from 2001 until 2006, the emphasis on Pashtun society does not interfere with this as even before the administrative reorganization Pashtun dominance rendered the southern part crucial for any attempt to obtain control over Uruzgan province. Similarly, we will focus on the districts surrounding the province's main population centres of Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud, and to a lesser extent Chora district, as the Pashtun solidarity groups living in those districts form the high ground of Uruzgan's human terrain.⁸⁴ Let us now start with a general oversight of Uruzgan's population and Pashtun tribal organization in particular.

Uruzgan's populace consists of an estimated 395,000 mainly rural living inhabitants.⁸⁵ The vast majority of this population is ethnic Pashtun (91%), with Hazara (8%) and other ethnicities (1%) making up the ethnic minorities.⁸⁶ The Hazara live predominantly in the northern districts of Gizab and Khas Uruzgan, which renders the rest of the province almost exclusively inhabited by Pashtun. The Uruzgan Pashtun can be divided along three tribal confederations, the Zirak Durrani (57,5%, including the influential Popalzai, Barakzai, and Achekzai sub-tribes), Panjpai Durrani (18,5%, mainly the Nurzai), and Ghilzai (9%, of which the Hotak and Tokhi are the predominant sub-tribes), as well as some smaller tribes (6%).⁸⁷ Originally Uruzgan was dominated by the Ghilzai, but as Afghanistan historically was ruled by Durrani Pashtun, Durrani tribes were moved to Uruzgan at the end of the nineteenth

81 This section contains edited material from Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind'.

82 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', in *Decoding the New Taliban, Insights from the Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 155-156. The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 14-15.

83 Originally Gizab district became also part of Daikondi province. However, in 2006 it was again placed under control of Uruzgan. Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 174. The 2004 reshuffle was arranged by president Karzai in the run up to the presidential elections as a respond to a longstanding demand from the Hazara community. See also The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 13, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 36, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 9.

84 Uruzgan's places and names are spelled as suggested by experts and scholars such as Martine van Bijlert, Susanne Schmeidl, and Willem Vogelsang. The ISAF forces sometimes deviated from this spelling as Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud, for instance, were most commonly spelled as Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawod.

85 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 155.

86 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 10.

87 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 3. The percentages are estimates in relation to the total population.

century by Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan in order to end Ghilzai dominance.⁸⁸ This resulted in the Ghilzai being marginalized throughout the province and today the pocket surrounding the provincial capital of Tirin Kot is the only area where Pashtun of both Ghilzai and Durrani descent are living. The Ghilzai-Durrani divide still forms a relevant source of tribal grievance in Tirin Kot district as the former consider themselves victims of years of Durrani oppression.

Another societal cleavage resulting from this policy of Ghilzai marginalization is that between Zirak and Panjpai Durrani. The latter confederation is a construct created by the Zirak Durrani in order to assimilate Ghilzai tribes, and therefore the Panjpai are often considered second-class Durrani.⁸⁹ Especially in Uruzgan's western district of Deh Rawud this divide is 'hot' as the Panjpai constitute the majority of the district's population, while governmental rule has traditionally rested with the Zirak Durrani. It therefore comes without surprise that the current Taliban insurgency has found fertile soil in the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani areas surrounding Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud. It should also be noted that Mullah Omar, the overall Taliban leader, is a Ghilzai tribesman who spent some time living in Deh Rawud.⁹⁰

To make things more complicated, the divides between different tribal confederations are important, but not as important as the affiliation with sub-tribes, which form the main solidarity groups and thereby define 'patterns of loyalty, conflict and obligations of patronage'.⁹¹ When the communist regime sought to establish control over Uruzgan's population by eliminating traditional tribal confederation leaders, local *mujahideen* commanders stood up against the communist governance and their Soviet allies.⁹² Since the demise of the communist regime, these commanders, who are organized along sub-tribal lines and often are also related to the old *khans* -which allowed them to mobilize fighters within their sub-tribal solidarity group-, have become the most influential power-holders in the province. A 2010 study illustrated this as it revealed that of fourteen identified key actors in Uruzgan province, only three lacked a *mujahideen* background (because of their age, but all three had family ties with important commanders), and that of the original eight most important commanders, four still held key positions, while two had become leading figures within the Taliban.⁹³ As all these different sub-tribe commanders control specific areas and maintain their own supportive networks which they provide with resources, Uruzgan's society has suffered from an increasing degree of fragmentation. In addition to traditional tribal grievances following the confederation divide, this process of fragmentation has led to conflicts which even take place within confederations and sub-tribes. The result is a chaotic situation in which sub-tribe commanders continuously fight against or alongside each other

88 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 10.

89 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 4.

90 Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan, De weg van Hamid Karzai naar het paleis* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 2009), 13. See also Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 156, 158, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 36.

91 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 156-157, interview with Martine van Bijlert, Tirin Kot, November 16, 2008.

92 This is an example of a counterinsurgency strategy of unquestioned dominance leading to escalation of the conflict.

93 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 24, 50-52.

depending on what serves their interest best. Thus, Uruzgan's societal landscape is dominated by sub-tribal *qawms* led by tribal entrepreneurs, the former *mujahideen* commanders, who replaced the traditional leaders, the old *khans*, during the Soviet-Afghan War. It needs to be mentioned here that Uruzgan's illicit poppy economy most probably is a significant source of revenue for these local power-holders.⁹⁴ Yet, up until now little is known about the local narco-industry. Although this leaves part of the interaction between different solidarity groups -and their leaders- unexplained, it should be noted that interests in poppy cultivation 'just' represent an unknown, shady, side of palpable confrontations or collaborations between these sub-tribal factions. Moreover, during their four-year campaign the Dutch considered counternarcotics subordinate to the counterinsurgency effort and therefore preferred to take no actions against key leaders suspected of involvement in poppy trade. For the Dutch the necessity to work with legitimate local power-holders simply outweighed the fight against drugs. Consequently, we will not delve further into (counter-)narcotics in this book, but focus on the tangible -yet not always visible- actions of the predominant local leaders representing their *qawms*. Therefore it is now first necessary to take a closer look at the different solidarity groups and their leaders in order to obtain an insight in Uruzgan's political marketplace prior to the start of the Afghan War in 2001.

The relatively small Popalzai sub-tribe of the Zirak Durrani confederation which only accounts for 10,5% of Uruzgan's population, has always been one of the province's most powerful factions as it is historically well-connected to greater Kandahar's regional power network and more recently also to the Kabul administration since Hamid Karzai himself is a Popalzai from a renowned family.⁹⁵ The Popalzai are spread over the main population centres, and only form a majority in the surroundings of Chenartu village in southern Chora district (which would become a separate district in 2008).⁹⁶ Yet, the Popalzai are highly influential in Tirin Kot en Deh Rawud, while they do not exert substantial influence in Chora district. The most important leading figure to emerge from this group was Jan Mohammed Khan of Tirin Kot district, who despite his humble descent succeeded in becoming a prominent Popalzai militia commander during the communist era. After the fall of the communist regime Jan Mohammed seized the governor's compound in Tirin Kot, an act which caught the attention of the Rabbani government and which led to his appointment as governor of Uruzgan. Reportedly, a young Hamid Karzai, whose life would later be saved by Governor Jan Mohammed during a tribal feud, used his leverage as deputy foreign minister to arrange the

94 On poppy agriculture in Uruzgan and the Dutch counternarcotics policy see Erik Donkersloot, 'Wij deden toch niets tegen de papaverteelt?' (Thesis, Utrecht University, 2010), Erik Donkersloot, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Christ Klep, 'Wij deden toch niets tegen de papaverteelt?', een onderzoek naar counternarcotics in Afghanistan, *Militaire Spectator* 179:9 (2010), Erik Donkersloot, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Christ Klep, 'Going Dutch, Counternarcotics Activities in the Afghan Province of Uruzgan', *Military Review* (September-October 2011).

95 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 18-21, 49. Historically there was also a connection with the Kabul government as the original Durrani kings who ruled prior to 1818 were also Popalzai. See note 24.

96 Chenartu district was created by the Popalzai-dominated provincial government in order to give the Popalzai in this area direct access to resources rather than through the non-Popalzai administration of Chora District. The Liaison Office, *Three Years Later, A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009* (Kabul: TLO, 2009), 5.19.

appointment of his fellow tribesman and *mujahideen*.⁹⁷ Jan Mohammed effectively exploited his new position and access to governmental resources to claim his position as Uruzgan's most important Popalzai leader, despite the fact that his main competitor, Malem Rahmatullah Khan (also from Tirin Kot district), was a descendant of the old traditional leadership. Yet, Jan Mohammed's power as Uruzgan's governor was limited due to the continuing inter-factional frenzy, which added to struggles over power and resources within the various sub-tribes.⁹⁸ In spite of mediation attempts by Uruzgan's religious leaders, feuding between the various sub-tribes remained the norm and even led to some fierce fighting. One of those conflicts was just another episode of a longstanding conflict between the Popalzai and their main rivals, the Barakzai.

Just like the Popalzai the Barkazai are a Zirak Durrani sub-tribe tapping from the power networks of the greater Kandahar region and the national government.⁹⁹ Although with 9% it accounts for an even smaller part of the provincial population than the Popalzai, it is equally well-presented in terms of power and influence.¹⁰⁰ Haji Zaher Khan Mohammad (from Tirin Kot district) was the predominant *mujahideen* commander of this faction and also enjoyed an excellent reputation as a descendant of the traditional tribal elite.¹⁰¹ Albeit not much is known about internal rivalry, it is clear that Rozi Khan and his brother Shah Mohammed as well as Commander Akhtar Mohammed also rose to power during the *mujahideen* era with Rozi Khan gradually becoming the most important Barakzai leader.¹⁰² Whereas their Popalzai rivals controlled the provincial capital, were influential in Deh Rawud and dominated the Chenartu region during the Rabbani years, the Barakzai network and its area of influence largely coincided with the northern parts of both Tirin Kot and Chora districts. As aforementioned the relationship between both powerful Durrani sub-tribes is contentious with regular spurs of violence, yet their access to wider power networks guarantees an influx of resources that gives them an edge over the other sub-tribal factions.

The Achekzai, the largest of Uruzgan's Zirak Durrani sub-tribes, make up some 35% of the local population.¹⁰³ In comparison with non-Zirak Durrani factions they are well-presented on the provincial political marketplace, however, they are not as powerful as either the Popalzai or the Barakzai as they are not equally well-connected to regional or national power networks. Additionally the Achekzai's area of influence mainly concerns the northern

97 Ibid., 24-25. See also Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157, Bette Dam, *Expedition Uruzgan*, 91-92. Van Bijlert reports that the accident in which Karzai was saved by Jan Mohammed occurred 'in the early 1980s'. As she also mentions that Jan Mohammed was governor at that time, this event should be dated in the early 1990s, which is confirmed by Bette Dam who gives a more detailed account of the event.

98 Bette Dam, *Expedition Uruzgan*, 37-38, Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157. It was during an earlier run of this conflict in the 1980s that Hamid Karzai's life was saved by Jan Mohammed.

99 The Muhammedzai clan of the Barakzai sub-tribe replaced the Popalzai kings and dominated the Kabul Government from 1818 onwards, see note 24.

100 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 18-21.

101 Ibid., 24, 51-52, see also The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 27-29.

102 Bette Dam, *Expedition Uruzgan*, 27-29, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 136-137.

103 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 18-21.

districts of Khas Uruzgan and Gizab and therefore they do not play an important role in the province's main population centres. Exception is Chora district, where the Achekzai form the major part of the population of which Malem Abdul Khaleq was the most important leader.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, due to his descent from the traditional Achekzai tribal elite Abdul Khaleq, who reportedly was an important facilitator and strong supporter of the *mujahideen* but not a fighting commander himself, was highly influential in Uruzgan's Achekzai community as a whole. Additionally Abdul Khaleq's excellent reputation earned him the respect of many of Uruzgan's inhabitants, and he kept close ties with the Barakzai (especially with Rozi Khan) together with whom the Achekzai dominated Chora district. Now we have dealt with the three most important sub-tribes of Uruzgan's Zirak Durrani majority, we will turn to the second-largest confederation, the Panjpai Durrani.

The Nurzai sub-tribe forms the bulk of Uruzgan's Panjpai Durrani tribesmen and constitutes 17,5% of the province's overall population. The Nurzai mainly live in the western part of Uruzgan and they are the largest sub-tribe in Shahidi Hassas/Charchena district and a vast majority in Deh Rawod district.¹⁰⁵ With regard to the latter district it has to be mentioned that the Babozai, which are the other majority group, partly consider themselves as a branch of the Nurzai.¹⁰⁶ The reason for this lies in the origin of the Panjpai as a Zirak Durrani construct for assimilating Ghilzai tribes. Whereas the Nurzai collectively agree upon their status as Panjpai, some elders of the Babozai consider themselves as Panjpai Durrani, while others consider themselves as a branch of the Hotak sub-tribe of the Ghilzai confederation. However, even combined with the Babozai the Nurzai remain a politically weak faction. None of the leading *mujahideen* commanders was of Nurzai origin, and the sub-tribe has been particularly ill-represented at Uruzgan's political marketplace. Only Haji Ghulam Hayder Khan, who fought as a commander during the *mujahideen* era, could claim some influence.¹⁰⁷ This political weakness is echoed at the local level in Deh Rawud, where the Nurzai (and Babozai) majority traditionally has been dominated by a Popalzai minority - as aforementioned the cleavage between Panjpai and Zirak Durrani is still 'hot' in this district. Albeit outweighed by their Popalzai counterparts, Nurzai power-holders of both *mujahideen* and inherited backgrounds have gained some importance in Deh Rawud's political arena due to the relative size of the popular segment they represent. Yet, overall the Nurzai are a political weak faction in Uruzgan's societal landscape.

The last and smallest segment in Uruzgan's societal landscape consists of the sub-tribes of the Ghilzai confederation that together make up 9% of the provincial population. Albeit divided and politically weak, the Ghilzai delivered two of the most important *mujahideen* commanders, Mohammed Nabi Khan and Mullah Shafiq.¹⁰⁸ The latter is the leader of the

104 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 71-72, 136-137, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 50.

105 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 18-21, 49. The names Shahidi Hassas and Charchena (four currents) are used interchangeably.

106 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 4, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 19-20.

107 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 20-21, 52-54.

108 *Ibid.*, 24.

Hotak sub-tribe living in the Mirabad valley of eastern Tirin Kot district. Despite being a representative of a minor Ghilzai sub-tribe, Mullah Shafiq himself enjoyed a reputation as one of Tirin Kot's top tribal leaders and a fierce opponent of Popalzai leader Jan Mohammed Khan.¹⁰⁹ Mohammed Nabi Khan emerged as the main *mujahideen* commander of the Tokhi sub-tribe living in the Deh Rafshan area of northern Tirin Kot district. Due to his descent from a traditional tribal elite family, he also held some influence in the Mirabad valley and reportedly he too had a troublesome relationship with Jan Mohammed Khan.¹¹⁰ Additionally it should be noted that the Tokhi sub-tribe was the scene of some of Uruzgan's fiercest intra-factional feuding as a conflict between Mohammed Nabi's ally Haji Hashem Khan and another Tokhi *mujahideen* commander, Haji Hodud, over an RPG (Rocket-Propelled Grenade) escalated and split the Tokhi sub-tribe in two factions respectively living along the east bank and the west bank of the Deh Rafshan river -this illustrates that even seemingly simple resources can trigger huge conflicts.¹¹¹ Mohammed Nabi Khan's influence within the Tokhi sub-tribe, consequently, mainly concerned the east bank. Despite the prominence of both Mullah Shafiq and Mohammed Nabi Khan, their influence at Uruzgan's political marketplace was limited as they -unlike their main Zirak Durrani rivals- did not possess access to wider power networks and resources. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the Ghilzai in Uruzgan form a small minority in a societal landscape dominated by Zirak Durrani sub-tribes. Therefore, the Ghilzai of Uruzgan are politically weak.

As aforementioned the *mujahideen* commanders have dominated Uruzgan's political marketplace since their ascent to power. The commanders are the tribal entrepreneurs that lead their respective sub-tribal *qawms* and either fight or cooperate with their competitors in order to secure access to resources or gain increased prominence. When the Taliban took over Uruzgan province at the end of 1994, however, the power of the *mujahideen* commanders was curtailed and some of these actors even were marginalized. Yet, most of the mentioned commanders were co-opted by the Taliban regime and thus could retain their positions.¹¹² Exceptions were Jan Mohammed Khan and Mohammed Nabi Khan, who both were imprisoned. Although not many details are known regarding the latter, it is known that Jan Mohammed Khan, who on the advice of the Karzai family voluntarily gave up his governorship in order to give way to the Taliban, was initially allowed to consolidate his powerbase. However, upon learning that he had repeatedly joined Hamid Karzai on visits to the US embassy in Pakistan where they discussed the possibilities to mount a coup against the Taliban regime, the Taliban jailed him on allegations of treason.¹¹³ It should also be mentioned that Jan Mohammed's fiercest opponent Mullah Shafiq, a fellow Hotak tribesmen (and reputedly also a direct relative) of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, rose to a prominent position

109 Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 13, 40.

110 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 28, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 52.

111 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 38.

112 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 52, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 27-28.

113 Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 11, 41, 50, 58, see also Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 134.

within the Taliban.¹¹⁴ Moreover, within the Taliban's top hierarchy there were many leaders who originated from Uruzgan. In Uruzgan itself, however, the Taliban controlled the local political marketplace through a series of accommodations with the prominent *mujahideen* commanders. This explains why those commanders today still command the high ground of Uruzgan's societal landscape as after the fall of the Taliban they immediately started to exploit the power vacuum and assumed their roles as tribal entrepreneurs securing political positions and resources as much as possible.¹¹⁵ Yet, the 2001 US-led intervention would tremendously alter the balance of Uruzgan's political marketplace as it opened new channels of resources through both the newly installed Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai as well as through the presence of foreign forces. We will address these developments, starting with Karzai's 2001 armed uprising which was launched from Uruzgan, later in this chapter in order to obtain an insight in Uruzgan's political landscape directly prior to the 2006 deployment of Dutch forces. Now we will first discuss the overarching context provided by the Afghan War from 2001 until 2006.

8.3 The Afghan War 2001-2006

The latest war in Afghanistan started on 7 October 2001 as the US reaction to the 9-11 attacks and initially could be characterized as a punitive expedition against the perpetrators of those attacks and their hosts. Consequently, not only eliminating Al-Qaeda, but also toppling the Taliban regime were the key objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and the enemy at that time was commonly referred to as AQT (Al-Qaeda/Taliban).¹¹⁶ The hunt for Al-Qaeda, however, proved to be an uncompletable task due to the elusive character of this terrorist network and the fact that many of its members left Afghanistan for Pakistan or other destinations -with Al-Qaeda still active today, and Osama Bin Laden, the main instigator of the 9-11 attacks, only being killed in May 2011. The removal of the Taliban government, on the other hand, was a more tangible task that was swiftly accomplished by December 6 when Mullah Omar and other senior leaders decided to flee and hide (mostly in Pakistan).¹¹⁷ In this section we will focus on the consolidation of this early success of which the ramifications determined the further course of the Afghan War.¹¹⁸ First we will discuss how a US-led coalition sought to pursue limited objectives with a small footprint, whereas in 2003 the international intervention in Afghanistan under command of NATO embraced

114 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 24, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 13, 40, Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157-159, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 39.

115 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 24, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 14.

116 Astri Suhrke, *When More is Less*, 4-5.

117 Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard Of Empires*, 93-94.

118 Allard Wagemaker, 'Afghanistan 2001-2011, Gewapende interventie en staatsvorming in een fragiele staat' (Doctoral Dissertation, Leiden University, 2012), 150-153.

a wider agenda that led to a rapid expansion of foreign presence throughout the country, which was completed in 2006. Next we will discuss the consequences of the international intervention at the grassroots level through an exploration of the way US forces influenced the societal landscape in Uruzgan province in the five years prior to the start of the Dutch TFU mission in 2006. Of course we will also address the role of Afghan actors and the Afghan state in the sketch of the wider events of the Afghan War. Therefore we will first delve into the evolution of the overarching campaign.

8.3.1 The first five years of the Afghan campaign

The speedy overthrowing of the Taliban regime was achieved through the so-called ‘Afghan model’, a clever combination of US airpower, Afghan anti-Taliban militias and a relatively small number of US Special Forces who ‘bridged the gap between the world’s premier air force and indigenous allies’.¹¹⁹ The bulk of the Afghan proxy forces were provided by the United Front for Islamic Salvation of Afghanistan, more commonly known as the Northern Alliance.¹²⁰ As mentioned earlier in this chapter Afghanistan’s northeast had been the only part of the country to defy Taliban dominance under the leadership of the Tajik Ahmed Shah Massoud. Albeit Massoud was murdered by Al-Qaeda two days prior to the 9-11 attacks, his forces spearheaded the anti-Taliban offensive and soon were joined by Dostum’s Uzbeks and other factions.¹²¹ Aided by US Special Forces and air power the Northern Alliance quickly conquered key positions in northern Afghanistan and Kabul was taken unopposed on November 13. Overall, the fighting in the north was mainly over by 26 November when a pocket of resistance of some 5,000 hard-core Arab fighters in Kunduz city surrendered, and attention shifted to the Taliban’s stronghold in the southern city of Kandahar.

Whereas the mainly Tajik and Uzbek proxies of the northern alliance had been instrumental in defeating the Taliban in northern Afghanistan, they were less useful in the Pashtun dominated south. Therefore US Special Forces had teamed up with Hamid Karzai in order to start an uprising against the Taliban in Uruzgan province. Albeit we will cover this in more detail in this chapter’s next section, it is important to notice here that Karzai’s position as a prominent Popalzai and former *mujahideen* brought him sufficient leverage to mobilize Uruzgan’s population (including Zirak and Panjpai Durrani, Ghilzai and even Hazaras) and

119 Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, Thomas E. Griffith Jr., ‘Winning with Allies, The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model’, *International Security* 30:3 (winter 2005/06), 158-159. On the ‘Afghan model’ see also Stephen D. Biddle ‘Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare’, *Foreign Affairs* 82:2 (March/April 2003), and Stephen D. Biddle, ‘Allies Airpower, and Modern Warfare, The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq’, *International Security* 30:3 (winter 2005/06).

120 Amin Saikal, ‘The Role of Sub-National Actors in Afghanistan’, *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics*, ed. K. Mulaj (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 248.

121 The following account of the fall of the Taliban regime is predominantly based on William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 219-222, Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard Of Empires*, 91-95. See also Brian Glyn Williams, ‘Report From the Field, General Dostum and the Mazar i Sharif Campaign: new light on the role of Northern Alliance warlords in Operation Enduring Freedom’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21:4 (December 2010), 610-611.

launch a thrust against Kandahar from Tirin Kot.¹²² While Karzai, thus, threatened the city from the north, another US-supported local power-holder, Gul Agha Sherzai, advanced from the south. The Taliban consequently opted to leave Kandahar for Pakistan, and on 9 December Hamid Karzai entered the city in an unarmed convoy.¹²³ By December 17 the initial phase of the campaign was completed as also the last Taliban and Al-Qaeda stronghold at the Tora Bora cave complex in eastern Afghanistan was mopped up, with many hard-core fighters, reportedly including Bin Laden, escaping to Pakistan. Now time had come to consolidate this initial success that had effectively terminated Al-Qaeda's Afghan sanctuary by toppling the Taliban regime.

The first steps for consolidation had already been taken in the German city of Bonn where under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) a conference on the future of Afghanistan was held from 27 November to 5 December 2001. This conference was attended by a representative group of relevant Afghan parties -excluding the Taliban- and led to the so-called Bonn Agreement 'that offered a blueprint for Afghanistan's political transition [towards a representative and freely elected government], outlining a series of benchmarks to be achieved'.¹²⁴ Most important of those benchmarks were the convening of an Emergency *Loya Jirga* to agree on a transitional government, formulating a new constitution, and the organization of free parliamentary and presidential elections. Furthermore, it was decided that this process would be initialized by an interim administration under the leadership of Hamid Karzai -a Pashtun and therefore an acceptable candidate for the bulk of the Afghan population-, who took power on December 22. The Emergency *Loya Jirga* of June 2002 confirmed this choice as Karzai was also named as the head of the transitional government. This transitional authority continued the course of the Bonn agreement and convened a constitutional *Loya Jirga* that took place in December 2003 and January 2004. Ultimately the first elections were held on 9 October 2004 and again Karzai was confirmed as the head of state of the new Afghanistan, this time as freely elected president (receiving 55,4% of the vote). When another successful round of elections for the *Wolesi Jirga*, the lower house of the national parliament, and provincial councils was held in September 2005, Afghanistan was seemingly 'well on the way to consolidating a new and civilized form of politics'.¹²⁵

122 Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 87-90.

123 Actually the fall of Kandahar was much more complicated as an old rivalry between the predatory Gul Agha Sherzai and well-respected local power-holder Mullah Naqib flared up in the wake of the Taliban's retreat on 6 December. The former, supported by US Special Forces, emerged from the struggle as Kandahar's new governor. Hamid Karzai, however, favored Naqib, and it was Karzai's mediation that led to an agreement between both rivals. For a detailed account on the events in Kandahar in 2001 see Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment Of Virtue, Inside Afghanistan After The Taliban* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 43-83.

124 Mark Sedra, Geoffrey Hayes, 'Introduction', *Afghanistan, Transition Under Threat*, ed. Hayes, G., Sedra, M. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), xiv, this account on the Bonn Agreement and its implementation is also based on, William Maley, 'Looking Back at the Bonn Process', *Afghanistan, Transition Under Threat*, ed. Hayes, G., Sedra, M. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 3-19, William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 224-229, Astri Suhrke, *When More is Less*, 26-36, Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 329-330.

125 William Maley, 'Looking Back at the Bonn Process', 8.

Yet, the success of what Astri Suhrke has critically dubbed the ‘liberal project’ was of a rather superficial nature.¹²⁶ The Bonn Agreement implied that the new Afghan state was modelled after developed Western states with a liberal political order and a centralized structure. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the Afghan state has always relied on some form of accommodations with local power-holders for establishing its rule, and consequently the post-2001 ‘liberal project’ did not match the traditional relationship between state and society as familiar to the Afghan people. Some observers have even argued that ‘in essence, the Karzai government is illegitimate *because* it is elected’.¹²⁷ This bold statement, however, misses the point that under its democratic cloak the Karzai government had firmly established its rule by meticulously weaving a web of patron-client relations with local power-holders throughout Afghanistan. This not only resembled the way the Afghan state had bypassed its own formal structures with use of external revenues in the past, it also brought back the warlords and commanders who had been driven to the background during the Taliban regime and now reappeared on the front stage of Afghanistan’s political arena.¹²⁸ The bargaining process that facilitated the co-option of those agents not only empowered their position at the grassroots level, it also drew them into the official state structure as governmental offices were used as rewards for collaboration with the Kabul government. Consequently, the state’s institutions were permeated with local power-holders and their *protégées* and corruption became a key feature of the new Afghan state -albeit it should be noted that this was nothing new as this fitted the time-honoured pattern of government in Afghanistan. Similarly, the elections (especially those for the *Wolesi Jirga* and provincial councils in 2005) were merely the formal translation of these new politics, which led some scholars to conclude that Afghanistan’s political transition could be characterized as a form of ‘warlord democratization’.¹²⁹ Thus, *de facto* the Bonn Agreement had created an Afghan state in which a weak central government backed by foreign aid had established its rule by co-opting warlords and former *mujahideen* commanders controlling Afghanistan’s numerous locales.¹³⁰

The light footprint adopted by the intervening US forces was never intended to support the building of a modern democratic state in Afghanistan.¹³¹ Yet, the consolidation of its success

126 Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 3, William Maley, ‘Looking Back at the Bonn Process’, 9.

127 Thomas H. Johnson, M. Chris Mason, ‘Refighting the Last War, Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template’, *Military Review* (November-December 2009), 5. Italics in original.

128 See, among others, William Maley, ‘Looking Back at the Bonn Process’, 12, Chris Johnson, Jolyon Leslie, *Afghanistan, the mirage of peace* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 193-194, Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 87-91, Allard Wagemaker, ‘Afghanistan 2001-2011, Gewapende interventie en staatsvorming in een fragiele staat’, 172-173.

129 See Barnett R. Rubin, ‘Peace Building and State-Building in Afghanistan: constructing sovereignty for whose security?’, *Third World Quarterly* 27:1 (2006), 180, Jonathan Goodhand, Mark Sedra, *Bargains for Peace? Aid, Conditionalities and Reconstruction in Afghanistan* (The Hague: Clingendael, 2006), 55, Mark Sedra, Geoffrey Hayes, ‘Introduction’, xiv.

130 Giustozzi argues this happened intentionally as he states that ‘the creation of a temporary and hybrid ‘feudal state’ was seemingly meant to build and consolidate a strong political centre that would gradually expand its power over the numerous local segments. Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 90. See also Chapter Three, section 3.5.2.

131 Dipali Mukhopadhyay, ‘Disguised warlordism and combatanhood in Balkh: the persistence of informal power in the formal Afghan state’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 9:4 (December 2009), 538, see also James A. Russell, ‘Into the Great Wadi: The

in toppling the Taliban regime required the adaptation of the campaign for this purpose. Therefore, the Bonn Agreement, endorsed by the Americans, called upon the international community to dispatch a multinational force for assisting the new Afghan Government by securing Kabul and its surroundings. Thus ISAF came into existence as the international community's military contribution to the state-building process in Afghanistan. When the first forces -a British contingent- deployed to Kabul in December 2001 it was clear they were going to support the new Afghan administration, while parallel to the ISAF mission OEF would continue to pursue the remnants of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the periphery. Soon, however, it became obvious that state building in Afghanistan would require ISAF forces to assist in providing security beyond the capital and its direct environment. While US troop numbers gradually increased from approximately 1,000 Special Forces in 2001 to about 10,000 mostly conventional forces in 2003 in order to keep up the pressure on enemy fighters in the wide-stretched remote locales of Afghanistan's countryside, US policy makers had blocked an early 2002 proposal for the expansion of ISAF -allegedly in order to save strategic air-lift assets for a future campaign in Iraq.¹³² This decision had painstaking ramifications as the lack of security forces tipped the balance in the co-optive relationships between the Karzai government and local power-holders in favour of the latter. Consequently many of the warlords and *mujahideen* commanders reverted to the same misbehaviour they had been demonstrating in the years before the Taliban's rise to power. Moreover, those agents often enjoyed support of locally deployed US forces as they were considered essential intelligence providers and force multipliers in the fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Especially the south, the traditional Pashtun heartland where the Taliban had started their march to power, suffered from repressive and predatory local power-holders such as the infamous Gul Agha Sherzai, who ruled Kandahar with American support.¹³³

To repair this mistake the United States in 2003 lifted its ban on ISAF's expansion beyond Kabul, and sanctioned by UN Security Council Resolution 1510 the mission, which now was led by NATO, deployed to the north in 2004 (stage I), the west in 2005 (stage III), and the south and east in 2006 (stage III/IV).¹³⁴ Furthermore, US forces -still predominantly operating under the banner of OEF- in 2003 adopted stabilization as their main mission and at this point counterinsurgency first emerged as the theme of the Afghan campaign.¹³⁵ As part of this change PRTs now were introduced as a tool for supporting the state-building process

United States and the War in Afghanistan', *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, ed. Farrell, T., Osinga, F., Russell, J.A. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 58, 64-67, Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 31-35.

132 William Maley, 'Looking Back at the Bonn Process', 11-13, Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard Of Empires*, 111-115. On US troop levels see James A. Russell, 'Into the Great Wadi: The United States and the War in Afghanistan', 55, 57, 68, Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 42-43.

133 William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 248-249. Sarah Chayes', *The Punishment Of Virtue* gives a detailed description of life in Kandahar under Sherzai. See also the remarks on the fall of Kandahar.

134 Astri Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission? NATO from Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping* 15:2 (April 2008), 223-224, William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 257-258.

135 James A. Russell, 'Into the Great Wadi: The United States and the War in Afghanistan', 67-68, David W. Barno, 'Fighting "The Other War"', *Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan, 2003-2005*, *Military Review* (September-October 2007), 34.

in the countryside through economic development as well as the provision of security. Although originally designed as a quick fix to fill the gap created by the initial blockade of ISAF's expansion, the PRT concept would become a standard instrument in both the counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq -as was already mentioned in section 3.5.4.¹³⁶ All these measures, however, could not prevent the Taliban from exploiting the 2002 strategic mistake of blocking ISAF's expansion; between 2002 and 2006 the movement gradually established and consolidated a strong foothold in the south and the east (and it even was expanding beyond these regions). Consequently, by the time ISAF troops were deploying for stage III and IV of the expansion, they were confronted with a full-blown insurgency that was now also known as the Neo-Taliban.¹³⁷

The seeds for the re-emergence of the Taliban thus were sown by a flaw of the implementation of the Bonn process which partly restored the pre-Taliban situation (especially in the south) in which predatory local power-holders were dominating the local level without any effective control from the Kabul government. The new Taliban recruited their largest following among tribes and local communities who had been marginalized by such agents and their foreign (predominantly US) allies.¹³⁸

Although US military forces had adapted their mission and campaign theme, and under command of NATO ISAF was expanding to support the state-building process in the whole country, it was also deemed necessary to link this to a further enhancement of the position of the Karzai government. Whereas the Bonn Agreement was concluded as its benchmarks had been formally realized, the international community acknowledged that the institutions of the Afghan state were far from perfect and hugely incapable to facilitate the further development of the country -mainly due to the role of local power-holders, who not only ruled the local level, but also permeated the administration. Therefore in 2006 the so-called Afghanistan Compact was drawn up by the Afghan government and the international community. This agreement contained a shared vision on the further development of Afghanistan, and while the Afghan government committed 'itself to realising this shared vision of the future', the international community, in turn, committed 'itself to provide resources and support to realise that vision'.¹³⁹ The Afghanistan Compact encompassed the improvement of security, governance, rule of law and human rights, and economical and social development in the next five years. Furthermore the elimination of the drugs industry was identified as a vital cross-cutting spearhead. These new benchmarks were integrated in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and thus the compact resulted in a tangible plan subscribed to by both Afghan government and international community, of

¹³⁶ An excellent analysis of the emergence and role of PRTs in the Afghan campaign is provided by Miriam Grandia Mantas, 'Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Symbol van NAVO-commitment in Afghanistan of meer?'.
¹³⁷ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 1-6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 42, 46-69, see also William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 246-247, Noah Coburn, *Bazaar Politics, Power And Pottery In An Afghan Market Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 220.

¹³⁹ The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international community, *The Afghanistan Compact*, available at http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf, 2.

which the latter provided the resources for a proper implementation. The overall emphasis for the next five years would lay on socio-economic development, for which foreign aid was to be used to strengthen the state's institutions' ability to improve the daily life of the Afghan people at the grassroots level.¹⁴⁰

Thus, by 2006 the Afghan campaign had evolved from a purely punitive expedition into an ambitious stabilization mission in which the international community not only had committed itself to the provision of security through military forces, but also had bought into a more extensive state-building program aimed at creating a modern, democratic Afghan state, the 'liberal project'. Soon, however, this all proved too ambitious as in spring 2006 the re-emergence of the Taliban triggered a surge of violence (mainly in the south) that required immediate action.¹⁴¹ The Afghanistan Compact and the consequential ANDS had never taken such a deterioration into account and therefore the new strategy was virtually derailed before its implementation had properly started. ISAF's stage III and IV expansion, on the other side, continued as scheduled, and consequently those troops found themselves fighting a full-fledged insurgency; despite its wider agenda, the international community now was focusing on security first. The roadmap provided by the ANDS was abandoned as the various contingents reverted to 'tactical solutions and quick fixes' for achieving the compact's objectives.¹⁴² The integrated approach for Afghanistan as a whole, thereby, faltered and individual donor countries increasingly channelled aid through their national military contributions to ISAF, with PRTs as main vehicle for development support.¹⁴³ Needless to say that this did not do much to strengthen the position of the central government. Furthermore, it also led to huge differences between the locales where various national contingents were operating and even within those locales there could be differences as sometimes several nationalities shared an operating environment. To add to this complicated situation, ISAF troops found themselves fighting the insurgency side-by-side with OEF forces. While the latter had adopted counterinsurgency tactics, many of those troops in the south were still relying on the collaboration of repressive local power-holders or had developed an oversimplified understanding of the Taliban's connections with local tribes.¹⁴⁴ It was against this background of a fragmented overarching campaign focusing on securing a state that was characterized by a weak central government and *de facto* was dominated by local power-holders, that a contingent of Dutch troops as part of ISAF's stage III expansion deployed to Uruzgan province and took over from a US PRT in August 2006. In the next chapter we will

140 Ibid., 9-14, see also, Ali A. Jalali, 'Afghanistan: The Challenge of State Building', *Afghanistan, Transition Under Threat*, ed. Hayes, G., Sedra, M. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 33, William Maley, 'Looking Back at the Bonn Process', 18, Fatima Ayub, Sari Kouvo, 'Righting the course? Humanitarian intervention, the war on terror and the future of Afghanistan', *International Affairs* 84:4 (2008), 652-655.

141 See, among others, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 1-8, Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard Of Empires*, 210-212, Astri Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission? NATO from Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan', 224-225.

142 Ali A. Jalali, 'Afghanistan: The Challenge of State Building', 33, 43.

143 Nipa Banerjee, 'Peace Building and Development in Afghanistan', *Afghanistan, Transition Under Threat*, ed. Hayes, G., Sedra, M. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 254-258, Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 86.

144 See for instance Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 46-47, 59-60.

delve more deeply in the Dutch mission, now we will first address the situation in Uruzgan as a result of the first five years of the Afghan campaign.

8.3.2 Uruzgan 2001-2006

Although Uruzgan is commonly considered a relatively backward province, it has become of symbolic importance to the Taliban as well as for the Karzai government. Many individuals of the former's top leadership have some kind of connection with Uruzgan, while President Karzai's march to power commenced there in October 2001 as part of OEF. It is this latter occasion which has hugely shaped the political marketplace in Uruzgan after the fall of the Taliban as many prominent locals kept direct ties with Karzai as a result of their support during the uprising, and Karzai's trustee Jan Mohammed was (re-)installed as the provincial governor.¹⁴⁵ Understanding the societal landscape and the political relationships in Uruzgan prior to the Dutch involvement, therefore, first requires an analysis of Karzai's expedition in order to reveal how the various influential local power-holders were related to the president. Once we will have obtained clarity on this matter, we will look at the political order that emerged as a result of these ties and the new situation in Afghanistan, and how US operations under the flag of OEF further influenced Uruzgan's political marketplace. To conclude we will also look into the way the Taliban sought to regain influence in Uruzgan as part of their renewed appearance. But, as mentioned, let us first start with the events of 2001.

Karzai left Pakistan and first arrived in Uruzgan armed with CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)-provided satellite telephones and money, and accompanied by just a couple of confidants around October 11. Operating from the *qala* (walled house typical for rural Afghanistan) of a befriended *mullah* he set out to forge alliances with local power-holders in order to mobilize support for his uprising against the Taliban.¹⁴⁶ OEF had only just begun, and the opening moves of the war went almost unnoticed in rural Uruzgan. As the Taliban still seemed steady in control of the province, many local power-holders were initially reluctant to join Karzai. The Taliban had largely left them in peace on the condition that they would not interfere with their rule, and violating these accommodations would end this peaceful equilibrium.¹⁴⁷ Yet Karzai, thanks to the large sum of CIA money, succeeded to rally some of the most important local power-holders in the province. Among the first to be approached was fellow Popalzai Malem Rahmatullah Khan who, in absence of the jailed Jan Mohammed Khan, had become the local sub-tribe's most important leader. Rahmatullah initially reacted reticent to Karzai's request, but was persuaded to join -reportedly verbal persuasion combined with a sum of 100,000 Pakistani rupees (roughly \$1,600 at that

¹⁴⁵ See, among others, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 25-26, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 22-23.

¹⁴⁶ The following fragment on Karzai's expedition and the role of Uruzgan's local power-holders is predominantly based on chapters seven, eight, and nine of Bette Dam's *Expeditie Uruzgan*. See Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 85-142.

¹⁴⁷ See also Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157.

time) did the job- which secured the support of most of the local Popalzai.¹⁴⁸ The Barakzai community, however, was less supportive as their main leader Rozi Khan did not join Karzai due to the longstanding conflict with the Popalzai. On the other side some Barakzai leaders who were not actively engaged in this feud, most notably Sultan Mohammed, opted to join the uprising.¹⁴⁹ Ghilzai leader Hashem Khan of the Tokhi sub-tribe, the ally of the then jailed Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan, contacted Karzai offering his allegiance as well as his services to negotiate the collaboration of two more Ghilzai communities. His initiative was well rewarded with some 200,000 rupees (reportedly much to Malem Rahmatullah's envy who immediately tried to claim 50,000 rupees from Hashem Khan) to demonstrate Karzai's intent to recruit beyond the divide separating the various Pashtun confederations. Additionally, Karzai could also count on the ethnically different Hazara of northern Uruzgan who fiercely opposed the Taliban and immediately chose to join the uprising.

Despite this considerable success Karzai's expedition initially ended in disaster as the *ad hoc* coalition failed to materialize in a capable fighting force. Due to different opinions on the exact approach and mounting Taliban pressure the uprising quickly lost momentum. Even a US weapons drop on November 1 could not boost the morale of the fighters. Of the approximately 150 men who initially joined Karzai only a couple remained (most fled or were sent home) after a march full of hardship through the remote mountains that separate east from west Uruzgan. The Taliban even claimed Karzai's death. Consequently Karzai saw no other option than retreat and was extracted by US helicopters that flew him to safety in Pakistan less than a month from the start of his uprising.

Under the leadership of Mirabad Hotak leader Mullah Shafiq, the nemesis of jailed Popalzai leader Jan Mohammed Khan, the Taliban set out to clear the supporters of Karzai's expedition in the Popalzai-dominated areas of Tirin Kot district. This action was so effective that when a week after their evacuation the first of Karzai's confidants returned in order to prepare the comeback of their leader, they found that virtually all those who had sheltered them were in detention or hiding. Consequently Karzai's expedition, which now would be reinforced by a twelve men strong US Special Forces A-team and six CIA agents, would be reinserted in Deh Rawud district where Karzai's allies from the local Popalzai community were left untouched by the Taliban.

On 14 November US helicopters landed Karzai and his US advisors in the vicinity of Deh Rawud where they indeed received shelter from the local Popalzai leaders. The next day, however, they immediately set out for Tirin Kot. At this time news of the War had reached Uruzgan and it was also clear that the Taliban had suffered considerable losses in the north and that Kabul had fallen on November 13. The inhabitants of the provincial capital had enthusiastically greeted this news, and many of them now openly denounced the Taliban. Without doubt this was fed by persistent rumours on Karzai's undertaking that had kept buzzing around since his first arrival. Confronted with this situation the local Taliban structure

¹⁴⁸ See also The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 28.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

collapsed and many officials fled and reportedly went into hiding in Mullah Shafiq's Mirabad area. In order to exploit this vacuum the Karzai expedition rushed to Tirin Kot, receiving additional weapons for new recruits by airdrop on their way. In Tirin Kot they were not only met by Karzai's allies from the first hour, but also by main Barakzai leader Rozi Khan who now joined the coalition because he realized he had to overcome the longstanding conflict with the Popalzai -and especially Jan Mohammed- in order to secure a future position. Rozi Khan had kept a secret weapons cache and was now using these weapons against the Taliban. Not only had he seized the governor's compound, but he also had fought the last remaining Taliban fighters in Tirin Kot's police office and seized its arsenal. Combined with his good reputation among the Barakzai and Achekzai this made him a pivotal actor for Karzai to ally himself to. Thus, Karzai's coalition in Uruzgan now incorporated the most important sub-tribes of the dominant Zirak Durrani (57,5% of the population), while also sub-tribes of the other confederations and Hazaras had joined the effort.¹⁵⁰

The new coalition immediately received its first test when the Taliban started launching attacks at Tirin Kot. Only about forty Afghan fighters showed up to assist US Special Forces with the defence against hundreds of (mainly Pakistani and Arab) Taliban from Kandahar in the south, while Rozi Khan and his militia advanced to counter a Taliban offensive from the Mirabad area to the east. Despite the small number of local fighters, the coalition succeeded in defeating the Taliban thanks to massive US air support guided by the Special Forces -demonstrating the effectiveness of the 'Afghan model'. This show of force was also instrumental in boosting the local commitment to Karzai's expedition as local power-holders now massively opted to join a coalition that possessed such a tremendous military might.¹⁵¹ It was, therefore, hugely through the support of US military resources that Karzai's expedition gained a renewed impetus which following the battle for Tirin Kot not only culminated in the thrust for Kandahar, but also won Hamid Karzai his position as head of the interim administration and future president.

In Uruzgan itself the success of Karzai's expedition initially led to the emergence of a political order reflecting the broad coalition of local power-holders that had supported Karzai. Although the Zirak Durrani Pashtun, notably the Popalzai and Barakzai, again obtained the most powerful positions, the overall situation was characterized by a relative balance in power, unprecedented in Uruzgan's recent history. Malem Rahmatullah was rewarded with the governor's position and he received personal instructions from Karzai to welcome back and accommodate former Taliban members.¹⁵² Rozi Khan became the provincial chief of police, while his main Achekzai ally Abdul Khaleq was appointed chief of Chora district.¹⁵³ The leaders of sub-tribes of the Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzai such as Tokhi chief Hashem Khan

150 See also The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 28-29.

151 See also Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 157.

152 Bette Dam, *Expedition Uruzgan*, 180, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 123, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 28,

153 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 71-72.

received Karzai's word that they would maintain a permanent influence in political affairs.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore former *mujahideen* commanders and local prominents Mohammed Nabi Khan and Jan Mohammed Khan, who both were detained by the Taliban, returned to the province. It was the comeback of this latter Popalzai power-holder, former governor and Karzai-trustee, however, that ushered the end of the relative stability on Uruzgan's political marketplace.

In 2002 after only a few months Rahmatullah was replaced by Jan Mohammed Khan as provincial governor. Although Karzai later compensated Rahmatullah with the post of provincial minister of education and paid for his pilgrimage to Mecca, it was clear that Jan Mohammed had successfully retaken his old position as the province's dominant Popalzai leader.¹⁵⁵ The main reason for this move laid in the US desire to step up anti-Taliban operations. Jan Mohammed was not only known by the Americans (he had repeatedly joined Hamid Karzai on his visits to the US embassy in Pakistan during the Taliban regime), he now had become an even fiercer Taliban opponent as a result of the hardships and torments suffered during his detainment. The US, therefore, empowered Jan Mohammed as part of OEF's hunt for the remnants of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The ramifications of this appointment for Uruzgan's new political order were catastrophic. Jan Mohammed immediately set out to consolidate and enlarge his power by playing divide and rule to neutralize the Barakzai and Achekzai majority within Uruzgan's Zirak Durrani Pashtun, while he simultaneously adopted a ruthless policy of marginalizing the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani through repressive measures.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore Jan Mohammed's governorship was characterized by its predatory nature as he continuously enriched himself by levying additional taxes as well as arrogating property and other possessions.¹⁵⁷ To enforce his rule Jan Mohammed made extensive use of a 800-1,000 men strong militia under command of his nephew Matiullah Khan, who closely collaborated with US Special Forces.¹⁵⁸ Since opponents were consequently labeled as Taliban, the governor assured himself of the almost unconditional support of these American soldiers. This so-called false reporting (see also Chapter One, section 1.2.2) gave the targeting 'a strong tribal dimension', with the various sub-tribes of the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani confederations typically branded pro-Taliban.¹⁵⁹ The 2004 documentary *Taliban Country* offers a grim insight in the daily consequences of these practices at the grassroots level as

154 Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 183.

155 *Ibid.*, 180-181.

156 See, among others, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, 56-58, Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 156-158, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 183-185, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 24-26, The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 5, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 221-223, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 720.

157 Jan Mohammed, for example, demanded \$1,500,000 governor's tax annually from Chora district and stimulated the illicit poppy economy in order to increase his revenues through taxing the farmers who cultivated these crops.

158 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 223, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, 59, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 40, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 27-28.

159 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 158, see also Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 21.

it captures Jan Mohammed operating along US Marines while harassing village dwellers on allegations of ties with the Taliban.¹⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly Jan Mohammed's rule invoked much resistance and repeatedly Karzai's intervention was called upon by those who had supported him in 2001, but were now suffering from the provincial administration's policy. This, however, was to no avail despite the fact that in Uruzgan's political marketplace direct access to President Karzai remained one of the most important sources for securing resources, positions, or consolidating one's power.¹⁶¹ Yet, it was Jan Mohammed who kept the closest ties with Karzai, and therefore he was virtually inviolable. As part of his policy Uruzgan's governor gradually removed all of his rivals from official positions and replaced them by Popalzai associates or 'long time friends'.¹⁶² Achekzai leader Abdul Khaleq was relieved from his function as chief of Chora district, and Ghilzai leaders of the Tokhi sub-tribe Mohammed Nabi Khan (who, it should be remembered, had also returned to Uruzgan after his imprisonment by the Taliban) and Hashem Khan felt so endangered by Jan Mohammed that they fled to Pakistan and Kandahar respectively.¹⁶³ Police chief Rozi Khan, however, managed to stay in office, despite various attempts to get rid of him. Needless to say that relations between the chief of police and governor became seriously troubled. More and more the official positions within the provincial administration were occupied by Jan Mohammed's network and Rozi Khan's police was effectively outmanoeuvred by incorporating Matiullah Khan's militia within the governmental structure as so-called Afghan Highway Police (AHP, which was better equipped than the regular police force and officially tasked to guard the Tirin Kot-Kandahar highway).¹⁶⁴

Under influence of Jan Mohammed's policies Uruzgan's societal landscape suffered from an increased degree of fragmentation. The disturbance of the tribal balance of power in favor of the Popalzai minority led to a chaotic situation in which not only traditional tensions between Zirak Durrani, Panjpai Durrani, and Ghilzai were exaggerated, but also grievances within the confines of those confederations and even within sub-tribes were further polarized. The result was a chaotic situation in which sub-tribe commanders intermittently fought against or alongside each other depending on what served their interest best.¹⁶⁵ The *mujahideen* commanders who had also dominated the political marketplace before the Taliban (supported by their allies and networks) remained the most powerful political agents in this situation; Rozi Khan controlled most of the Barakzai, Abdul Khaleq the Achekzai,

160 Carmela Baranowska, *Taliban Country* (Thames Ditton: Journeyman Pictures, 2004) available at <http://jman.tv/store?p=2083&s=Taliban+Country>, a relevant fragment is also available through <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc18CKwIAGQ>. The same event is discussed in Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living, America, The Taliban, And The War Through Afghan Eyes* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 245-246.

161 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 25-26, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, 58.

162 See, for instance, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 222.

163 Bette Dam, *Expedite Uruzgan*, 182-183.

164 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 44, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 223.

165 Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 720.

the Ghilzai, however, were increasingly splintered and suffering from internal feuds as their main leaders went into exile because of Jan Mohammed's effective marginalization, and the Panjpai sub-tribes' were kept politically weak. Jan Mohammed Khan himself, of course, was the champion of this self-created disorder as he cleverly legitimized and consolidated his powerbase by presenting 'himself as the only one able to somehow control this chaos [with use of his own means as well as his guaranteed access to national and US resources], justifying his lasting occupation of the post of governor, despite the Popalzais [sic] being a small minority in Uruzgan'.¹⁶⁶ Although Karzai was convinced that Jan Mohammed was the right man in the right seat, the provincial governor's legitimacy at the grassroots level never spread beyond the power block he had created around his clientage network of Popalzai associates and personal friends from other sub-tribes.¹⁶⁷

Whereas US Special Forces had almost unconditionally supported Jan Mohammed throughout his governorship, the US PRT that was established in the province in the summer of 2004 gradually obtained an awareness of the true nature of his policy and the consequences for the local political situation.¹⁶⁸ They welcomed the 2005 election of Jan Mohammed's opponent and former Chora district chief Abdul Khaleq (with overwhelming votes) as one of the province's representatives in the *Wolesi Jirga*. Moreover, candidates tied to Abdul Khaleq as well as to Rozi Khan were elected in the Provincial Council. Jan Mohammed, naturally, also had his straw men elected in both *Wolesi Jirga* (Mohammed Hashim Watanwal) and Provincial Council and even had US Special Forces arresting one of the candidates running for his opponents. The US PRT, however, arranged this person's release and ultimately a more balanced political situation with representatives of all three powerful Zirak Durrani factions was secured. Yet, other sub-tribes remained ill-represented and especially the Ghilzai were more and more alienated from the provincial government as a result of Jan Mohammed's brutal repression. The newly elected Provincial Council, therefore, set out to involve them with the provincial administration.¹⁶⁹

This attempt, however, came too late, as the resurging Taliban had already found fertile soil in the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani areas surrounding Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud.¹⁷⁰ The marginalization of those tribes as well as the exclusion of former Taliban from the political marketplace -despite Karzai's initial promise of reconciliation- made that many local leaders opted to join the Neo-Taliban because of their dissatisfaction with the (provincial) government, or even felt forced to do so as collaboration with the Taliban was their only option for survival.¹⁷¹ Hotak leader Mullah Shafiq (the former *mujahideen* and Taliban

166 Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, 57-58.

167 A detailed description of Jan Mohammed's network can be found in Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 26-27.

168 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 23, 125-126, 127-145, see also Dan Green, 'Counterinsurgency Diplomacy: Political Advisors at the Operational and Tactical Levels', *Military Review* (May-June 2007), 25-28.

169 *Ibid.*, 126.

170 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 161, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 718-719.

171 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 160-161.

commander and fierce opponent of Jan Mohammed, whose surrender was initially accepted), for instance, was soon targeted by Jan Mohammed with the support of US Special Forces. His native Mirabad area was the scene of some of the most brutal actions of the governor's militia, which reportedly included torture of prisoners and mutilation of perished fighters.¹⁷² Albeit Mullah Shafiq fled to Quetta in Pakistan, his position within the Taliban only grew stronger and by 2006 he was deemed to be Uruzgan's most important Taliban commander, controlling (from Pakistan) 10 sub-commanders and 600 to 1,000 fighters.¹⁷³ Whereas Mullah Shafiq's network covered the eastern part of Uruzgan province, and most notably Tirin Kot and Chora districts, the Taliban fighters in the west of the province were directly linked to Mullah Berader, a Popalzai from Deh Rawud who until his arrest in 2010 was the second man (and military commander) of the overall Taliban movement.¹⁷⁴ The effectiveness of this local organization was mirrored by the re-emergence of local Taliban commanders as relevant political actors at the lowest societal levels. Local leaders and communities increasingly sought to negotiate with the Taliban about matters such as 'requests for safe passage, permission for NGO activities, punishment of criminals or the reigning in of oppressive strongmen, mediation in conflicts, or the removal of fighters from residential areas', or mutually agreed to leave each other alone -which meant that the local population also would not collaborate with the government and foreign forces.¹⁷⁵ In case of non-compliance, however, the Taliban would not hesitate to deploy coercive measures against local power-holders or their people, and therefore the relationship between Taliban and local population can be characterized ambiguous at best.

At the eve of the Dutch mission Uruzgan, thus, was characterized by a highly fragmented local society in which various actors were vying for power and influence. Popalzai leader Jan Mohammed Khan was on top of the local political marketplace, as he not only possessed the vastest resources, including his own militia, but also kept the closest ties with President Hamid Karzai as well as that he enjoyed the back up of US Special Forces. Albeit the 2005 elections had empowered the Barakzai and Achekzai sub-tribes under the leadership of respectively Rozi Khan and Abdul Khaleq of the same Zirak Durrani confederation, the sub-tribes of the Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzai were either incapable to compete with more powerful actors (the Panjpai leaders) or simply held no direct access to Uruzgan's political marketplace (Tokhi leaders Mohammed Nabi Khan and Hashem Khan as well as Hotak and Taliban leader Mullah Shafiq). The Taliban's successful re-emergence had re-established them as a political actor in Uruzgan, though their influence was limited to the lowest societal levels. In this melee the local population typically sought to secure its survival along sub-tribal lines, which remained the most important *qawms*, but sometimes different

172 Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 184-185. Jan Mohammed Khan not only shared a history of personal rivalry with Mullah Shafiq, he also suspected the latter to be the instigator of his imprisonment under the Taliban.

173 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 39, Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 158.

174 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 164-165, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 138.

175 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 161-164.

solidarity groups also existed within sub-tribes or emerged across tribal divides as especially those local people who were not represented by powerful political actors felt the need to establish ties with more important local power-holders. Moreover, the struggle for power in Uruzgan was characterized by ‘almost daily’ shifting alliances as solidarity groups felt caught between the major forces influencing the political landscape; the dominant local power-holders, the (provincial) government, the Taliban, and of course the international presence.¹⁷⁶ With regard to the latter we can conclude that US Special Forces had supported Jan Mohammed throughout his governorship, whereas the US PRT had encouraged the re-establishment of Rozi Khan’s Barakzai and Abdul Khaleq’s Achekzai in the provincial administration. Yet, it has to be concluded that overall the US involvement in Uruzgan from 2001 until 2006 consolidated Jan Mohammed Khan’s position as dominant local power-holder and simultaneously put him in the governor’s chair, while the ‘dark side’ of his rule went largely unnoticed or was unaddressed, which alienated his personal rivals and their solidarity groups from the Afghan government. Now we have dealt with the social-political developments in Uruzgan in the period prior to the HOTO between the US and the Dutch, we can commence our analysis of the way the Dutch task force manoeuvred at the provincial political marketplace in order to obtain control over the local population. But let us first wrap up the conclusions of this chapter.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed at providing an insight in the context of the operational environment of the 2006-2010 Dutch mission by sketching the historical and societal background of Afghanistan and Uruzgan as well as the first five years (2001-2006) of the Afghan War and its effects at the grassroots level in Uruzgan province. To conclude this context analysis we will now discuss our findings focusing on Afghanistan in general and Uruzgan specifically. We will start with the former in order to finish with an oversight of the situation at the grassroots level in Uruzgan that functions as a starting point for the next chapter on the first two years of the TFU campaign.

The historical background of present-day Afghanistan was dominated by a continuous struggle for enhanced centralization -and most times also modernization- under influence of imperialism, the Cold War, and armed conflict, in all of which externally provided resources fulfilled an essential role. Yet, centripetal forces never succeeded in overcoming the importance of local powers as throughout its recent history Afghanistan has always been characterized by a substantial degree of decentralized rule. From the early Durrani empire in the eighteenth century until today’s Islamic Republic of Afghanistan alliances and co-optive ties with tribes and local power-holders have been a key trait of the Afghan state. Interestingly, it can be observed that the pattern of centralization follows variations

¹⁷⁶ Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 186, see also Martine van Bijlert, ‘Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles’, 162.

in the use of coercion by the central government; the government in Kabul held its strongest influence under the 'Iron Amir' 'Abd al-Rahman as well as under the Taliban, who both ruled the country with considerable use of coercion for controlling local power-holders. The longest period of stability, however, occurred under the rule of King Zahir Shah (r. 1933-1973) when Afghanistan gradually evolved into a modernized hybrid state -centrally ruled, but with a large role for local power-holders- that succeeded in accommodating both the traditional tribal leadership of the countryside as well as the newly emerged modernist elite of the cities. The redistribution of foreign resources by the Kabul government was instrumental in encapsulating both rural and urban societal forces.

The Afghan state's endemic need to accommodate local power-holders and the groups they represent, is a logical consequence of the weblike structure of Afghan society which until today has been characterized by a high degree of fragmentation and a corresponding heterogeneous nature of control. This fragmentation goes beyond the obvious differences between Afghanistan's many ethnicities (with the confrontation between Pashtun and non-Pashtun as main cleavage), as even within ethnical groups huge variations between communities exist. Solidarity groups (based on either true or constructed kinship) protecting the interests of their members, *qawms*, are the basic units of societal organization which facilitate political participation and distribution of economical goods. In Pashtun society, which is the focus of this case study, *qawms* most commonly correspond to sub-tribal segments within the overarching tribal organization. Although these sub-tribal *qawms* will unite as Pashtun when facing external threats, by default they are competing units and protection against rival solidarity groups is a key function of the *qawm*. Due to the interaction with the state's centre those entities have evolved from more or less egalitarian-led to groups led by tribal notables in a hierarchical role. Especially the *khans*, the most important tribal leaders, have become hereditary feudal-like patrons with extensive client networks thriving on their access to state resources. During the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1980s, however, these economically-based authorities were gradually sidelined by a newly emerging type of *khan*, the so-called tribal entrepreneur. These tribal entrepreneurs were foreign-sponsored local strongmen capable of protecting their solidarity groups by use of force (typically *mujahideen* commanders), but sometimes also possessed the skills to exert true tribal leadership. After the end of the war the new *khans* consolidated their power by assuming the same feudal-like patronage role as the old elite. Whereas this led to the emergence of warlord politics in northern and western Afghanistan, the fragmented tribal structure of the Pashtun did prevent the dominance of a single leader. However, predatory behavior and violent repression of rival *qawms*, which both were less common under the old *khans*, increasingly occurred in this new political constellation and provided one of the key reasons for popular support to the Taliban. The rule of the latter, therefore, interrupted the political system of the new *khans*. Yet, since 2001 political authority in the Pashtun-dominated south and east of the country again has rested with a range of tribal entrepreneurs who have established

themselves as patrons (of a *qawm*) capable of dealing with each other, the central state, and foreign aid.

The first five years of the Afghan campaign unintentionally consolidated and even augmented the role of Pashtun tribal entrepreneurs as they were instrumental in the OEF hunt for the remnants of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan and benefitted from their connections with the Karzai-government in Kabul. The light footprint adopted by US forces urged those forces to rely on local allies as force multipliers, who were essential for providing intelligence as well as additional fighting power in the form of militias. Due to the absence of an effective mechanism for controlling these agents -a direct consequence of the initial US ban on expansion of the ISAF mission- they abused their positions and often reverted to the same predatory behavior and repressive practices they had been demonstrating in the years prior to the Taliban. The 'liberal project' which introduced a wider agenda of building a western-model centralized state by implementation of the Bonn-agreement, *de facto* -contradistinctively- led to an Afghan state ruled by a weak central government backed by foreign support and dependent on collaboration of warlords and former *mujahideen* commanders controlling the country's numerous locales. This dependency not only increased the position of these local power-holders at the grassroots level, it also gave them leverage over the state's institutional apparatus as official positions were used as bargain chips for securing collaboration. Especially Pashtun leaders well-connected to Karzai benefitted from this new political order. In order to repair the flaws of the state-building process the international community stepped up its effort by expanding the ISAF mission to Afghanistan as a whole as well as the adoption of stabilization measures such as PRTs by OEF forces. Moreover, in 2006 the Afghanistan Compact and the consecutive ANDS strategy were drawn up to enhance socio-economic development by strengthening the institutions of the Afghan state with foreign resources. By that time, however, the ramifications of the flaws in the Afghan campaign had created fertile ground for the re-emergence of the Taliban which in the spring of 2006 triggered a surge of violence that predominantly focused on southern Afghanistan. It was in these conditions that NATO forces seeking to strengthen the new Afghan state according to the idea of the 'liberal project' deployed to the greater Kandahar region as part of ISAF's stage III expansion in August 2006. Thus the rise of the new Taliban and the ISAF expansion converged which promptly derailed the overall strategy provided by the ANDS and left individual countries fighting a full-fledged insurgency in order to restore security in their area of responsibility. This was the background of the deployment of Dutch forces for the TFU mission; let us now conclude this chapter with an analysis of the local circumstances in Uruzgan.

Uruzgan's societal landscape largely follows the Pashtun tribal structure as clear distinctions exist between the Zirak Durrani, Panjpai Durrani, and Ghilzai confederations. As typical for Pashtun society, the sub-tribes of these confederations form the most important *qawms*, and therefore sub-tribal affiliations define the structure of Uruzgan's society. Yet, it should be mentioned that even within sub-tribes different solidarity groups might exist as

is the case with the Tokhi community which is the scene of fierce intra-factional feuding. Leadership of the sub-tribes lies with former *mujahideen* commanders, Uruzgan's tribal entrepreneurs, who during the communist regime took over from the old *khans* -with whom they often keep good relations. These commanders vie (including violent contention) or cooperate with each other in shifting alliances in order to secure power and resources on Uruzgan's political marketplace. The most dominant leaders that have emerged from the *mujahideen* era are Popalzai leader Jan Mohammed Khan, Rozi Khan of the Barakzai sub-tribe, and Abdul Khaleq of the Achekzai (all Zirak Durrani), as well as Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan and Hotak elder Mullah Shafiq (both Ghilzai). The rivaling Popalzai and Barakzai sub-tribes are relatively small but well connected into the power networks of the greater Kandahar region and Kabul and therefore constitute the most powerful factions in Uruzgan. The large Achekzai sub-tribe is also well- represented on the political marketplace and traditionally keeps good ties with the Barakzai. The combined Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzai are less influential and typically are considered lower-ranking Pashtun by the province's Zirak Durrani majority. Yet, the Ghilzai, which form the smallest minority, have produced two important provincial leaders. The Panjpai, however, are weakly represented and their influence is limited to the lowest societal levels. Although the Taliban curtailed the influence of the here mentioned local power-holders, they all survived to re-assume their roles as tribal entrepreneurs securing political positions and resources immediately after the fall of the Taliban. Thus, until today the here mentioned *mujahideen* era commanders (and their inheritors) are the main political actors representing the various sub-tribal *qawms* on Uruzgan's political marketplace.

Since the fall of the Taliban Uruzgan's political constellation has been hugely influenced by the presence of US forces as well as the new Afghan government under Popalzai President Hamid Karzai. Although during his expedition in Uruzgan the latter had promised that nobody would be excluded from the province's new political order, it soon became clear that former Taliban supporters like Hotak leader Mullah Shafiq were unwelcome to participate in the political process. Moreover, also some of Karzai's first-hour supporters were denied the ability to consolidate their positions (especially the Tokhi leaders). This was a consequence of the appointment of Karzai-trustee and fellow Popalzai Jan Mohammed Khan as provincial governor in early 2002. Jan Mohammed immediately started to play divide and rule for neutralizing the Barakzai and Achekzai power block and set out a ruthless policy for marginalizing the Ghilzai and Panjpai Durrani through repressive measures. The new governor enforced his rule through his own militia, US Special Forces who were deliberately led to believe that his rivals were Taliban, and his ties with Hamid Karzai. Furthermore, Jan Mohammed cleverly wove a web of Popalzai associates and 'long time friends' for consolidating his power, albeit he never succeeded in obtaining legitimacy beyond this patronage network. The only rival strong enough to defy Jan Mohammed's policy was provincial chief of police and Barakzai leader Rozi Khan, who was later joined by his Achekzai ally Abdul Khaleq. The US PRT (active since summer 2004) welcomed this counter-balance

against Jan Mohammed and supported attempts to include the marginalized sub-tribes in the new provincial government. Yet, this came too late as the Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzai sub-tribes already had become fertile soil for the re-emerging Taliban, who by 2006 had developed an extensive network in Uruzgan capable of maintaining ties with the local population through either persuasion or coercion.

Thus, Dutch forces found themselves deploying to an Afghan locale as foreign interveners supporting the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai whose governor was responsible for marginalizing his rivals and repressing large parts of the local population. To make things worse, US forces had actively supported and even participated in this alienating policy which fuelled suspicion against foreign forces. Moreover, as a consequence of Jan Mohammed Khan's rule the re-emerging Taliban had firmly established themselves in the province. The local population now found itself caught between local power-holders, the government, the Taliban, and foreign forces; how could the Dutch TFU in the first place obtain control over the local population in such circumstances -not to speak of consolidating and transferring this control to the Afghan government?

Chapter 9

Chapter 9: Task Force Uruzgan 2006-2007: establishing a foothold

9.1 Introduction

The arrival of a Dutch quartermaster detachment, the Deployment Task Force (DTF), in Uruzgan in March 2006 coincided with the replacement of Jan Mohammed Khan by Governor Abdul Hakim Munib, a well-educated Ghilzai Pashtun from Paktya who kept close ties with Karzai and held a background as undersecretary for tribal and border affairs in the Taliban government.¹ This move was a consequence of an early November 2005 meeting between Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot and Hamid Karzai in Vienna's Hotel Imperial in which the former stated that the Netherlands' government considered the removal of Jan Mohammed a *sine qua non* for the commitment of its troops.² With US ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann supporting the Dutch demand, Karzai eventually complied reluctantly, and on 27 February he recalled his *protégé* to Kabul where Jan Mohammed was appointed as the president's chief advisor for tribal affairs.³ While this high level diplomacy cleared the way for the deployment of the Dutch task force, the soldiers of the DTF were preparing to construct what would become TFU's two main operating bases near Uruzgan's most important population centres of Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud.⁴ Seemingly the Dutch were well-informed on local circumstances even before the start of the TFU campaign; the culprit of the instable situation in the province was removed and replaced by a new governor who could operate relatively independent of local influences (and whose tribal and political background would allow him to reach out to alienated segments of the population), and Dutch forces themselves would focus on the districts accommodating the larger part of the local population allowing them to influence the people.

These measures also perfectly fitted the stance taken by Dutch politicians and media that the Dutch mission was primarily a reconstruction mission that would enhance the local population's living conditions by strengthening the Afghan government as described in the roadmap of the ANDS.⁵ This position was an outcome of the political debate prior to the 3

1 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 213, The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 29, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 153-154, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 187-188, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 199, Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 242, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 721.

2 Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2011), 203-205, the approximate date of the Vienna meeting was found by use of Theo Koelé, 'De lange weg naar de missie', *Volkskrant* 29 December 2005, accessible via <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/684673/2005/12/29/De-lange-weg-naar-de-missie.dhtml>.

3 Neumann's position becomes clear from a report written to him by Dan Green, at that time the US Political Advisor (POLAD) in Uruzgan. The full report is attached to Green's book on his experiences, see Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 221-226.

4 On the DTF mission see presentation commander DTF colonel Henk Morsink, 'ISAF III Deployment Task Force', 6 february 2006, available at <http://www.defensie.nl/documenten/publicaties/2006/02/07/presentatie-dtf-o>, Erwin Vonk, 'Deployment Task Force, Eerste ervaringen in Zuid-Afghanistan', *Armex* 90:3 (2006), 9-11.

5 Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'Deadly embrace? The Decision Paths to Uruzgan and Helmand', 146-148. Leendert Johan Hazelbag, 'Politieke besluitvorming van de missie in Uruzgan: een reconstructie', 34, 40, George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, 'The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009', 432, 435.

February decision to definitively commit Dutch troops for two years, in which the discussion had evolved around the dichotomy of a ‘benevolent’ reconstruction mission *versus* a ‘malign’ fighting mission. Moreover, framing the TFU mission this way also concurred with the self-created myth of the so-called ‘Dutch approach’, a subtle, non-violent way of conducting operations by focusing on the local population and the government rather than on fighting the insurgent opponent, that was practiced before in Iraq’s Al Muthanna province (2003-2005) and during a PRT mission in Baghlan in northern Afghanistan (2004-2006).⁶ In the public debate this approach was unanimously considered to be highly contrastive to -and better than- the more violent methods employed by US forces as part of their OEF mission. It should also be noted that with regard to the TFU mission senior policy makers within the Ministry of Defence initially avoided the term counterinsurgency as it was perceived to invoke an image of a predominantly violent approach associated with for instance the Indonesian war of decolonization and the US experience in Vietnam.⁷ The outcome of the political debate, thus, was clear; the Dutch would deploy on a population-centric mission ‘that would aim at fostering stability and security through augmenting the local population’s support for the Afghan authorities, while diminishing support for the Taliban and related groups’ with CIMIC (Civil-Military Cooperation), reconstruction activities as well as promotion of such activities by others as pivotal elements.⁸ Combat troops of the Battle Group (BG) would provide security assistance -if necessary also with offensive actions- to allow the PRT and Afghan authorities to implement this approach, which was considered more subtle than the methods of their US predecessors. But how would this turn out in the reality of soldiering at the grassroots levels in Uruzgan where the Dutch immediately were confronted with the challenges of waging a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign -despite the high-level aversion of the term- amidst a highly fragmented society?

In this chapter we will analyze the first two years of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan including pre-deployment operations that created the conditions for the commencement of the TFU campaign on 1 August 2006. Of course the specific topic of this book demands us to

6 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, ‘The Use and Abuse of the ‘Dutch Approach’ to Counterinsurgency’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36:6 (2013), 868-869, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 198-199, detailed information on the mission of the Baghlan PRT was obtained through Rob Sinterniklaas, 1 (NL) PRTPEK, Presentation given as member of Netherlands Provincial Reconstruction Team Pol-E Kholmri to the Netherlands AH-64 Apache Detachment Kabul. January, 2005.

7 This became evident during the conference *Counter-Insurgency, Historical Roots and Relevance* organized by the Netherlands Institute of Military History and the Royal Society of War Studies in The Hague on November 14 and 15 2007. On the second day a vivid debate evolved between Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, a military historian, and the late Professor Jan Geert Siccama, a senior policy advisor at the Ministry of Defence. When Brocades Zaalberg argued that the TFU mission effectively was a counterinsurgency mission as it bore many resemblances to counterinsurgency, Siccama fiercely denounced the use of the term as he associated it with violent repression of uprisings. In an earlier article and policy paper Brocades Zaalberg had already convincingly expanded his argument, see Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, ‘‘Hearts and Minds’ of ‘Search and Destroy’? Leren van klassieke counter-insurgency’ and T.W. Brocades Zaalberg, P.M.H. Groen, J.A. de Moor, A. Ten Cate, ‘Historische Analyse Counter-Insurgency’ (Policy paper, Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, 2006). Siccama later explained his point as he argued that counterinsurgency has a negative connotation because of its connection to ruthless state reactions to insurgencies of the (post-)colonial past, whereas the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan were of an emancipatory nature as they for example aimed at ‘promoting citizen’s and women’s rights’. See Jan Geert Siccama, ‘New and Innovative Counterinsurgency-Related Books’, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: Irregular Warfare from 1800 to the Present*, ed. Brocades Zaalberg, T., Hoffenaar, J., Lemmers, A. (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of Military History, 2011), 265-266.

8 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 193.

focus on the way Dutch forces sought to establish control over the population by exploiting the gap left by Jan Mohammed's removal with use of Uruzgan's other major political actors enjoying legitimacy from their respective societal segments. Doing so, however, also requires us to obtain a profound insight in how the TFU's understanding of the local societal situation evolved and how TFU structure and mission developed during the first two years of the campaign. As was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the 2007 *battle* of Chora turned out to be the hinge point after which the campaign gained momentum as an enhanced neo-classical counterinsurgency campaign. The term *battle*, indeed, explicitly implies that Dutch forces were engaged in fierce fighting. Despite the political label of reconstruction mission soldiers had been actively involved in fighting the Taliban since Dutch Special Forces operating along the DTF had met the first resistance in April 2006.⁹ Thus, fighting was an essential and integrated part of the TFU mission from its beginning. Similarly, the aversion to the word counterinsurgency at the highest policy levels did not echo in the field. Military officers at the lowest executive levels recognized that the TFU mission effectively was a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign, which resulted in the bottom-up introduction of counterinsurgency concepts into the overall campaign.¹⁰ It was only after the battle of Chora that these ideas, which reflected the reality on the ground in Uruzgan, gradually were accepted by policy makers and politicians in The Hague and officially implemented in the TFU campaign plan. That leaves us here with the first two years of the campaign; how did the TFU establish a foothold in Uruzgan, and could the Dutch soldiers operating from their Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud bases for this purpose indeed exploit the removal of Jan Mohammed as well as the knowledge that had informed this move? To answer these questions we will first discuss the experiences during the pre-deployment period (March 2006-August 2006) and the first TFU rotation, TFU-1 (August 2006-January 2007). Next we will look into the battle of Chora, its prelude and aftermath, which corresponds with the TFU-2 (January 2007-August 2007) and TFU-3 (August 2007-January 2008) rotations. We will conclude this chapter with a discussion of our findings including the extent of the level of control obtained as a consequence of the first two years of TFU operations.

9.2 First contact

The start of operations on the first of August 2006 marked the beginning of what would eventually become a four-year campaign (initial commitment was until 2008) in which a

9 Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 244-245. See also Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 109-110, Christ Klep, *Uruzgan*, 42-46.

10 See for instance Hans van Griensven, 'It's All about the Afghan people, Eén jaar 1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force Uruzgan', *Atlantisch Perspectief* 31:6 (2007), 10, Piet van der Sar, 'Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om', *Carré* 30:1 (2007), 15-17, Ralph Coenen, 'Counterinsurgency Operaties, geen succesvol optreden zonder gedegen kennis', *Carré* 30:1 (2007), 18, Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, 'Hearts and Minds' of 'Search and Destroy'? Leren van klassieke counter-insurgency', 299-301, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 178, 181.

whole range of Dutch military units accompanied by civilian experts would be deployed to southern Afghanistan. The various rotations of the 600-strong BG and 60-person PRT formed the nucleus of the mission, but it also consisted of an extensive Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) unit, a Psychological Operations Support Element (PSE), Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs), an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team, Special Forces (SF), air assets, artillery, engineers, military police, medical and logistical support, *et cetera*.¹¹ Overall troop levels at any time varied between 1,400 and 2,000 soldiers at peak moments when different units were going through their HOTOs. Albeit all these assets might have had a unique contribution in exerting influence over the local population, our analysis will focus on the overarching construct that determined the strategy and controlled the actions of this kaleidoscope of continuously rotating units, the TFU, and more specifically its staff. Therefore this narrative follows the subsequent rotations of TFU commanders and their staff, yet if necessary we will also delve into the role of individual units. We will see that especially the pioneering phase of the first year requires us to do so as the TFU staff and its subordinate units were struggling with the adaptation to their mission in Uruzgan's complicated environment.

Alongside the Dutch units an augmented Australian reconstruction and mentoring battalion operated as part of the TFU, and several other countries such as France, Slovakia and Singapore contributed small contingents to the mission.¹² The United States, who previously were lead nation in Uruzgan province also retained their presence in the province with a detachment of Special Forces operating independent from the Dutch task force. This brings us to the HOTO between US and Dutch forces that effectively started during the pre-deployment period when several Dutch officers were attached to the US PRT staff in order to increase the situational awareness of the TFU, while the troops of the DTF and Special Forces started cooperating with US forces.¹³ Moreover, albeit the Dutch effort at that time emphasized construction of bases and logistical facilities, it also focused on understanding and shaping the operational environment in order to enhance security and create more permissive conditions for the TFU to fulfill its mission. Therefore we will start our analysis of the first TFU experiences with a discussion of the pre-deployment phase of the campaign from March to August 2006.

11 Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 161, 172-173.

12 Australia initially focused on reconstruction, while in 2008 mentoring was added as the second main task of its detachment, additionally Australian Special Forces also were active in the province. On the first role see Mick Ryan, 'The Military and Reconstruction Operations', *Parameters* 37:4 (Winter 2007-08), 58-70, on Australia's contribution in general see Nicole Brangwin, Ann Rann, 'Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan since 2001: a chronology', *Background Note, 2010-11*, (Canberra: Parliamentary Library, 2010).

13 See among others, interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, personal correspondence with major Mirjam Grandia Mantas, CIMIC liaison with US PRT, 12 May 2014, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D approach and counterinsurgency, a mix of defence, diplomacy, and development, The case of Uruzgan', 16, Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 233.

9.2.1 Initial moves: understanding & shaping

As the main body of the DTF started the construction of base facilities in Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud, the high level diplomacy that had successfully secured Jan Mohamed's removal continued. The next step concerned the replacement of provincial chief of police Rozi Khan, whose association with the predatory government of Jan Mohammed was considered an obstacle in the outreach to alienated segments of Uruzgan's population.¹⁴ At the end of May General Qasim, a 'professional outsider' was installed as police commander, overseeing a poorly equipped and undermanned force of some 350 Afghan National Police (ANP) officers.¹⁵ With the discharge of Rozi Khan the bulk of Uruzgan's police force, consisting of men personally affiliated to the Barzakzai strongman, had melted away. This concurred with official Dutch policy that regarded collaboration with militias off-limits as it strived to purge Afghan security forces from local influences.¹⁶ Albeit this position can be perfectly understood from the perspective of long-term state building, which requires independent institutions free of local influences, its short-term ramifications in Uruzgan were devastating for the fragile counterbalance against Jan Mohammed Khan's network; the sacking of Rozi Khan left Matiullah Khan's AHP -which was not touched by Dutch diplomacy- as the only capable force in the province and thereby seriously weakened the position of the Barakzai and Achekzai power block.¹⁷ Furthermore it also undermined the position of Governor Munib who initially was supported by Rozi Khan, but now faced serious troubles as his former chief of police and several of his relatives were either actively or passively involved in anti-government and anti-coalition actions (Taliban gangs, for instance, suddenly enjoyed freedom of movement within their areas of influence). This led to a rise of Taliban activities in the Barakzai- and Achekzai-dominated areas and a subsequent worsening of the provincial security situation in spring 2006.¹⁸ Whereas Dutch high level diplomacy aimed to shape the operational environment in order to create more permissive conditions for the TFU to reach its aim of a more stable and secure Uruzgan through augmenting the local population's support for the government, its initial achievements were highly dubious and only worsened local security.

The root cause for this failure was a lack of fine-grained intelligence on local circumstances in Uruzgan. Although the Dutch decisions to lobby for the replacement of Jan Mohammed and to focus TFU operations on Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud district were based on correct

14 See, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 213 & 218.

15 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 42-44, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 154.

16 See, for instance, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no.221, personal correspondence with lieutenant-colonel Andy van Dijk, military assistant commander TFU-2, 16 October 2013.

17 Although there is no source available that can clarify why Matiullah's AHP was not affected by Dutch diplomatic measures, a possible explanation might be that this unit resorted under a regional AHP headquarters in Ghazni, and thus, unlike Uruzgan's ANP, did not report to the local government which was the focal point of Dutch attention. It also has to be mentioned that under pressure from Karzai Matiullah Khan publicly announced his support for Governor Munib. See The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 44, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 157.

18 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 154-157.

assumptions and suggested an extensive knowledge, the initially available information was rather superficial and certainly not as detailed as required for a population-centric campaign seeking to re-establish governmental control over a highly fragmented local society. For instance, the fact that Rozi Khan's relationship with Jan Mohammed was of an involuntary nature and part of a precarious tribal balance went unnoticed. Similarly, the removal of Jan Mohammed was not directly accompanied by empowerment of his successor or measures to curtail the former's network, allowing him to remain a dominant actor in Uruzgan. Actually many 'residents were counting the days when Jan Mohammed Khan would return'.¹⁹ This hiatus in knowledge, however, was acknowledged by the Dutch government as early as 22 November 2005, when the letter informing parliament on the details of the intended mission to Uruzgan stated that once a decision would be made, work on a so-called civil assessment containing an analysis of local power relations would commence as soon as possible.²⁰

As soon as possible turned out to be May 2006 when an Afghan NGO, The Liaison Office (TLO), hired by the Royal Netherlands embassy in Kabul started to conduct ethnographic field research in Uruzgan province.²¹ This study lasted until June and TLO's detailed report 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province' was presented to the embassy in July where its findings were used to formulate the civil assessment's context analysis.²² The civil assessment as such also was to act as guidance for the strategic engagement of communities through development aid. For this purpose a team of Dutch military CIMIC officers, among whom captain Mirjam Grandia-Mantas, was embedded with the US PRT, while designated TFU civilian advisor for development aid (a civil servant of the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation) Marten de Boer was dispatched to the embassy in Kabul to assist with the preparation of the rapport.²³ The civil assessment was completed in August, which was too late for the first TFU rotation to incorporate its findings in the pre-deployment training and planning. Thus, while the civil assessment and especially the TLO analysis meant a huge leap forward in the overall Dutch knowledge of Uruzgan, the soldiers of TFU-1 (and also the DTF) did not fully benefit from it. But how then did the first task force obtain an advanced understanding of the local circumstances that could be used upon its deployment?

As early as fall 2005 conferences on a possible mission to Uruzgan had been organized at the brigade (13th mechanized brigade, October 2005) and army level (December 2005) and by January 2006 individual units had started to produce reports based on openly available

19 Ibid., 155.

20 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 193.

21 See among others, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 221, The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 3, Antoinette de Jong, 'Het Schijngerecht met de Taliban', *NRC Handelsblad*, (Maandblad M, 7 April 2007), 52, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 721.

22 See Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, 'Civil Assessment' (Kabul, 2006), and Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, 'Context Analysis Uruzgan Province' (Kabul, 2006).

23 Personal correspondence with major Mirjam Grandia Mantas, CIMIC liaison with US PRT, 12 May 2014, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D approach and counterinsurgency, a mix of defence, diplomacy, and development, The case of Uruzgan', 16, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, Marten de Boer, 'New perspectives for conflict transformation, development and diplomacy: implementing a cautious and fully balanced approach against the odds in Uruzgan', *A Rich Menu for the Poor*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008), 229.

sources.²⁴ One such document, an unclassified reader compiled by the CIMIC staff section of 13th mechanized brigade (which originally was tasked for the first task force, but eventually would provide the staff of TFU-2 as well as the second rotations of both BG and PRT), demonstrates that despite the rudimentary character of the available information ('internet/books'), Dutch soldiers tried to compose a comprehensive picture of their future operational environment.²⁵ In addition to basic facts the report discussed the state of the local government, the humanitarian situation, tribal diversity, US presence, and even included available assessments of individual villages. Additional information was also acquired by reconnaissance parties involving the commanders of future TFU units, which had taken place as of November 2005.²⁶ Furthermore, intelligence on the local security situation was provided by a Dutch Special Forces contingent operating from Kandahar as part of OEF. The green berets escorted early Dutch fact finding missions to southern Afghanistan in May, June and September 2005, and since October 2005 they had launched several probing missions into Uruzgan which all reported on the growing Taliban opposition, triggering an advise to adopt counterinsurgency as the main theme of the TFU's campaign plan.²⁷ As of April 2006 Dutch Special Forces were withdrawn from OEF and regrouped in what was named the Viper-detachment, a Special Forces unit that would support the DTF and later the TFU.²⁸ During the pre-deployment period the Vipers stepped up their reconnaissance effort in Uruzgan and were repeatedly drawn into heavy fighting, which we will discuss further below. While the operations of those Special Forces produced great classical military intelligence on terrain and what were dubbed Opposing Militant Forces (OMF), fine-grained information on the local population and power dynamics needed to paint a more comprehensive picture was only sparsely available to the various military units preparing for their TFU deployments.

Illustrative in this regard is that military officers who would deploy to Uruzgan were initially not invited to attend a roundtable with Governor Munib and twelve of the province's tribal leaders and elected officials in Kabul on 8 May 2006.²⁹ This three-hour meeting which

24 For the conferences see Gerard Koot, 'Tankers in een wederopbouwrol: Provinciale reconstructie in Uruzgan', *VOC* 68:3 (2007), 17.

25 See Section S9 13 (NLD) Mechanised Brigade, 'Appendix 5, Area Study Uruzgan, Annex U to OPOD C-13 Mechbrig, 18-01-2006', (Unclassified Report, Oirschot, 2006). The Taliban is not mentioned in this report, probably this was deemed a task for the intelligence section (S2).

26 Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, interview with colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

27 Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 230-233, 242-248.

28 See also George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman, Martijn van der Vorm, 'Operationele ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse *Special Operations Forces*, 2005-2010', *Militaire Spectator* 181:3 (2012), 116-122, Marco Kroon, 'DTF-acties Nederlandse Special Forces in de Chora-vallei', *Carré* 30:3 (2007), 30 (this article was published anonymously, but after Kroon received the highest Dutch gallantry decoration, the *Militaire Willemsorde*, it became clear that he was the author of the article), Michiel De Weger, 'Vipers or Tigers? Early Dutch Special Forces operations in Uruzgan', *Mission Uruzgan, Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, ed. Beeres, R., Van der Meulen, J., Soeters, J., Vogelaar, A. (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2012), 134. On the Dutch Special Forces' OEF contribution see also Ministerie van Defensie, *Evaluatie Nederlandse Special Forces Taakgroep in Operatie Enduring Freedom, April 2005-April 2006* (Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, 2006).

29 See, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009. Tweede Kamer, *Dossier* 27 925, nr. 214, 221, and Marten de Boer, 'New perspectives for conflict transformation, development and diplomacy: implementing a cautious and fully balanced approach against the odds in Uruzgan', 229. De Boer mentions that both Minister of Foreign

was hosted by the Dutch embassy was attended by high level officials such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Bot and Deputy Chief of Defence Staff lieutenant-general Hans Sonneveld, but colonel (later major-general) Theo Vleugels, who was assigned the command of TFU-1, and members of his staff were only invited after Vleugels asked for a chair. As no follow-up session was planned the future TFU commander considered the roundtable an isolated event and during the work-up towards the start of the mission no further contacts with local actors were established.

To fulfill the need for a better understanding of Uruzgan's operational environment both TFU core elements, BG-1 and PRT-1 in June pushed forward their intelligence officers (S-2), captains Ralph Coenen and Jan-Willem Feith, to Tirin Kot where they liaised with US intelligence officers and especially the intelligence section of the US PRT.³⁰ Yet, it was considered too late to use the information gathered by both officers in the pre-deployment program, and the newly acquired knowledge was mainly intended to give the units an underpinning for their operations after the HOTO on August 1.³¹ They obtained knowledge on tribal affairs, the local government, US operations, NGOs, *et cetera* which was regularly reported to the Dutch Military Intelligence and Security Service (Militaire Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, MIVD). Albeit there is no direct evidence, it is highly likely that an unclassified MIVD report on tribal relations in Uruzgan that was disseminated through military channels in July was informed by the work of both S-2 officers, as it contained well-informed information on local power relationships with details such as percentages indicating tribal distribution slightly deviating from the TLO report that was drafted for the civil assessment.³² Furthermore, the report also discussed the sacking of chief of police Rozi Khan in relation to the Barakzai and Achekzai power block. A commonly named source for this information by all involved Dutch officers (next to both intelligence officers, also their commanders and the members of the CIMIC team embedded within the US PRT) is the US PRT's political advisor (POLAD), Dan Green, who was nicknamed 'Afghan Dan'.³³ Indeed Green possessed this kind of knowledge as during his previous tour as a POLAD in 2005 he had been one of the advocates of the empowerment of the Barakzai and Achekzai as a counterbalance against Jan Mohammed's dominance (see 8.3.2). Moreover, Green was also the writer of

Affairs Bot and his Defence colleague Henk Kamp were attending the meeting. This is erroneous as the official parliamentary sources do not report the presence of Kamp, but mention Sonneveld as highest defence representative. Similarly a 2012 report by the Dutch national ombudsman regarding a complaint about the Dutch embassy in Kabul only mentions Minister Bot, see Nationale Ombudsman, *Rapport 2012/098, Rapport over een klacht over Nederlandse ambassade Kabul (Afghanistan)* (Den Haag: De Nationale Ombudsman, 2012), 5.

30 See interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, personal correspondence with major Mirjam Grandia Mantas, CIMIC liaison with US PRT, 12 May 2014.

31 Interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009.

32 MIVD, 'SupIntrep Afghanistan, Stamverhoudingen in Uruzgan' (Unclassified Report, The Hague, 2006).

33 See interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, personal correspondence with major Mirjam Grandia Mantas, CIMIC liaison with US PRT, 12 May 2014.

a report (2005) that had informed US ambassador Neumann's position in a meeting with Hamid Karzai regarding the removal of Jan Mohammed.³⁴ In this report Green had stated that any effort to get rid of Jan Mohammed 'must take into account the entrenched nature of his influence' and therefore he urged to remove AHP chief Matiullah as well. According to Green's views Rozi Khan was also to be sacked, as he was incompetent for the job of provincial chief of police. Contrary to what had happened in spring 2006, however, Green's plan called to respect Rozi Khan's position as one of the leaders of the Barakzai/Achekzai power block, and therefore he had to be appeased by a position as deputy governor, while one of Rozi's closest associates, a very competent Achekzai ANP officer, would be named chief of police. For the Dutch staff officers in Tirin Kot Green's detailed knowledge was a valuable source of information that was used to obtain a better understanding of local affairs in the pre-deployment phase as well as during the HOTO period between TFU-1 and the US PRT.³⁵ It has to be mentioned, however, that Green later admitted that he gave the Dutch 'a good portion' of his files, but kept the most for his successor, Linda Specht, who would stay with the remaining US forces in Uruzgan.³⁶ This confession indicates that the comprehensive intelligence picture obtained by TFU units during the pre-deployment period was far from complete.

A commonly reported obstacle by Dutch officers during the pre-deployment and HOTO period was the cumbersome cooperation with the US PRT, which formally was in lead of the US effort in Uruzgan.³⁷ Even Dan Green, who was added to the PRT in June 2006 to smoothen the transfer of authority to the Dutch, denounced the policy followed by the US PRT commander as well as his negative attitude towards the new-coming allies.³⁸ Whereas the previous PRT, in which Green also served as a POLAD, had empowered the Barakzai/Achekzai power block as a counterbalance against Jan Mohammed, the subsequent PRT, which took over around February 2006, again focused on control through collaboration with members of Jan Mohammed's Popalzai-dominated network. This was totally opposed to higher US policy, as ambassador Neumann supported the removal of this predatory local power-holder. The choice for Jan Mohammed's side, however, concurred with the view of locally operating US Special Forces who heavily leaned on the support of Matiullah and his AHP. As part of the PRT's policy the latter's force was to be integrated within the ANP, which would further strengthen Matiullah's position.³⁹ The PRT commander, naval aviator

34 The full report is attached to Green's book on his experiences; see Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 221-226.

35 An example of the detailed information given by Dan Green on matters such as the tribal composition of villages, key leaders, etc. can be found in an unclassified report in which Green provided answers to questions from Dutch officials. See Anonymous, 'Questions for Department of State Representative' (Tirin Kot, 4 August 2006).

36 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 181.

37 See, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, 28 September 2009, personal correspondence with major Mirjam Grandia Mantas, CIMIC liaison with US PRT, 12 May 2014.

38 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 148-149.

39 Richard Reiter, presentation concerning the HOTO between US and Dutch forces given by Richard 'Ruff' Reiter, *Tarin Kowt Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan*, Tirin Kot, June 2006.

and former top gun instructor commander Steve Hartung, lacked any understanding of either local power dynamics or the way to influence them and has been depicted by Green as ‘acting more like a war tourist than a confident commander’.⁴⁰ Yet, Hartung was full of self-confidence about his own appreciation of the situation, allowing no interference with his policy or engagement of local actors by outsiders. This especially applied to his Dutch successors, whom he considered to be ‘unprepared, arrogant, and so forth, and he seemed to go out of his way to antagonize them’.⁴¹ Hartung’s attitude permeated the US PRT, resulting in a narrow-minded operational mindset and bad relationships with its successors. Both Dutch PRT intelligence officer captain Jan-Willem Feith and CIMIC officer captain Mirjam Grandia-Mantas have described the US PRT as an extension of the local US Special Forces; its staff did not emphasize the advance of governance or the understanding of culture and tribal relationships, but focused on joining the Special Forces in the fight against the Taliban, which among others materialized in the PRT conducting airmobile actions by night.⁴² Except for the knowledge of Dan Green, therefore, there was not much to be learned or taken over from this US PRT.

Despite the US PRT’s lack of contribution to the subsequent TFU mission, its policy heavily influenced shaping operations in preparation of the deployment of the main Dutch task force. If the US PRT had followed the line of its predecessors, the effect of the removal of Jan Mohammed could have been augmented by further measures curtailing the influence of his associates at the grassroots level. Instead its anti-Taliban focus and especially its consensus with US Special Forces left Jan Mohammed’s replacement much unexploited. Moreover, as Matiullah’s AHP was considered a pivotal anti-Taliban asset, Jan Mohammed remained highly influential in Uruzgan’s political marketplace. Thus shaping operations were characterized by a lack of political engagement, and of an almost exclusively kinetic nature as they took the form of a series of clearing operations that had started during spring and culminated in the ISAF Regional Command South (RC-S)-led summer offensive ‘Mountain Thrust’.⁴³ It has to be remarked that while those operations rightly aimed to augment security by diminishing Taliban influence and presence in selected target areas, they -contrary to counterinsurgency wisdom- did not intend to hold such cleared areas as there were insufficient troops to do so. US Special Forces fulfilled a predominant role in clearing Uruzgan, for which purpose they received assistance from the US Tenth Mountain Division, Matiullah’s AHP, ANP -at least what was left of it after the sacking of Rozi Khan-, ANA, and their fellow Australian and Dutch Special Forces detachments. As promised afore, we will now briefly discuss the actions of the latter detachment in order to provide an insight in these shaping operations.

40 Dan Green, *The Valley’s Edge*, 149. Green uses the alias Joe Gates for the PRT commander, his real name was drawn from an unclassified presentation given by Green’s fellow POLAD Reiter, see Richard ‘Ruff’ Reiter, *Tarin Kowt Provincial Reconstruction Team Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan*.

41 Dan Green, *The Valley’s Edge*, 149.

42 See interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, personal correspondence with major Mirjam Grandia Mantas, CIMIC liaison with US PRT, 12 May 2014.

43 See, among others, Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 240, 245; Dan Green, *The Valley’s Edge*, 158, 160.

Since the Viper detachment had joined the DTF in April 2006 in order to pave the way for the start of the TFU campaign, it had been conducting reconnaissance patrols to gather intelligence. Due to a lack of jamming capacity against radio-controlled IEDs, the Dutch operators (as soldiers of Special Forces are referred to) were dependent on their Australian and US counterparts for their operations, and therefore the Viper detachment always operated in conjunction with one of those allies.⁴⁴ Furthermore the Dutch Special Forces had encamped next to their US comrades, with whom they got along pretty well.⁴⁵ The missions these combined Special Forces undertook often evolved into heavy fighting as they started to encounter the tactically trained and well-equipped fighters of the Neo-Taliban. The Viper detachment reported its first enemy contact at the end of April and during the next weeks it became clear that the OMF were well-established in the Deh Rafshan area and the adjacent Baluchi valley in northern Tirin Kot district. The situation was severe enough for the commander of the Viper detachment to report that ‘it has become clear that our squads are engaged in a war’.⁴⁶ In June a major Taliban offensive aimed at the Chora district centre was repelled by the Special Forces, whom by now had gathered precise information on the opponents strength and locations. Consequently in July the combined Special Forces, led by the Australians, launched a huge clearing effort, operation Perth, that aimed to reduce the security threat to Tirin Kot (and indirectly also to Deh Rawud) by sweeping the Baluchi valley and its adjacent areas of Deh Rafshan and Chora district.⁴⁷ Viper operators were tasked to move through the Baluchi valley in order to clear any OMF resistance, which took them nine days of continuous fighting. The operation was considered a huge success as 200 to 300 Taliban fighters were killed with minor coalition casualties and no losses among the Dutch. Moreover, platoon leader Marco Kroon was later awarded the *Militaire Willemsorde* for his actions during the operations. The biggest achievement of the operation, however, was the reduction of the Taliban threat and the immediate enhancement of the overall provincial security situation as the start of TFU operations approached.

Of course the total of these type of shaping operations hugely added to the permissiveness of the operational environment as they thwarted Taliban operations throughout Uruzgan and inflicted heavy casualties on the opponent’s side. Yet, the sustainability of this success was doubtful, the Baluchi valley, for instance, soon again was a hotbed of insurgents. In this regard the commander of the second Viper detachment (August 2006), correctly observed that ‘the enemy is fluid’; more worrying, however, was the conclusion that came along with this observation, ‘for us the Taliban is anyone shooting at us’.⁴⁸ Due to the kinetic focus

44 Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 243-244, George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman, Martijn van der Vorm, ‘Operationele ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse *Special Operations Forces*, 2005-2010’, 116, Marco Kroon, ‘DTF-acties Nederlandse Special Forces in de Chora-vallei’, 30.

45 Dan Green, *The Valley’s Edge*, 182.

46 Commander First Viper detachment quoted in Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 245.

47 George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, ‘The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009’, 438-439, Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 251-254, Marco Kroon, ‘DTF-acties Nederlandse Special Forces in de Chora-vallei’, 30-35.

48 Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 115, see also George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, ‘The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009’, 438.

of the shaping operations there had been little attention for the local population.⁴⁹ As a consequence of operating with the US and Australian Special Forces, the Dutch operators had accepted their view on Uruzgan's demographics and therefore they unwittingly followed the false assumption that the divide between Zirak Durrani and Ghilzai (which included Panjpai Durrani) tribesmen and the rather binary difference between 'good' government and 'bad' Taliban supporters coincided; a vision which at that early moment was shared by most Dutch soldiers, and which was only corrected when TFU operations brought an advanced understanding of local circumstances.⁵⁰ The side effects of the shaping operations, therefore, were less positive than the immediate advancement of security suggested; by operating with their American and Australian colleagues the Dutch Special Forces had openly aligned themselves with Matiullah's AHP which was extensively used by the US Special Forces in particular. Additionally, clearing operations such as Operation Perth had also caused civil casualties and many people felt forced to flee and leave their property.⁵¹ The local population, and especially the alienated Ghilzai tribes living in the Baluchi valley and Deh Rafshan area, consequently, started to associate the Dutch with the Popalzai elite of Jan Mohammed's network and expectations about the TFU were low.⁵² Inadvertently the shaping operations had provided segments of the local population with a reason not to trust the Dutch at best, or to shoot at them at worst. Following the logic that anyone shooting at Dutch soldiers was regarded Taliban, this could possibly lead to a 'catch-22' situation in which those actively unsympathetic to Dutch forces were further alienated from them and driven in the hands of the Taliban.

Thus, on the eve of the TFU campaign Dutch soldiers not only had obtained a less than complete understanding about their future operational environment, the positive effects of Jan Mohammed's removal were also largely spoilt due to the absence of measures against the former governor's Popalzai-dominated network and the fact that Dutch forces now were being associated with this elite. Higher policy made by decision makers in The Hague and actions taken at the grassroots level had drifted apart even before the start of TFU operations. For a large part this discrepancy can be attributed to the lack of a profound

49 Only in Deh Rawud district Dutch operators had joined US Special Forces in civil affairs matters and in July they had even addressed a *shura*, a meeting of important local leaders, where they announced the deployment of the Dutch PRT. Yet, such operations were relatively scarce and subordinate to kinetic actions aimed at capturing or killing Taliban insurgents. See Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 248-250.

50 See interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 186-187. George Dimitriu, Gijs Tuinman, Martijn van der Vorm, 'Operationele ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse Special Operations Forces, 2005-2010', 116-117, MIVD, 'SupIntrep Afghanistan, Stamverhoudingen in Uruzgan'. Albeit the MIVD report is relatively well-informed it also states that 'a considerable part of the Ghilzai have joined the Taliban' and that there were tribal affiliations between Taliban and Ghilzai. The report, however, also nuances this as it explains that the Ghilzai were most affected by Jan Mohammed's predatory behavior. This corresponds with Dan Green's view on this matter. See for instance Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 161-162. Yet, in the fog of war such nuances often became trivialities. Furthermore the general assumption of the Taliban as a Ghilzai-based insurgency itself was totally erroneous as discussed in the previous chapter and argued by, among others, Giustozzi. See Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, 46-52.

51 In the case of Operation Perth ten civilian casualties and 270 displaced persons were reported. See Michiel De Weger, 'Vipers or Tigers? Early Dutch Special Forces operations in Uruzgan', 138, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 186.

52 See interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 186-187.

understanding of local power dynamics combined with locally operating US forces with a different view on local actors (especially with regard to Jan Mohammed and Matiullah), and an own force incapable to operate independently (as a consequence of the lack of jamming capacity). From the traditional military point -it might be remembered that population-centric counterinsurgency demands significant adaptation from this point-, however, the pre-deployment phase can be considered a success as the reconnaissance activities of the Viper detachment and its allies had pin-pointed the main pockets of Taliban resistance and cleared those areas from enemy fighters.

On the short term the advance of provincial security that resulted from these operations was a huge result as this not only allowed the forces of the DTF to build the main operating bases in Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud, but also provided a permissive environment for the deployment of the TFU and the handover of responsibility over the province and its people from the US PRT. Equally important, in the wake of operation Perth Governor Munib, a Ghilzai himself, succeeded to broaden his support as on July 20 he held meetings with Ghilzai elders from the Deh Rafshan, Baluchi, and Mirabad areas discussing the security in their areas and the support needs of the inhabitants.⁵³ This was the provincial government's first reach out to these alienated communities and Munib was determined to continue this course as he had gained confidence during a trip to Kabul earlier that month. Whereas Munib previously was haunted by his background as an outsider, the sacking of Rozi Khan, and, of course, the remaining influence of Jan Mohammed, it seemed that senior government officials in Kabul now had expressed their explicit support for him. In the last days prior to the start of the TFU campaign Munib felt strong enough to fire corrupt government officials associated with Jan Mohammed's Popalzai network, among whom the mayor of Tirin Kot. Additionally, the new governor now publicly announced that he wanted to enroll the support of Tokhi-leader Mohammed Nabi Khan, who had fled to Pakistan as a consequence of Jan Mohammed's rule and now was back in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ While Dutch (and coalition) pre-deployment activities had not provided a sufficient understanding of local power dynamics and rendered Jan Mohammed's removal largely unexploited, Munib's actions in those final days before the start of the TFU campaign did shape the political marketplace by offering opportunities to the Ghilzai and curtailing Popalzai influence. Now it was up to TFU-1 to take advantage of this work and demonstrate to the local population that they truly wanted to augment support for the local government by offering equal chances to all segments of Uruzgan's population.

53 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 155-156.

54 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 28.

9.2.2 TFU-1

The first Task Force not only deployed with a less than complete understanding of Uruzgan's complicated operational environment, it was also confronted with the challenges to lead an effort of unprecedented size in the history of the modern Dutch military, and simultaneously had to adapt to the demands of a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign.⁵⁵ In this section we will explore how TFU-1 fulfilled its pioneering role from August 2006 until January 2007, and how this shaped the Dutch quest for control over the local population. Therefore we will first discuss the evolution of the TFU's initial campaign plan, the so-called 'Master Plan', as well as the role of the subordinate units.⁵⁶ Subsequently we will deal with the way TFU-1 sought to obtain influence in Uruzgan's political marketplace.

As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, politicians and decision makers in The Hague formulated a mission goal including some guidelines prescribing the TFU to foster stability and security in Uruzgan by augmenting the local population's support for the Afghan government through CIMIC and reconstruction activities predominantly, with combat troops providing security assistance to create a permissive environment for such activities.⁵⁷ Albeit this aim and approach were rooted in previous Dutch experiences in the Balkans, Iraq, and northern Afghanistan, and can be directly linked to a 2005 white paper concerning military missions in failing states, they provided hardly any tangible directions for implementation by the first task force.⁵⁸ Consequently, TFU-1 set out to design its own plan within the framework of high level policy (including the ANDS). Despite this process being initiated during the pre-deployment training, the definitive Master Plan, with influx of the civil assessment, was only completed two months in the actual deployment.⁵⁹ This plan was subsequently embraced by the defence staff and became the TFU's official campaign plan. TFU-1 commander colonel Vleugels later commented on this episode that:

55 Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 161.

56 On the Master Plan see, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 167-169, Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 70-73, Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleeuw, Harm van der Have 'Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan, van het schakbord naar een bord spaghetti', *Militaire Spectator* 176:12 (2007), 553-556, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009 Major Randy Derks, 1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force – Uruzgan, Breda, 2 October 2015.

57 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier* 27925, no. 193

58 Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 166-167, Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 70, see also Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Economische Zaken, *Notitie: wederopbouw na gewapend conflict* (Den Haag: Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Economische Zaken, 2005).

59 See, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleeuw, Harm van der Have 'Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan, van het schakbord naar een bord spaghetti', 555, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 167.

‘... [The guidelines] from higher level were very broad. That did not allow me to see what my end state would be. We didn’t have a campaign plan when we started, but we later got one from my higher headquarters that was close to ours, which is not surprising as they told us to do what we told them we would do.’⁶⁰

TFU-1, consequently, started its campaign without a proper campaign plan, which gave subordinate units some latitude to pioneer their own approach. Especially the first BG provided by the 12th airmobile infantry battalion under command of lieutenant-colonel Piet van der Sar succeeded in exploiting this gap as its staff had already devised a plan based on classical counterinsurgency principles.⁶¹ The unit had been actually assigned the Uruzgan BG mission as early as November 2005, while the staff of TFU-1 was appointed late December 2005 and only started to work together effectively during the integration (final) exercise in March and April 2006.⁶² The 12th battalion’s advantage was that it had been training for, among others, stabilization tasks as part of the high readiness NATO Response Force (NRF), and consequently its staff and soldiers had obtained proficiency with the tasks they were up to in Uruzgan. Contrastingly, lieutenant-colonel Nico Tak’s 42nd tank battalion which had been assigned the PRT role at an equally early moment had to adapt from large-scale manoeuvre warfare to the predominantly non-kinetic PRT mission.⁶³ Consequently, the first BG held an edge over the PRT, which would heavily influence their cooperation as we will discuss below.⁶⁴ Moreover, the 12th battalion also enjoyed a lead over the TFU staff, and the knowledge and ideas of the BG could easily find their way to the emerging campaign plan.⁶⁵

Thus, under influence of the BG’s staff a first concept of operations evolved envisioning the deployment of TFU forces to two so-called Afghan Development Zones (ADZs) surrounding Tirin Kot (primary ADZ) and Deh Rawud (secondary ADZ). These ADZs were designated areas in which improvement in security and governance was to enhance the ties between the Afghan government and the local population, allowing the former to gain control by convincing the people of the government’s legitimacy.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the ADZs were to act as a bridgehead for controlling the whole of Uruzgan province; a phased approach would first enable establishment and consolidation of the ADZs through the disruption of OMF

60 Russell W. Glenn, S. Jamie Gayton, *Intelligence Operations and Metrics in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008), 9.

61 Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, Piet van der Sar, ‘Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om’, 12-17, Ralph Coenen, ‘Counterinsurgency Operaties, geen succesvol optreden zonder gedegen kennis’, 18-20.

62 Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009.

63 Interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009.

64 See also interview with lieutenant-colonel Joost Doense, G-3 TFU-1, Breda, 25 April 2007.

65 Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009.

66 See, among others, Sebastiaan Rietjens, ‘Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan’, 71-72, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, ‘Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands’ Task Force Uruzgan’, 167-169, Piet van der Sar, ‘Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om’, 12.

activities and the provision of security creating the conditions for sustained development as well as an opportunity for expanding beyond the original ADZs. This approach clearly echoes the *tache d'huile* or ink spot concept, a heritage of both colonial warfare as well as the classical counterinsurgency era. Despite The Hague's aversion to the term counterinsurgency, ideas stemming from its history thus percolated to the actual TFU strategy. Remarkably, the 12th battalion forms the nucleus of the Van Heutsz regiment -indeed named after the one time colonial officer and governor of Aceh who together with Snouck Hurgronje pioneered the Aceh strategy. Albeit this traditional link with the Dutch colonial army and the strategy for winning the Aceh War sometimes has been suggested as the inspiration for the BG's embracement of counterinsurgency, involved officers commonly credit the 12th battalion's intelligence officer, captain Ralph Coenen, with the introduction of counterinsurgency concepts in both the staff of BG-1 and TFU-1.⁶⁷

The ultimate TFU-1 campaign plan, the Master Plan, provided a detailed guideline for pursuing security and stability in Uruzgan province. In order to enhance the position of the provincial government TFU would expand its footprint from the original ADZs to the rest of the province's population centres within four rotations (two years). This was to be achieved through four lines of operation respectively aimed at governance and justice, security and stability, development, and the TFU's own credibility.⁶⁸ While the latter intended to secure the TFU's freedom of action and movement, the other three lines of operation all sought to bolster the local government's capacities, influence, and authority. This included mentoring and assisting the locally operating Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF, all forces part of Afghanistan's security apparatus, i.e. army, police, etc.), which were expected to guarantee the security and stability in the long run. Furthermore 23 effects were discerned which had to be obtained to create a secure and stable province under the helm of the Afghan government.⁶⁹

67 Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. Ralph Coenen started reading counterinsurgency literature when the 12th battalion was preparing for its NRF task. As his knowledge grew, it increasingly fed into the battalion's staff, where it was enthusiastically embraced by commander lieutenant-colonel Piet van der Sar. At the time of the assignment as BG-1 a profound knowledge of counterinsurgency thus led to the use of counterinsurgency concepts that were also accepted by the TFU-1 staff. Throughout the TFU campaign both Coenen and Van der Sar have advocated the use of counterinsurgency methods and contributed to the spread of knowledge through lectures, advises, and the publishing of articles. See, for instance, Piet van der Sar, 'Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om', presentation Piet van der Sar, *De Bataljonsstaakgroep in een Counterinsurgency Campagne*, 31 maart 2008, interview with Piet van der Sar, Leo van Westerhoven, 'Counter insurgency in Uruzgan, 'Eerst zien, dan pas geloven', zeggen de Afghanen', *Armex* 91:1 (2007), Ralph Coenen, 'Counterinsurgency Operaties, geen succesvol optreden zonder gedegen kennis', Ralph Coenen, 'De Taliban in Uruzgan, Het karakter van de vijand en een aantal heroverwegingen om hem effectiever te bestrijden', *Militaire Spectator* 178:3 (2009), interview with Ralph Coenen, Anonymous, 'Peloton tussen kamp en dorp, Platoonhouse in Uruzgan als middel in de counterinsurgency-aanpak', *Landmacht* 5:2 (March 2007). On the suggested link with the Aceh strategy see Eric Vrijssen, 'Als vlooien op een wilde hond', *Oude Van Heutsz strategie is inspiratie voor aanpak Taliban*, *Elsevier* 62:52 (30 december 2006), 26.

68 See, among others, Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleeuw, Harm van der Have 'Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan, van het schakbord naar een bord spaghetti', 553-555, Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 71-73, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 167-169

69 The TFU thus followed the so-called Effects-Based Approach to Operations (EBAO); the effects were linked to measurable criteria that allowed the monitoring of the mission's progression. See Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleeuw, Harm van der Have

An old military adage warns that no plan survives first contact. This once again proved to be true as the TFU immediately after the start of its mission was ordered to provide substantial support (one of its three infantry companies for about a month) to operation Medusa, a large-scale anti-Taliban operation in Kandahar province under command of RC-S. Even more important, Chora district had to be included within the Dutch ink spot as the Taliban continuously threatened this densely populated area. Whereas an initial troop-to-task analysis had already revealed a structural lack of means to maintain a permanent security presence in the originally identified ADZs, the drain of forces and immediate expansion of the footprint caused an overstretch from the onset of the campaign.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the inadequate situational awareness with regard to the local population as well as the inexperience of both staff and soldiers with the new TFU organization and especially with the PRT mission characterized the start of the TFU campaign (we will discuss this further below).⁷¹ Consequently, the Master Plan turned out to be too ambitious for the available capacity causing the TFU staff and its subordinate units to search for a *modus operandi* allowing them to deliver security and enhance the local government's control to the best of their -limited- abilities.

Due to the scarcity of capabilities BG-1 opted to emphasize continuously active patrolling (preferably by foot). Although the unit experimented with two so-called platoon houses during its tour (one in northern Tirin Kot district, and one in the north of Deh Rawud district), the available resources were insufficient for maintaining a permanent presence in the whole of the appointed ADZs. Therefore the battalion's staff decided that in addition to their own security operations, the main effort should be directed at building an effective local counter-organization.⁷² The counter-organization is a classical counterinsurgency concept that prescribes a broad approach for organizing an effective administration and mobilizing the population against an insurgency.⁷³ As BG-1's main mission was to create a permissive environment for the local government to become more effective -corresponding with the Master Plan's operation lines of security and stability, and a credible task force-, it focused on the enhancement of the local security apparatus. The advancement of the provincial government itself was the core business of the PRT -that thereby addressed the operation line of governance and justice as well as that of development.⁷⁴ The BG, consequently, started

⁷⁰ 'Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan, van het schaakbord naar een bord spaghetti', 553-556.

⁷⁰ Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. See also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 178. On the support to operation Medusa see Piet van der Sar, 'Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om', 12.

⁷¹ Interview with lieutenant-colonel Joost Doense, G-3 TFU-1, Breda, 25 April 2007, interview with colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

⁷² Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009.

⁷³ The idea of the counter-organization is most thoroughly described by McCuen. See John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*, 85-127.

⁷⁴ For the BG mission see Piet van der Sar, 'Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om', 12, on the PRT mission see Gerard Koot, 'Tankers in een wederopbouwrol: Provinciale reconstructie in Uruzgan', 18. On mission and role of BG and PRT see also interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November

to organize a counter-organization of local forces that would be able to keep a permanent posture by manning small operating bases throughout the province. Lieutenant-colonel Piet van der Sar preferred the use of ANP and ANA forces for realizing this plan. The reality, however, was that at the beginning of the TFU campaign these forces were insufficiently available in Uruzgan; the local police force had almost vanished after the dismissal of Rozi Khan, while only a small contingent of ANA soldiers was active in the province. The theory of the counter-organization solves this problem by stressing the importance of local militias for self-defense, however, as aforementioned Dutch forces in Uruzgan were operating under a political caveat that banned any form of cooperation with such entities. A rather ingenious solution that matched the reality on the ground with that of the politicians and policy makers in The Hague was found by drafting tribal militias as so-called Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), which formalized them as part of the official ANSF.⁷⁵ Thus the TFU, and more specifically the BG, could start practicing the idea of the counter-organization in order to enhance the government's security footprint and improve the security situation at the grassroots level.

The need to recruit local allies for the ANAP program urged the BG to establish contacts with local leaders. A first ally was found in Fazil, a militia commander from the Barakzai and Popalzai dominated Kowtwal village on the west bank of the Deh Rafshan in northern Tirin Kot district.⁷⁶ Fazil, who held ties with Matiullah Khan, was instrumental in establishing a much-needed first barrier between pro-government Kowtwal and the Taliban-dominated villages to its north (among others Kowtwal's school had recently been burnt by the Taliban).⁷⁷ Fazil and his men were predominantly drafted into the ANAP as a local self-defence force, but soon the locally well-respected Fazil was also employed for careful rapprochement of the communities living to the north at either side of the Deh Rafshan river. Typically the BG would exploit Fazil's contacts by dispatching its recce platoon on patrols to trace potential allies. If a key leader was encountered the platoon would call for BG commander Van der Sar (who was nicknamed 'Big Smurf' by his recce troops) to come in and set up a meeting. Tokhi elder Ismael Khan of the west bank's Kakarak village was among the first leaders engaged this way. Despite a very positive meeting, the influence of the Taliban in the area was evident as Ismael Khan explicitly stated that he would be slaughtered if he would collaborate with the Dutch ISAF forces. A more successful reach-out to the previously marginalized Tokhi communities was accomplished in Surkh Murgab, where returned Tokhi-leader Mohammed Nabi Khan and his people (who previously had fought international forces) proved more than

2009, interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, interview with lieutenant-colonel Joost Doense, G-3 TFU-1, Breda, 25 April 2007.

75 The ANAP was a nation-wide program that sought to address the immediate need for more security forces by recruiting 11,000 officers, of which 1,000 in Uruzgan. See Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 237.

76 This section is predominantly based on the interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. For more information on villages and Deh Rafshan power dynamics see PRT4, 'Deh Rashaan' (Unclassified Report, Tirin Kot, January 2008).

77 The Liaison Office, 'A Survey of Uruzgan Province', 16.

willing to join the ANAP and establish a series of police posts and check points on the east bank of the Deh Rafshan.⁷⁸ The ANAP officers were monitored, assisted, and trained by the BG, whose patrols paid regular visits to their indigenous auxiliaries. Contradistinctively the initial success of the counter-organization strategy was demonstrated by the untimely death of Fazil, who together with seven of his fighters was killed in an ambush on the road between Tirin Kot and Kandahar in January 2007. Albeit this incident was commonly reported as a Taliban action, it is most likely that Matiullah Khan ordered the killing of his ally in order to curtail Fazil's rapidly growing influence as a key TFU collaborator -which made him a potential rival for Matiullah.⁷⁹ This explanation is strongly supported by the location of the ambush; at that time the highway between Tirin Kot and Kandahar was under tight control of Matiullah's men of the AHP and Taliban ambushes were extremely rare.

Matiullah Khan himself had offered his services to the BG on several occasions. Van der Sar and Coenen once met him during a dinner arranged by the commander of the Afghan Security Guard (ASG), a militia operating as a local private security company and responsible for securing the outer perimeters of the coalition camps.⁸⁰ In a cordial sphere Matiullah emphasized his reputation -with the Americans- as a Taliban hunter as well as his ability to distinguish between the insurgents and the innocent population. Both Van der Sar and Coenen deemed Matiullah a valuable contact because of his influence and as a source of intelligence, but further cooperation could only be of a limited nature due to his bad name among large segments of the local population (most notably the Ghilzai). Therefore a continuation of informal contact was considered the best way forward. Albeit Matiullah invited Van der Sar for a follow-up dinner at his home, this meeting never took place due to an illness of the former that required immediate treatment in India.

Next to Matiullah and Mohammed Nabi Khan the BG also established contact with other influential local power-holders such as Malem Sadiq, the brother of Achekzai leader Malem Abdul Khaleq (who by now was residing in Kabul as a member of parliament), and Barakzai Commander Akhtar Mohammed, both of Chora district.⁸¹ Additionally many lower-level power-holders were engaged by BG patrols. Yet most of these meetings occurred randomly as platoons coincidentally ran into local elders in the area of operations of a specific mission.

78 See also interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009.

79 Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. Joeri Boom also briefly mentions Fazil's death, but describes it as a Taliban ambush. See Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan* (Amsterdam: Podium/BKB, 2010), 94-95.

80 Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. During its campaign the TFU hired about 250 ASG members for the protection of its bases in Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud. See Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 295*.

81 Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. Commander Akhtar Mohammed was nicknamed Akhtar Mohammed 'Brown Eyes' by the Dutch in order to distinguish him from Chenartu Popalzai leader Akhtar Mohammed as well as from Taliban commander Akhtar Mohammed 'Red Eyes'. See Anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 95-96.

Only in Deh Rawud ADZ, where infantry platoons were assigned their individual operating domain and villages, more structural ties with lower leaders were forged.⁸²

The soldiers of the BG, thus, made first contact with many of Uruzgan's local power-holders in their quest to raise an effective counter-organization as well as during their continuous patrols. Yet, the experiences thus far had brought the BG on a collision course with the PRT, and especially with its commander lieutenant-colonel Nico Tak, who considered engagement of local power-holders a typical task for the specialized soldiers and civilian officials of the PRT.⁸³ Moreover, due to the afore mentioned lead of the BG *vis-à-vis* the PRT and the TFU staff which resulted in the influx and acceptance of BG ideas and plans by the latter, many within the PRT felt overlooked. Tak -rightly- assumed that strengthening the local government required him to empower Governor Munib by enhancing his relations with Uruzgan's local power-holders. BG commander Van der Sar, on the other hand, primarily sought to implement the classical counterinsurgency idea of establishing a counter-organization. In classical counter-insurgency locally operating (infantry) units typically fulfill roles in the field of security, governance, as well as development, and therefore no distinction between PRT-like and BG-like units exists. Although the definition of the exact roles of the BG and PRT as well as their mutual relationships and that with the TFU staff would remain troubled during the pioneering rotation of PRT-1 and BG-1, both commanders as well as TFU staff officers felt that the units had to improve their cooperation through enhanced integration. This resulted in an integrated approach towards patrols in which a PRT mission team would join a BG patrol. Furthermore the division of tasks was such that the BG primarily emphasized the provision of security and force protection, while the PRT became the prime unit to engage local power-holders for enhancing governance and development. However, as the about 60 PRT officials were far too less for maintaining contact with all key leaders, infantry platoon commanders would support the PRT in engagement of lower-level local power-holders. The dominant local power-holders were the exclusive focus of the military and civil officials of the PRT, with the commander of the TFU providing a backup capability that permitted an escalation of authority if this would be necessary to achieve an agent's collaboration.

The ANAP program, which sought to enhance governmental control by institutionalizing local militias, now also became a responsibility of the PRT. Members of the military police were employed to teach the Afghan recruits a short course in policing at what now was called *Kamp Holland*, the main Dutch base in Tirin Kot.⁸⁴ The BG remained active in mentoring and

82 Interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. See also Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010), 'Getuigenissen van een missie'* (s.l.: s.n., 2012), 28-29.

83 This section is based on interviews with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, lieutenant-colonel Joost Doense, G-3 TFU-1, Breda, 25 April 2007, colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009.

84 See among others, André Twigt, 'Commandant PRT keert met goed gevoel terug, 'We hebben de raderen in werking gezet'', *Defensiekant* 4 January 2007, 4, Juul Platenburg, 'PRT leidt eerste Afghanen op tot hulppolitie', *Als wij het niet doen, wie dan wel? Herinneringsboek TFU-1*, ed. Grotens, P. (Den Haag, 2007), 85, Gerard Koot, 'Tankers in een wederopbouwrol: Provincial reconstruction in Uruzgan', 23, Piet van der Sar, 'Kick the enemy where it hurts most, De steun van de lokale bevolking, daar gaat het om', 11.

assisting the ANAP posts and units in the field. More important was that the engagement of Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan (who was first contacted by the BG under the ANAP program) now was continued by the PRT. As a result of repeated talks with Governor Munib, who already kept good ties with his fellow Ghilzai tribesman Mohammed Nabi, the PRT officials at this time were aware of the latter's potential for re-connecting Uruzgan's alienated Ghilzai tribes with the provincial government.⁸⁵ The Dutch soldiers even considered Mohammed Nabi the key player for controlling the whole of the Taliban-dominated area that reached from northern Tirin Kot district via the Baluchi valley to adjacent Chora district. Consequently, the Dutch set out to establish a co-optive relationship with Mohammed Nabi through development projects (among others a bridge was constructed) as well as the ANAP program. Albeit PRT commander lieutenant-colonel Nico Tak felt that he lacked the assets to come to business with key leaders, the Dutch succeeded in securing Nabi Khan's collaboration.⁸⁶ This certainly can be regarded a successful first reach-out to the Ghilzai, and Mohammed Nabi cooperated with the TFU for its entire campaign. The first results, however, were somewhat disappointing as his position proved to be of a more limited nature than assumed by the Dutch.

As mentioned in the previous chapter (section 8.2.3), Mohammed Nabi's direct influence mainly concerned the east bank of the Deh Rafshan area and parts of Mirabad valley, and he held only limited influence in the Baluchi valley as well as on the west bank of Deh Rafshan (the latter due to internal struggle within the Tokhi sub-tribe). This first became clear when he was ambushed in the Baluchi valley and called PRT commander Tak for assistance. TFU commander Vleugels then decided that 'Mohammed Nabi's leverage might be crucial [for the TFU mission], and therefore we will relief him', but not at all costs, 'we won't blow up the valley' (with massive bombing by a B-1 bomber) or engage in extensive fighting.⁸⁷ Consequently, the mission of extracting Mohammed Nabi Khan was assigned to the Special Forces of the Viper detachment, who successfully rescued the TFU's key collaborator.⁸⁸ This incident indicated that Mohammed Nabi's influence in the Baluchi valley was limited as he could not rally local fighters to come to his relief, but was completely dependent on Dutch support. A series of other incidents occurred at the end of the four-month rotation of the first BG and PRT when the TFU decided to extend its oil spot by building a post in Mohammed

85 The following sections on Mohammed Nabi Khan are based on interviews with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009. In an April 2010 meeting at the Dutch embassy in Kabul Munib told Dutch officials that he, against the advice of Jan Mohammed Khan, had actually asked Mohammed Nabi Khan to return to Uruzgan. See Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 13 April 2010.

86 For Mohammed Nabi Khan's attitude towards the TFU see interview with Mohammed Nabi Khan Tokhi conducted by Ralph van Kemenade, Tirin Kot, 9 January 2010.

87 Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009.

88 Although no report is available this incident can be dated September 21 2006 as one source mentions an OMF attack on tribal elders in the Baluchi valley with Dutch forces giving support. See Peter Grotens (ed.), *Als wij het niet doen, wie dan wel? Herinneringsboek TFU-1* (Den Haag, 2007), 55. Furthermore Ten Cate and Van der Vorm state that Viper at that time was operating in the Baluchi valley area. Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 256-257.

Nabi Khan's area of influence near Surkh Murgab. From the start of its construction this post, named *Poentjak* (a reference to the colonial era as this is the name of a mountain pass in west Java where the regiment traditionally linked to the unit that formed BG-2 had established an outpost during the Indonesian War of Independence), came under repeated attacks of the Taliban despite its location and the presence of Mohammed Nabi's ANAP.⁸⁹ This not only revealed the limited nature of Mohammed Nabi's power, but at that moment also gave him a reputation of duplicity as the Taliban could freely execute their operations in his home area. However, these incidents also signaled the strength of the Taliban in northern Tirin Kot district. Albeit Mohammed Nabi Khan's power was not what it was expected to be, he remained a key player to diminish the Taliban's influence and reach out to at least a part of the previously marginalized segments of the population. Therefore, the Dutch soldiers continued their engagement of this local power-holder throughout the TFU campaign; yet this would never be as intensive as during these first months.

The episode with Mohammed Nabi demonstrates that the Dutch would attribute development projects, train and assist militias in order to formalize them and even go as far as providing security to co-opted power-holders. The case, however, also reveals that the understanding of the local population and its leaders still was far from perfect. As aforementioned (section 9.2.1) the detailed information of the civil assessment had simply come too late to be incorporated by BG-1 and PRT-1. Furthermore the unfamiliarity with this aspect of intelligence combined with an implicit preference for kinetic operations against the Taliban -despite TFU commander Vleugels stressing the need for a population-centric approach-, resulted in an intelligence process still optimized for gaining and processing enemy-centric intelligence.⁹⁰ A much heard claim in this regard is that during the early stages of the TFU campaign some officers considered the reading of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* a sufficient preparation for understanding Uruzgan's complicated societal landscape.⁹¹ This hampered the development of an appropriate situational awareness in the complicated operational environment provided by Uruzgan's fragmented society, a flaw that most heavily affected the PRT whose mission was completely dependent on such

89 See also interview with colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009. The intensity of the fighting around *Poentjak* is thoroughly recorded in Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 36-50, as well as in Peter ter Velde, *Rabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog* (Schoorl: Uitgeverij Conserve, 2008), 117-119, 129-133. On the name *Poentjak* see Harm Ede Botje, 'We zitten daar goed', Rapportage Op pad met onze jongens in Uruzgan', *Vrij Nederland* 6 January 2007, 29.

90 See Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 175, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 721-722, Anonymous, 'Leven in het Oude Testament', 3D, *de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W. (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 15-16, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'Shafer Revisited - The three great oughts of winning the hearts and minds: analysing the assumptions underpinning the British and Dutch COIN approach in Helmand and Uruzgan', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24:4 (2013), 737-738, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D approach and counterinsurgency, a mix of defence, diplomacy, and development, The case of Uruzgan', 19, Belinda Smeenk, Rudi Gouweleew, Harm van der Have 'Effect gebaseerde aanpak in Uruzgan, van het schakbord naar een bord spaghetti', 555.

91 This claim was echoed more widely during informal talks and meetings, and is explicitly mentioned by PRT-2 commander Koot. See interview with colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009, and, for instance, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 47.

information.⁹² Even the completion of the civil assessment did not improve this deficiency, as there were insufficient civil experts to assist the military in overcoming their inexperience in dealing with this kind of fine-grained information. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had produced the civil assessment, initially dispatched only two representatives to assist in its implementation on the ground in Uruzgan. POLAD Rochus Pronk, who focused on the provincial government and functioned as the link between the TFU and the Dutch embassy in Kabul, and development cooperation advisor (*ontwikkelingssamenwerking adviseur*, OSAD) Marten de Boer, who until the middle of September spent much of his time in Kabul in order to finalize the civil assessment.⁹³ Thus, even when appropriate information about the local population and its socio-political structure became available through the civil assessment, this did not immediately transform into a more thorough understanding of Uruzgan's societal landscape.

The situation took a change in the right direction when an additional development cooperation advisor for tribal affairs (*ontwikkelingssamenwerking/tribal adviseur*, OSTAD) was embedded in the PRT. This Dutch national, with about twenty years of working experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan, had previously worked as an advisor of the Canadian PRT in Kandahar (while being employed by the British Department for International Development (DFID)), and combined a thorough understanding of Pashtun society with an extensive network in the greater Kandahar region and command of the Pashto language.⁹⁴ The presence of this dedicated tribal advisor opened new opportunities for the soldiers of the TFU, who now could benefit from his expertise to enhance their understanding of Uruzgan's local society and its power structure as well as in the daily contacts with the local people and their leaders. Whereas the Dutch initially sought to understand the dynamics of (violent) contention in Uruzgan along lines of pro-government and pro-Taliban -with the term OMF being used as a synonym for Taliban-, a more nuanced image now gradually emerged. Of course, the tribally inspired rivalry between Jan Mohammed Khan's Popalzai network and especially the Ghilzai Pashtun had been acknowledged afore, but in addition to this tribal dimension the conflict in Uruzgan by this time was also analyzed by studying the position and role of the dominant local power-holders, the so-called power brokers, current political relationships of local leaders, as well as the affiliation of local leaders and sub-tribal segments during the *mujahideen* era. This multi-faceted concept for understanding Uruzgan's complicated

92 See also interview with lieutenant-colonel Joost Doense, G-3 TFU-1, Breda, 25 April 2007.

93 See, among others, interviews with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Utrecht, 12 November 2009, brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009, Gerard Koot, 'Tankers in een wederopbouwrol: Provinciale reconstructie in Uruzgan', 18-22, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D approach and counterinsurgency, a mix of defence, diplomacy, and development. The case of Uruzgan', 30-32, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 201.

94 Interview with anonymous TFU OSTAD, The Hague, 1 March 2010. See also Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 205-206, major S.F. King, *Civil-Military Cooperation in the Kandahar PRT*, Kandahar, 2006, presentation on CIMIC experiences. De Bont refers to this advisor under the alias Gerard. Although the OSTAD's exact date of arrival cannot be traced (neither he could remember it during the interview), this occurred somewhere during fall 2006. The first time his appointment was publicly mentioned was on 15 September 2006, see Noël van Bommel, 'In Uruzgan is diplomaat gezworen kameraad', *Volkskrant* 18 September 2006, accessible via <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/779704/2006/09/18/In-Uruzgan-is-diplomaat-gezworen-kameraad.dhtml>.

operational environment along several dimensions was known as ‘layers of conflict’. Albeit the pioneering PRT-1 was the first to initiate this comprehensive analysis, it was optimized by their successors of PRT-2 who not only took advantage of the OSTAD’s advise, but also enjoyed the benefit of possessing the completed civil assessment (which they found hard to get as it was only made available to them after repeated requests) for obtaining a proper level of situational awareness before their actual deployment.⁹⁵ Furthermore it has to be mentioned that in addition to the OSTAD, PRT-2 commander Lieutenant-colonel Gerard Koot also made good use of a Dutch national interpreter, Mr. Hamidi, who not only possessed an excellent command of both Pashto and Farsi, but also had quickly developed a good grasp of local politics and relationships that was instrumental in completing the layers of conflict model.⁹⁶

It goes without doubt that the OSTAD’s contribution was of great value to the entire TFU; this was also acknowledged by the fact that as of the third month of the TFU mission his expertise was incorporated in regular meetings with the task force’s most important actors, including the commander.⁹⁷ In addition to improving the understanding of the local circumstances, the OSTAD also smoothed the interaction with the local population. Of vast importance was his advise to use only Dutch national interpreters for the engagement of local leaders. Whereas PRT-1 already had observed that some local power-holders were uncomfortable with locally hired interpreters, the OSTAD could clarify this as most of those interpreters held a tribal affiliation to either the Barakzai or Popalzai sub-tribes of the greater Kandahar region and he also suspected that they reported their findings outside TFU channels.⁹⁸ Another example was his urge for enhanced vetting of the official local representatives attending *shuras* with the combined BG and PRT staff in Deh Rawud, as he -rightly- suspected that these representatives were merely straw men of dominant power brokers and not the legitimate leaders of the district’s marginalized Babozai and Nurzai sub-tribes. Yet, the OSTAD himself sometimes experienced resistance to his attempts to imprint a more population-centric mindset.⁹⁹ While the soldiers’ implicit preference for enemy-centric operations can partly explain this resistance, an additional explanation is given by the OSTAD’s character. Albeit very competent the OSTAD is commonly described as an eccentric individual whose elucidations were extremely hard to follow even by well-

95 See colonel Nico Tak, *PRT Briefing*, Amersfoort, 4 September 2009, Gerard Koot, ‘Tankers in een wederopbouwrol: Provincial reconstruction in Uruzgan’, 20. Interviews with anonymous TFU OSTAD, The Hague, 1 March 2010, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009, brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009.

96 In 2008 Mr. Hamidi would become the TFU’s assistant tribal advisor and as such he spent the entire four years of the TFU-campaign (except for leave) in Uruzgan. We will expand his role in the next chapter. Interestingly, Mr. Hamidi first offered his services to the Dutch forces in 2005 when he was on a holiday trip travelling by car from the Netherlands to Kabul. In northern Afghanistan he ran into the Dutch PRT at Pol-E Khomri as he assisted the local population to improve schooling with help of the PRT. See interview with Mr. Hamidi, TFU *cultureel adviseur* (CULAD), Tirin Kot, 22 November 2008.

97 Interviews with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

98 Personal documents from captain Leendert Johan Hazelbag, commander B-company BG-2, obtained 15 September 2008, interview with captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009.

99 Interview with anonymous TFU OSTAD, The Hague, 1 March 2010.

prepared officials such as PRT staff officers or POLADs.¹⁰⁰ This, in combination with long periods of absence due to leave and work outside the perimeter of the camp, made him rather inaccessible, especially to the BG, the TFU's largest sub-unit. Moreover, his tendency not to share all information -in order to protect his sources- and extensive contacts among the local population as well as the fact that he had been working for other foreign powers gave him a dubious reputation in the eyes of many soldiers who were used to guard their operational security. On the other side the OSTAD enjoyed much respect from PRT personnel who were more dependent on his knowledge; commanders and staff officials generally report a good working relationship and appreciated the OSTAD's advises.¹⁰¹ Thus, the OSTAD's influence on the TFU was felt best within the PRT.

In addition to his direct contribution to the military's TFU mission the OSTAD and the other two civilian advisors deemed a so-called 'Track 2' approach, which encompassed 'covert action and activities through actors close to the local communities', necessary.¹⁰² This program would focus on marginalized segments of the population and try to co-opt 'high value collaborators', including internally displaced persons and opinion leaders, through quick and visible (development) projects (QVPs) executed by Afghan NGOs. Whereas 'Track 1' mainly consisted of regular TFU and Afghan government development activities within the ADZs, 'Track 2' actions predominantly concentrated on the areas outside the TFU's oil spot. Albeit some of the military officials of the PRT were involved with 'Track 2', the program's exact whereabouts were not clear to the TFU's other units and its staff -many soldiers were even completely unaware of its existence.¹⁰³ Reportedly this was a deliberate choice to protect local collaborators and prevent disturbances caused by military interference. Consequently 'Track 2' was not synchronized with the TFU's campaign plan and operations, and therefore its potential remained largely unexploited. Moreover, a bifurcation between both tracks occurred as both development advisors focused on 'Track 2' QVPs, while the military officials of the PRT sought to engage the local population and its leaders within the ADZs through CIMIC activities.

Even more important was that while PRT-1 commander Tak already had complained about the lack of means for establishing ties with key leaders, the 2006 budget of €1,000,000 for

¹⁰⁰ See Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 206. see also interviews with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, colonel Piet van der Sar and captain Ralph Coenen, commander/S-2 BG-1, Weert, 28 September 2009.

¹⁰¹ See, among others, interviews with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

¹⁰² See interview with anonymous TFU OSTAD, The Hague, 1 March 2010, Marten de Boer, 'New perspectives for conflict transformation, development and diplomacy', 235-237. De Boer has adopted the term 'Track 2' from conflict theory. See also, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 724-725, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'The 3D approach and counterinsurgency, a mix of defence, diplomacy, and development, The case of Uruzgan', 42, 71, Major Randy Derks, 1 (NLD/AUS) Task Force - Uruzgan, Breda, 2 October 2015.

¹⁰³ See interviews with anonymous TFU OSTAD, The Hague, 1 March 2010, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009, Anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Nico Tak, PRT Briefing, Amersfoort, 4 September 2009. See also Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 725.

'Track 2' QVPs doubled the €500,000 allocated for CIMIC (with respectively €1,000,000 and €2,000,000 for the first year of the campaign); a December 2006 update mentions 50 CIMIC projects, and more than 200 QVPs conducted by seven local NGOs.¹⁰⁴ Additionally €3,000,000 of Dutch development aid for Uruzgan was channeled through the central government in Kabul, which rendered this budget out of control of the TFU and prone to malign influences within the Afghan government as well as to corruption. Both PRT-1 and -2 observed how the Afghan government's institutional structure built around central and provincial ministries also minimized the influence of Governor Munib as for instance tons of money for new schools were directly transferred from Kabul's Ministry of Education to Uruzgan's local educational ministry. Former governor and Popalzai tribal leader Malem Rahmatullah Khan who was now Uruzgan's minister for education, hugely benefitted from this as he also possessed a construction company that received the exclusive order to build the new schools.¹⁰⁵ The asymmetry between the Dutch budgets for CIMIC and development through QVPs and Afghan government channels remained unchanged during the whole four-year TFU campaign, culminating in a total of €4,000,000 spent by the PRT *versus* a tremendous €126,000,000 spent on development aid.¹⁰⁶ As both the donation of aid to the government and the QVPs executed by local NGOs were almost impossible to verify, most money spent on development in Uruzgan could not be used as a leverage tool for enhancing the TFU's control over the local population. Thus, only a limited amount of money, the CIMIC budget, was available to engage the bulk of Uruzgan's local power-holders who were living within the ADZs -the main area of interest for the TFU- in order to obtain their collaboration.

Despite all these difficulties of which at least a part is inherent in initiating a population-centric campaign with multiple units -of which most were inexperienced with this kind of campaign- and other actors in a highly complicated operational environment, TFU-1 can be credited for its continuous effort to empower Governor Munib. The reach out to the formerly alienated Ghilzai communities, which was started by the new governor just before the beginning of the TFU campaign, was amplified by BG-1's engagement of Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan. When the PRT took over the lead of this effort, the course was continued and TFU commander Vleugels even deployed Dutch forces to protect Mohammed Nabi asking himself 'what would it mean to Munib if I won't intervene'.¹⁰⁷ Albeit the results of this contact were not as spectacular as first expected, it re-established a durable connection between at least a significant part of Uruzgan's Ghilzai and the local government that would endure long after the end of Munib's governorship. PRT-1 commander Tak established a good relationship with Munib and he became the primary TFU agent (supported by the POLAD) to

104 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 239*, Ambassadeur R. van de Geer, Generaal D.L. Berlijn, *Stand van Zaken briefing*, The Hague, 1 December 2006.

105 See interviews with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

106 Willem Vogelsang, 'Wat opmerkingen over de Nederlandse betrokkenheid in Uruzgan', (personal memo, Leiderdorp, 12 March 2011), on the asymmetry in budgets during the entire campaign see also Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations* (The Hague: Clingendael, 2011), 34-37.

107 Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009.

have regular (almost weekly) meetings with the governor.¹⁰⁸ It has to be mentioned that Tak discovered Munib's taste for fish that he duly exploited to smoothen their relationship by inviting Munib for dinner every time fish was served at *Kamp Holland*. It's a testimony to their good relationship that Munib was shocked when Tak announced his departure after four months as he had expected the Dutch PRT to stay for a year just like their US predecessors.¹⁰⁹ Yet, Munib found Koot to be an equally competent partner to deal with. Albeit both PRT commanders kept a good relationship with Uruzgan's governor, they did not shun a critical attitude. Munib was confronted with evidence of corruption among the local government and precarious questions about his weeks-long visits to Kabul, during which his absence seriously hampered the advancement of the provincial government. It turned out that Munib spent much of his time in the capital because he was thwarted by the central government as a result of former governor Jan Mohammed Khan's influence. Although Munib did not want to let down Hamid Karzai, he confessed this during a private meeting with Koot and Mr. Hamidi who started philosophizing about the relations between Jan Mohammed's Popalzai network and the Karzai family and asked him to nod his head when they were right. Furthermore Munib's position was also actively undermined by local representatives of the mentioned networks, especially by Khudai Rahim, his deputy governor and a direct relative of Jan Mohammed and Matiullah Khan. The TFU successfully blocked Rahim's lobby to replace Munib and install Matiullah as provincial chief of police.

Matiullah Khan, the most powerful local power-holder allied to Jan Mohammed's network, was carefully engaged by the Dutch soldiers of TFU-1 as already illustrated by the experiences of BG-1. Both PRT commanders repeatedly met Matiullah, and TFU commander Vleugels occasionally talked to him.¹¹⁰ Whereas the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs had issued an official ban on all contacts with Jan Mohammed, it was felt that Matiullah with his well-organized, equipped, and trained fighters (who were institutionalized as AHP), could not be ignored as he was a too influential player in Uruzgan's political marketplace. Lieutenant-colonels Tak and Koot therefore actively sought to exert some influence in order to mitigate the spoiling effects of his militia on the outreach towards the marginalized Ghilzai tribes. This resulted in a tacit agreement that kept Matiullah's fighters outside the main Ghilzai areas as he would confine his operations to the south of the Teri Rud river.

While Matiullah at least 'temporarily and locally' accepted this restriction, US Special Forces which had leaned heavily on his use as their prime anti-Taliban 'gun dog' were

108 This section on Munib is based on interviews with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

109 The first two PRT rotations operated for four months in Uruzgan, just like the BG's rotations (the TFU staff spent six months). However, as four months proved to be too short to build rapport with local actors and establish effective relationships, the PRT rotations were extended to six months as of PRT-3.

110 Interviews with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009, colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009, captain Jan-Willem Feith, S-2 PRT-1, Amersfoort, 14 December 2009, colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

less acquiescent.¹¹¹ Added to their discontent of the Dutch policy that had been fed by the replacement of their ally Jan Mohammed by Governor Munib with his Taliban background, this now gradually resulted in the US Special Forces actively thwarting the TFU mission. The disobedience of an explicit order from TFU commander Vleugels -the overall area commander of Uruzgan- that called for them to cease cooperating with Matiullah was the culmination point of these different perspectives on with whom exactly to collaborate.¹¹² Albeit Dutch major-general Ton van Loon, who just had assumed command over RC-S (dating this incident in November 2006), solved the conflict through the US Special Forces chain of command, the fundamental difference between the Dutch officers and diplomats and what they regarded as American operators with “cowboy” ways -‘as if that is an insult to an American’- would persist during the entire four-year TFU campaign (we will see this in the next chapter).¹¹³

Matiullah himself had realized that his best chances to consolidate and enlarge his power lay in obtaining a higher position within the official security apparatus of the Afghan government. As we have already seen, the last US PRT actively sought to enlarge Matiullah’s role within Uruzgan’s branch of the ANP and other actors of Jan Mohammed’s network started to lobby for his appointment as provincial chief of police. During the latter period of the TFU-1 rotations Matiullah himself set up a brilliant public relations masterpiece by which he demonstrated his competence for the job. In early 2007 Matiullah organized a ceremony at his camp in which he handed over 250 captured weapons to the head of the national disarmament committee who was purposely flown in from Kabul.¹¹⁴ After this all attendants, including PRT-2 commander Koot and his small security detachment, were regaled with an exorbitant dinner. Albeit it was evident to all that those guns were rusty and totally obsolete it was a clear signal to ISAF and Munib’s provincial government that Matiullah applied for the function of provincial chief of police. Thus, the TFU-1 deployment had empowered Munib and brought about the much-needed reach-out to the Ghilzai community, but ended with the most influential local actor of Popalzai origin announcing his ambition to enlarge his power. This was an obvious hint that there was a long way to go to definitely curtail the influence of Jan Mohammed’s Popalzai-dominated network.

9.3 The battle of Chora and its aftermath

In the early morning of Saturday 16 June 2007 the Taliban opened an all out attack on the centre of Chora district, a strategic junction connecting Uruzgan’s four compass quarters (and consequently also an important connection between Helmand, Kandahar and

111 Interview with colonel Nico Tak, commander PRT-1, Utrecht, 6 November 2009.

112 Interview with brigadier Theo Vleugels, commander TFU-1, Vught, 7 December 2009.

113 Dan Green, *The Valley’s Edge*, 182.

114 Interview with colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009, see also Deedee Derksen, ‘Transition in Uruzgan (2): Power at the centre’, 12 June 2013, accessible through <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/transition-in-uruzgan-2-power-at-the-centre/>.

Afghanistan's northern provinces).¹¹⁵ The ensuing battle raged for four full days and saw TFU forces, ANSF, and local sub-tribal militias jointly repelling the attackers. Before this battle the situation in Chora was defined by a stalemate that resulted in a tacit understanding between local leaders (including government representatives) and Taliban commanders respectively seeking to secure trade and daily livelihood, and freedom of movement. After the fighting threw out the Taliban, the situation shifted in favor of the TFU and the provincial government, which triggered the Dutch soldiers to adopt measures for consolidating and exploiting this outcome.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the intense combat revealed to the Dutch public that the TFU soldiers were involved in a full war with the Taliban insurgents. This opened the way to the adoption of counterinsurgency as the Dutch task force's official campaign theme early in 2008; a development that would effectively render the remaining years of the TFU mission an enhanced neo-classical counterinsurgency campaign (which will be discussed in the next chapter).

At this point we will focus on the battle of Chora itself as well as on its immediate ramifications for the campaign and especially the TFU's influence over Uruzgan's political marketplace. In order to grasp these complicated affairs we will first study the battle and its prelude and subsequently analyze the aftermath of the struggle for Chora. This means that this account covers (parts of) the deployment of the second and third TFU staff rotations commanded by colonels Hans van Griensven (TFU-2, January 2007-August 2007) and Nico Geerts (TFU-3, August 2007-January 2008). Additionally we will study PRT-3 (the first six-month PRT rotation, April 2007-September 2007) and PRT-4 (October 2007-March 2008), which were led by lieutenant-colonels Gino van der Voet and Wilfred Rietdijk respectively. The reason for the focus on the PRTs is provided by the coarse distribution of tasks between BG (security) and PRT (engagement of the population and its leaders) that gradually evolved during the deployment of TFU-1 and was adopted as a standard for the remainder of the TFU campaign. Due to this book's particular subject of co-option of local power-holders, the actual engagement of local leaders as well as its connection with the overall mission are the most important affairs to be studied. As aforementioned, we cannot analyze all contributions to the TFU mission, but if necessary essential details from the involvement of other units, such as the BG, will be incorporated in our analysis. Let us now first turn to the battle of Chora and the events that preceded it.

115 The estimated amount of attackers ranges from 300-350 to 800-1000. Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272*. For information on Chora district see, among others, Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency' (Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2012), 19-20, Colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007, personal documents from captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, obtained 9 february 2010.

116 Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 725, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 175-176.

9.3.1 Chora, spring 2007: prelude and battle

When TFU-2 took over the helm from TFU-1, they clearly benefitted from the experiences of their pioneering predecessors. Colonel Hans van Griensven, a former lecturer of the Netherlands' staff college, stated in his commander's intent that the mission was to be regarded as a typical counterinsurgency operation in which he sought to make the OMF irrelevant -rather than destroying them- by winning the population's collaboration.¹¹⁷ Therefore he called upon the Dutch soldiers to gear up their mindset for population-centric operations, 'to build where possible and fight if necessary', which was also captured in TFU-2's motto 'It's all about the Afghan people'. Albeit not all elements of the TFU staff and units under its command turned equally adept in fulfilling this appeal (the TFU intelligence section remained predominantly focused on the Taliban, and some key personnel within the BG equally considered the fight against the insurgents the essence of the mission), Van Griensven's emphasis on the importance of the local population would have a great impact on the TFU campaign, as we will see below.¹¹⁸

A direct consequence of the new commander's vision was that not only the distribution of tasks and roles between the BG and PRT as gradually established during TFU-1 was maintained, but that the latter unit now became leading. The BG would create the right conditions for the PRT by providing force protection and applying pressure with its patrols according to the directions of the PRT, which fitted the TFU commander's philosophy that 'my task force is one big PRT'.¹¹⁹ While BG commander lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido had bought into this idea and together with his PRT colleague lieutenant-colonel Gino van der Voet had agreed to seek concurrence on their mutual operations, the relationship between Task Force staff and PRT on one side, and the BG on the other would remain tense during the TFU-2 rotation. A factor that might have influenced this was that both Van Griensven and Van der Voet belonged to the tight community of Dutch Army's engineer corps (as well as the bulk of the PRT which predominantly consisted of personnel from 41 armoured engineer battalion), which smoothed their relationship as they held daily meetings late in the evening (usually between 23:00 and 24:00, often discussing their work while playing darts), while Querido as an infantryman was a relative outsider.

Initially the focus of the TFU-2 effort lay on the Deh Rafshan area in the north of the Tirin Kot ADZ. The situation around base *Poentjak* as well as on the river's west bank remained

117 See interviews with, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, Hans van Griensven, 1 (NLD/AUS) *Task Force – Uruzgan 2*, The Hague, 5 March 2010, Hans van Griensven, 'It's All about the Afghan people, Eén jaar 1 (NLD/AUS) *Task Force Uruzgan*', 6-10.

118 Interviews with, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, PRT-3, *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3* (Unclassified draft report, Tirin Kot, 2007).

119 Interviews with, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007.

troublesome with regular contacts between TFU soldiers and OMF.¹²⁰ Supported by BG patrols and the detachment on *Poentjak* the PRT set out to enhance stability in the area by engaging the local population. Like the previous rotation, PRT-3 had benefitted from the availability of the civil assessment and the knowledge gathered by their predecessors, which had brought them considerable information on the provincial government and the background of associated key leaders. More important, whereas PRT-2 had first conceptualized the conflict as multilayered, PRT-3 was fully aware of this complicated situation upon its deployment and immediately started to enhance its understanding with use of the OSTAD and interpreters such as Mr. Hamidi.¹²¹ This not only resulted in a better insight in the local dynamics, it also brought them an ability to actually interfere. The way the PRT sought to gain influence over the population on both banks of the Deh Rafshan river clearly bore the fruits of this new approach; it was understood that the divided Tokhi community could not be engaged through a single dominant leader, like the east bank's Mohammed Nabi Khan Tokhi, and therefore the PRT staff opted for a reconciliation strategy in which respected Tokhi elder Doctor Abdul Baqi (who was well-connected to the communities on both sides of the river and related to Mohammed Nabi) fulfilled a key role. This program was a true reach-out to the whole of the Deh Rafshan's Ghilzai tribes as it not only enhanced the collaboration of the east bank community, but also provided an opportunity to the west bank communities linked to the Taliban to connect to the local government. It turned out to be a huge success as in 2007 alone 140 local insurgents defected.¹²² Yet, the main west bank Taliban commander, Gulam Razul, did not switch sides as the PRT's involvement with Dr. Baqi's efforts lost its momentum. Culprit was an immediate need to shift the focus of the main effort from the Deh Rafshan area to Chora district where as early as March 2007 signs of a serious Taliban threat were mounting.

As aforementioned, Chora district was the scene of a fragile equilibrium between the Taliban and local leaders, including the district chief, mayor and local chief of police. This situation was the result of the events that took place in June 2006 when an estimated 300 Taliban fighters overran the district. The insurgents were pushed back to the north by a combined force of Australian and Dutch Special Forces, US soldiers and overwhelming air power including Dutch AH-64 attack helicopters, US AC-130 gunships and close air support by A-10 fighters.¹²³ While this action restored the peace in the district itself, the Taliban retained their presence to its north and in the adjacent Baluchi valley, which rendered them an ability to exert influence in Chora. In order to consolidate the results of the coalition's military actions

120 See, for instance, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 76-90, Harm Ede Botje, "We zitten daar goed", Rapportage Op pad met onze jongens in Uruzgan", 29, Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 36-50.

121 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, anonymous TFU OSTAD, The Hague, 1 March 2010, Mr. Hamidi, TFU CULAD, Tirin Kot, 13 November 2008. The remainder of this paragraph is also based on these sources.

122 On Dr. Baqi and the reconciliation program see also Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 170, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 225-226.

123 Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 237-240.

and prevent an increase of Taliban influence, the TFU included Chora district into its oil spot immediately after the beginning of the campaign. Due to the lack of means, Dutch presence took the form of bi-weekly patrols in which an augmented platoon of the BG, including a PRT mission team, would set up a temporarily patrol base at the so-called White Compound, the district centre in the town of Ali Shirzai.¹²⁴ After a couple of days of patrolling the district, the Dutch would leave to return in two weeks. Yet, in April 2007 it became clear that this was insufficient as the Taliban was quickly raising its pressure and insurgents were attacking police checkpoints in the district's west. This resulted in the deployment of elements of the Viper detachment to Chora as well as the permanent positioning of a company (two platoons strong) of the BG. The latter unit became entangled in almost continuously fierce fighting while retaking checkpoints or encountering Taliban fighters during the months April, May, and the first weeks of June.¹²⁵

Since the first indications of an imminent Taliban attack, the PRT staff had focused on Chora and devised a 'rescue plan' for the district.¹²⁶ The enhanced BG presence was part of this plan that additionally called for strengthening the locally operating police. An additional problem was the weak position of Chora's governmental officials, district chief Haji Obaidullah (a Barakzai befriended to Jan Mohammed Khan) had a poor reputation and the chief of police was despised for his corruption and the keeping of a chai boy.¹²⁷ Therefore the PRT plan also called for direct engagement of the true authorities, the local tribal leaders, by allocating development projects. The underlying idea was to unite Chora's tribes in order to mobilize them for a stand-off with the Taliban. Albeit it was known that the Achekzai and Barakzai dominated Chora, the exact relationships between various sub-tribal segments had remained *terrain vague*. Especially the so-called Barakzai triangle in the northeast turned out to be a source of contention within the Barakzai sub-tribe. It appeared that a 30-year old conflict over water and land (known as the 'water conflict') between prominent Barakzai tribal leader Commander Akhtar Mohammed and the less important Gul Badja Khan was the cause of a deep rift in Chora's community.¹²⁸ To enhance his position Akhtar Mohammed had allied himself with provincial Popalzai leader Jan Mohammed Khan, while the powerful Achekzai leader Malem Abdul Khaleq had supported the other side. As Abdul Khaleq and Barakzai leader Rozi Khan were the headmen of the Barakzai/Achekzai block that had constituted a credible counterbalance against Jan Mohammed's Popalzai-dominated

124 Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency', 37-38.

125 Ibid., 39-40, see also Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 268, colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007.

126 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010.

127 Harm Ede Botje, 'We zitten daar goed', Rapportage Op pad met onze jongens in Uruzgan', 32, personal documents from captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, obtained 9 February 2010.

128 Interview with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, personal documents from captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, obtained 9 February 2010, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 85-86, 148, 160, see also Noël van Bommel, 'Wateroorlog', *Volkskrant* 10 November 2008, accessible via <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/909083/2008/11/10/Wateroorlog.dhtml>.

network, the local conflict within Chora's community reflected the struggle for dominance in Uruzgan's political marketplace. At this time, however, the PRT was not fully aware of the details of this highly politically polarized conflict. Yet, it succeeded in organizing *shuras* to discuss the deteriorating security situation of the district as well as the way forward to stability with representatives of both parties attending, including Akhtar Mohammed and Malem Sadiq (who represented his brother Abdul Khaleq as he was residing in Kabul to fulfill his duty as a *Wolesi Jirga* member).¹²⁹

This is even more remarkable considering what by now had been learned about the attack on Chora in the previous year. It appeared that the fall of the district to the Taliban in 2006 was the result of a buyout, a deal between district chief Haji Obaidullah and the insurgents.¹³⁰ Former governor Jan Mohammed Khan was the mastermind behind this affair, which was to demonstrate his enduring influence as well as the powerlessness of his successor Munib. In this typical Afghan demonstration of guile, the latter was reportedly ordered not to interfere with the events in Chora. While the TFU staff and PRT did not yet know the details of the political relationships within Chora district, they were well aware of the background of the 2006 battle of Chora in the run-up to the 2007 battle. Moreover, this knowledge had led to the acceptance of a working hypothesis predicting that the mounting Taliban pressure again could be linked to Jan Mohammed, who once more wanted to demonstrate his political power in Uruzgan, while simultaneously pushing Munib in disrepute. This time, however, the position of Jan Mohammed's network would also be augmented as the mounting pressure would inevitably urge the local government and ISAF to call in Matiullah, who would only come to assistance on the condition of his appointment as provincial chief of police. The rescue plan for Chora sought to prevent a new buyout by establishing a permanent TFU presence (the BG company), and aimed at enhancing Chora's local police as well as obtaining the cooperation of its tribal leaders to circumvent Matiullah's involvement. Thus, the underpinning of the TFU policy in Chora was based on the assumption that Jan Mohammed's political manoeuvre of 2006 was being repeated.

While there is little doubt that the actions in Chora also fitted the Taliban's strategy of attacking district centres and police checkpoints in order to demonstrate their strength, the TFU's working hypothesis was fueled by an accumulation of events.¹³¹ Among others there was the abstinent and sometimes reluctant attitude of Munib. Uruzgan's governor was -again- spending much of his time in Kabul, and even thwarted TFU attempts to ameliorate the situation in Chora.¹³² For instance, when after repeated Dutch requests a 200 men strong ANP

129 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

130 This paragraph is based on interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 173, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 190-191.

131 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010. On this Taliban strategy specifically see Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 173.

132 On Munib's attitude see also Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 200-202.

reinforcement for Chora was sent to Uruzgan, it was kept in Tirin Kot and Munib refused to use his influence for enforcing its deployment to Chora. Additionally, Matiullah Khan himself was conspicuously absent during the events in Chora. At one time he passed a message to the PRT stating that he was in Kabul, but more than willing to return to assist the TFU in Chora and for that purpose might be called any time. The national government itself demonstrated a seemingly deliberate lack of urgency and save the mentioned ANP reinforcement, not many other measures to support the TFU rescue plan were taken, despite the Dutch embassy's engagement of senior national players. President Karzai, himself, played a rather dubious role as he offered a solution in the form of Matiullah's appointment as provincial chief of police -more than probably on the advise of his counselor Jan Mohammed-, an offer duly rejected by both the TFU and the Dutch embassy. Furthermore, whereas various appeals for weapons to be sent to Uruzgan for distribution in Chora were denied, a delivery for Uruzgan Popalzai leader Akhtar Mohammed of Chenartu came through the channels carrying President Karzai's personal approval. In a bold move TFU commander Van Griensven ordered these weapons to be delivered to Chora 'because there is an Akhtar Mohammed too'.¹³³ DynCorp, an American private military company responsible for the distribution to AN(A)P forces in the province, followed Van Griensven's orders and brought the weapons to Chora where they were used to boost the arsenal of the police and local forces -the TFU never received any questions from either Kabul or Chenartu. The overall lack of support of the provincial as well as the national government combined with Matiullah's posture all added to the credibility of the working hypothesis adopted by the TFU.

While the engagement of local leaders in Chora district itself was tightening the ties between the TFU and Achekzai leader Abdul Khaleq and his brother Malem Sadiq, who was the most important local leader on the ground, the Dutch now also started to seek for a durable counterbalance against Jan Mohammed's remaining influence in the province. This brought them to Abdul Khaleq's ally Rozi Khan, the province's dominant Barakzai leader and former provincial chief of police. Any effective counterbalance against Jan Mohammed's network could not succeed without this man, who a year before had been sacked on Dutch request. Due to this earlier association with Jan Mohammed's government the initial approaches by the PRT were careful and indirect as it was felt that official contact was undesirable at this time.¹³⁴ However, as by now it was gradually understood that despite Rozi Khan's official position in Jan Mohammed's government, he actually was an opponent of the former governor, the relationship soon improved and obtained a more public character. When an old man was detained by coalition forces on suspicion of involvement with an IED threat, Rozi Khan felt confident enough about his ties with the Dutch to plea for his release. He visited the PRT at *Kamp Holland* and informed them that this particular old man was a

133 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010. As mentioned in note 81 Chora's Commander Akhtar Mohammed was also identified by adding the suffix 'brown eyes', exactly to prevent the kind of misunderstanding Van Griensven now deliberately exploited.

134 Interview with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009.

Pir, a local saint, who certainly would not engage himself in such matters. Moreover, if the holy man would not be released, the local population would certainly start revolting. PRT commander Van der Voet and the OSTAD checked these claims that they found to be true and subsequently asked TFU commander Van Griensven to set the old man free. Upon the man's release Rozi Khan again came to the base in order to express his gratitude to Van der Voet personally, stating 'I owe you one'.¹³⁵ Consequently, the prelude to the battle of Chora brought the TFU contacts with the leaders of the Achekzai and Barakzai; the headmen of the only provincial power block that could provide an effective counterbalance against Jan Mohammed's Popalzai network.

Yet, these contacts as well as the engagement of the tribal leaders in Chora itself were not developed sufficiently for preventing the Taliban from attacking the district. However, in the first weeks of June they did provide the TFU warnings that an attack was imminent. Just prior to the attack *Wolesi Jirga* member Abdul Khaleq called the PRT on one of its public phone numbers to inform the Dutch that his people were considering an evacuation.¹³⁶ Thus, the TFU was not caught off guard when the actual attack took place. Even more important was that in the weeks prior colonel Van Griensven had made up his mind about what to do in case of such an eventuality; the TFU would stand and fight.¹³⁷ Albeit such a decision can only be taken in the heat of the battle itself, it was obvious that any other option would sever the task force's credibility *vis-à-vis* the local population. Faced with the massive Taliban attack on Saturday 16 June 2006 Van Griensven, the TFU staff and its sub-commanders one more time carefully considered their options and confirmed that the best decision was to fight and repel the assault. In a dramatic gesture the commander of the BG company in Chora, Srebrenica veteran captain Larry Hamers, ordered the regimental flag of the *Stoottroepen* (shock troops, the same regiment that to no avail had tried to protect the safe haven Srebrenica in July 1995) to be flown next to the Afghan and Dutch flags.¹³⁸ While his troops together with a small ANA detachment (40 soldiers) and a handful of AN(A)P men started fighting the Taliban, the staff in Tirin Kot was figuring out what would be the best option for relieving the district's population and destroying the Taliban. It was evident to all that due to the TFU's limited resources local allies would fulfill a crucial role in this operation. The question, however, was who of the local leaders would join the TFU forces and mobilize his men for the standoff with the Taliban.

135 Interview with colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

136 Interview with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009.

137 Interviews with colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, the decision during the battle itself and its argumentation are also captured by Tweede Kamer, Dossier 27925, no. 272, Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 226-228, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 106-108, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 158, 159.

138 Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 107-108, 115, colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007, Hamers was one of the co-presenters of this briefing.

Initially the process of mobilizing local allies went troublesome; it was difficult to get hold of Chora's leaders in the turmoil. In the wider province the PRT started to call leaders who had handed in their weapons as part of Afghanistan's demilitarization and demobilization program, but of whom it was suspected that they had secretly preserved some of their capabilities.¹³⁹ Most people from outside Chora district, however, refused to meddle in affairs that they did not consider their own. Van Griensven recounts Van der Voet saying that 'if we call Kabul this problem will be solved within the hour, however, we will be appointed a new provincial chief of police [Matiullah Khan]'.¹⁴⁰ Change came when a PRT staff officer succeeded in contacting Rozi Khan who was expecting the TFU's call for support and immediately responded to it.¹⁴¹ On Sunday 17 June Rozi Khan linked up with the commander of the BG, to join him on his way to reinforce the troops defending Chora's district centre. As the Barakzai leader showed up with only a small militia of about 25 armed men -the PRT had informed Querido to expect up to 200 fighters-, disappointment was the first reaction.¹⁴² Yet, upon arrival at the white compound Rozi Khan immediately demonstrated his pivotal importance; after briefly shaking hands with company commander Hamers, he directly went into the district where Dutch patrols saw him visiting Chora's tribal leaders in their respective villages.¹⁴³ On the morning of Monday 18 June the full extent of his tribal diplomacy was revealed when rather unexpectedly 150 to 200 armed local men reported themselves at the district centre.¹⁴⁴ Hamers forced a reluctant district chief Obaidullah to issue ammunition and the men quickly attached red and white barrier tape to their arms and guns for identification by TFU soldiers. It has to be mentioned that most of the fighters were connected to Achekzai leader Abdul Khaleq with the brave and charismatic Toor Abdullah as their most important field commander, while Commander Akhtar Mohammed decided to stay aloof.¹⁴⁵ Rozi Khan, thus, had become a pivotal ally in the battle for Chora by mobilizing and organizing the local population -especially the segment linked to his ally Abdul Kahleq-through its leaders.

In the meantime the BG company had successfully held its ground thanks to overwhelming support from close air support and the 155 mm self-propelled *pantserhouwitser* gun at *Kamp*

139 Interview with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009.

140 Interview with colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010.

141 Interview with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009. It was this official who actually called Rozi Khan. See also interview with colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

142 Colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007, Hamers was one of the co-presenters of this briefing, André Twigt, "We zijn door het oog van de naald gekropen", *Defensiekrant* 4 October 2007, 3. See also interviews with colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009.

143 Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency', 40-41.

144 See also Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 117, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 160, Anonymous, 'Door het oog van de naald', 3D, *de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W. (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 80, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272*, Colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007.

145 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010.

Holland. While most of the artillery shelling took place in the night of 16 to 17 June, air support was almost non-stop as attack helicopters, fighter aircraft, and bombers were continuously stacked in the air space over Chora and a total of 67 bombs were delivered (of which 21 by Dutch F-16s).¹⁴⁶ Additionally, the pressure was reduced by actions of the Viper detachment that on Sunday 17 June commenced operations in the adjacent Baluchi valley in order to draw away and fix as many as possible Taliban fighters.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore the BG sent reinforcements to the district in preparation for a counterattack under the name operation Troy.¹⁴⁸ In the evening of Monday 18 June, with all forces, including the local allies under Rozi Khan, complete, the sub-commanders gathered at the white compound for Querido's final orders.

Troy commenced at ten o'clock local time in the morning of Tuesday 19 June. The plan called for the ANA and BG forces to push the Taliban out of the western part of the district, while Rozi Khan and his make shift militia would clear the east side. All were prepared for fierce fighting and heavy casualties, and it was expected that it would take 48 hours to achieve the operation's aims. Things turned out quite different; the key objectives were reached within three and a half hours, and at the end of the day all positions were consolidated with only sporadic fighting. The Taliban had collapsed during the four-day battle as it had suffered many casualties including its main commanders, Mullah Mutalib and Mullah Ismael.

This success, however, came at a high price for Chora's civil population that endured an estimated 50 to 80 casualties and between 50 and 100 wounded. Reports of the Afghan Government, Human Rights watch, the United Nations, and ISAF itself have indicated that the Taliban executed people and used them as human shields.¹⁴⁹ Reportedly many were killed when they were trapped in their own houses that were bombed because those buildings were also being used by the insurgents.

Yet, the population's attitude towards the TFU was generally positive. Immediately after the battle Van Griensven and Governor Munib flew to the district and convened a *shura* in which the latter immediately started to pay the traditional compensation fees for casualties to the families of the deceased (for which purpose a budget had been allocated by the Ministry of

146 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272*, Guus de Koster, 'The use of air power in Uruzgan', *Mission Uruzgan, Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, ed. Beerres, R., Van der Meulen, J., Soeters, J., Vogelaar, A. (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2012), 127, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 159-160, Anonymous, 'Door het oog van de naald', 80-82, colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

147 Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 269-271, colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007.

148 On Troy and its immediate aftermath see, among others, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 108-109, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 160-164, Anonymous, 'Door het oog van de naald', 3D, *de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W., 79-82, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272*, Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency', 41, colonel Hans van Griensven, lieutenant-colonel Rob Querido, and others, *Battle of Chora briefing*, Breda, 5 December 2007.

149 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272*, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 163-164, Peter Olsthoorn, Desirée Verweij, 'Military ethics and Afghanistan', *Mission Uruzgan, Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, ed. Beerres, R., Van der Meulen, J., Soeters, J., Vogelaar, A. (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2012), 83-85, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

Development Cooperation).¹⁵⁰ Rozi Khan told Querido that he had never expected the Dutch to stay, fight, and overcome.¹⁵¹ The battle had not only demonstrated TFU's commitment to the local population in Chora, but also in Uruzgan as a whole. Moreover, the decisive outcome ended the influence of the Taliban in Chora and therefore the balance of power started shifting towards a new equilibrium. As people were quickly picking up old feuds, they were also looking to the main victors, the TFU, to settle the situation.¹⁵² Furthermore the alliance with Barakzai leader Rozi Khan had brought the Dutch an ally with a powerful position in the mesh constituting Uruzgan's political marketplace. Thus, the battle of Chora ended in a clear victory for the TFU; not only in the traditional military sense, but also with regard to its credibility *vis-à-vis* Uruzgan's population and as an increase of TFU influence over the population. The question for now was how to consolidate and exploit this to the benefit of the TFU campaign.

9.3.2 The battle's aftermath

During the first year of the TFU campaign the task force had sought to establish and exploit collaborative relationships with local leaders through the allocation of development projects or the ANAP program. While this approach certainly had gained the Dutch some influence, it suffered from serious constraints; especially the limited budget for CIMIC actions within the ADZs restricted the PRTs leverage over the leaders of the major part of Uruzgan's population. While PRT-1 commander Tak had already stated this, PRT-3 commander Van der Voet repeatedly echoed his discontent with these lacking tools.¹⁵³ Moreover, as in a year time the military's bureaucratic organization had established a time-consuming system of tight financial control that required any project proposal to be signed by multiple TFU staff officers -this in contrast to the much larger 'Track 2' budget that was largely spent without stringent verification-, the situation had become almost impracticable.¹⁵⁴ Van der Voet rightly observed that with such a system it would be impossible to curtail the spoiling influence of Jan Mohammed who not only had built an extensive network, but also owned a substantial amount of agricultural land and reportedly held a vast share in Uruzgan's illicit economy. The

¹⁵⁰ Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 229-230, interview with colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010, PRT-3, *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3*.

¹⁵¹ Interview with colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010.

¹⁵² Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency', 41.

¹⁵³ Interview with colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, PRT-3, *Evaluatie PRT 3 ISAF TFU 2 en 3*. The situation was worst in Deh Rawud, where the PRT mission team had to wait for more than three months to get its approvals. See Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 159-161.

¹⁵⁴ See also Jasper Kremers, 'Aanbesteden en Civiel-Militaire Interactie, Het aanbesteden van Civiel-Militaire projecten in de context van expeditionair militair optreden' (Thesis, University of Twente, 2009), 53-54, Stijn de Jong, 'The comprehensive approach to counterinsurgency: opportunity for opportunism?!' (Thesis, Utrecht University, 2013), 49-52. The control process of development activities was largely outsourced to Afghan NGOs operating under auspices of the Dutch embassy in Kabul. The effectiveness of this verification, however, was questionable at best. For a detailed description of this process see Joeri Boom, 'Wie controleert de lokale organisaties?', *Internationale Samenwerking 2008:7*, 34-37.

battle of Chora, however, functioned as a turning point; it paved the way towards a durable connection between the TFU and Jan Mohammed's rivals Rozi Khan and Abdul Khaleq's of the Barakzai/Achekzai power block. Furthermore, if the hypothesis of the Dutch was right they had also prevented an increase of Jan Mohammed's influence by defeating the Taliban and obstructing Matiullah's appointment as provincial chief of police. It has to be mentioned at this place that while the correctness of this hypothesis could not be definitely proven, locally well-connected sources have indicated that there is enough supporting evidence to render it likely.¹⁵⁵ All in all, the Dutch fighting forces, which were deployed as part of a population-centric plan to protect Chora in cooperation with local allies, had brought the TFU an amount of leverage exceeding the results achieved by the limited tools of influence previously employed.

The use of local allies and their militias was a bold move as it seemingly violated the Dutch government's principle not to cooperate with such entities. TFU-2 commander Van Griensven who had to deal with his limited resources as well as the lack of support from the Afghan government, however, deemed this measure necessary and thought it in accordance with the Afghan culture in which any important leader maintained some kind of fighting force.¹⁵⁶ The commander on the ground received full support from the political honchos in The Hague as a letter to parliament clarified that Rozi Khan's 'militia' -the actual term itself is used- was to be considered as an *ad hoc* unorganized self-defense force of 'home guards' operating according to 'ancient customs in (southern) Afghanistan'.¹⁵⁷ While it was perfectly understandable that Chora's leaders had mobilized their 'home guards', they were not part of the ISAF chain of command, and therefore parliament was informed that there was no structural cooperation between (Dutch) ISAF troops and militias. Due to the 'exceptional situation', however, the TFU troops had advised the local authorities in Chora to supply the civilians of the 'home guards' with ammunition -it might be remembered here that company commander Hamers had to force a reluctant district chief Obaidullah to do so. In other words, the TFU's decision to use local militias was justified by the circumstances in Chora, but it had been operating on the brink of what was politically acceptable. If the task force was to consolidate and exploit the alliance with Rozi Khan, it had to search for options to formalize his position. Therefore it was quickly decided to empower him through an official appointment in the local government.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 173, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 190-191, Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 119. Dam would later explicitly state that Jan Mohammed was the mastermind behind the 2007 attack on Chora. See Bette Dam, 'Wie zijn de Taliban?', *Vrij Nederland* 15 February 2010, available through <http://www.vn.nl/Meer-dossiers/Afghanistan/Artikel-Afghanistan/Wie-zijn-de-taliban.htm>.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 272.

¹⁵⁸ Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010.

Consequently, Rozi Khan was named provisional district chief of Chora (which would be followed by his definite appointment after elections on June 8, 2008).¹⁵⁹ Institutionalizing fighters as part of the ANAP and allocation of development projects further stabilized the situation in Chora. This approach not only strengthened the ties between the TFU and Uruzgan's most important Barakzai leader, it also gave renewed impetus to the Barakzai and Achekzai power block which now held influential positions in the local as well as the national government. The alliance with this faction, that represented Uruzgan's major societal segment, greatly augmented the TFU's influence over the population. Combined with the task force's enhanced credibility this altering of the provincial balance of power led to a tremendous increase of relationships with local leaders; whereas the PRT had established contact with some 36 local leaders at the beginning of the year, there were 140 contact persons after the summer.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the TFU certainly succeeded in consolidating the results of the battle of Chora.

The question that remained was whether or not the TFU would be able to further exploit this beneficial situation. Not only was there an upcoming rotation of both the TFU staff (September) as well as the PRT (October), it was also clear that Jan Mohammed's network would seek a way to neutralize the newly gained influence of its main rivals. If we stick to the hypothesis of the second Chora battle as an attempt of Jan Mohammed to augment his influence, we can state that the former governor was severely struck by the resulting backfire. Jan Mohammed now faced a Barakzai and Achekzai faction that was cooperating with the TFU. Additionally, one of his long-time associates, Haji Obaidullah, lost his influence when he was replaced as Chora's district chief. This required immediate counter-measures. The attitude of Governor Munib was illustrative in this regard. By now TFU decision makers assessed Munib to be under influence of Karzai -and thus of Jan Mohammed- as he was desperately seeking a position outside Uruzgan, where he had been increasingly caught between Kabul and a local society that had remained to see him as an outsider.¹⁶¹ This not only explained his passive and even reluctant attitude during the battle of Chora and its prelude, it also clarified the total lack of zeal he was demonstrating in the aftermath of the battle that offered him an excellent opportunity to improve his position as provincial governor. The relationship between Munib and Van Griensven quickly soured, and the governor did not show up at the latter's change of command ceremony. This brings us to the point first mentioned; would the new TFU-3 staff continue the population-centric approach adopted by their predecessors, and would this enable PRT-4 to continue the exploitation of the effects of the battle for Chora district?

159 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272*. Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 191, Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency', 42.

160 Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 178.

161 Interviews with anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010, colonel Hans van Griensven, commander TFU-2, The Hague, 28 January 2010. Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 177.

The TFU-3 staff led by colonel Nico Geerts assumed command on 1 August 2007.¹⁶² During its pre-deployment training the focus had been on kinetic operations, which is hardly surprising considering the recent heavy fighting in Chora as well as the fact that this remained the core business of the army. Geerts regarded an understanding of the local population important, as it was part of the TFU's operational environment, but he thought the actual engagement of local partners to be the terrain of the specialists from the PRT. Consequently, the only members of the TFU staff that were actually involved in (the planning of) non-kinetic operations were its POLAD and officers of its CIMIC section. The TFU staff would typically define a geographical centre of gravity, which then was translated by the PRT staff into a population-centric approach for that specific area.¹⁶³ This gave the PRT enormous latitude to determine the TFU's policy *vis-à-vis* the local population. Thus, while the TFU staff itself emphasized kinetic operations, a continuation of the adopted population-centric course was guaranteed by totally delegating these tasks to the PRT.

Of course, Van Griensven's embrace of a population-centric approach for the task force as a whole conforms more to the concepts of counterinsurgency warfare, but, as we will see below, Geerts' choice fitted the circumstances challenging the incoming TFU staff upon its deployment. Moreover, we should not forget that the term counterinsurgency was still avoided at the political level in The Hague -despite the experiences of the battle of Chora-, and that the body of knowledge related to this campaign theme was not as widespread as it would become during the next years; *FM 3-24*, for instance, at that time was an unfamiliar doctrine to most Dutch staff officers.¹⁶⁴ The TFU-3 staff understood that the exploitation of the newly gained influence in Chora district itself as well as in the still troubled Deh Rafshan area of northern Tirin Kot district would require the TFU to deal with the Baluchi valley, an enduring hotbed of Taliban activity. Therefore the TFU staff started to plan for a massive clearing operation in the valley. Operation *Spin Ghar* took place between 25 October and 9 November 2007 and aimed at reducing the pressure that the Taliban in the Baluchi exerted on the adjacent regions of the TFU's ink spot.¹⁶⁵ *Spin Ghar* never intended to establish a permanent presence in the valley -there were simply no means to achieve this-, which was considered a kill zone. Moreover, the return of the Taliban to the valley was anticipated -which actually happened within two months- as at the operation's end new posts were established to guard its entrances at both the southern (Deh Rafshan) and northern (Chora) ends. This illustrates how a predominantly kinetic operation was used to create a more permissive environment for the engagement of the local population in adjacent areas.

¹⁶² Interview with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010, Tjip Prins (ed.), *"Niets is wat het lijkt"*, *Herinneringsboek TFU-3* (Den Haag, 2008), 3.

¹⁶³ Interview with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010.

¹⁶⁵ On *Spin Ghar*, see, among others, George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, 'The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009', 439-442, Anonymous, 'Operatie Spin Ghar', 3D, *de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W. (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 94-95.

Any aspect of such an engagement, from planning to execution and evaluation, was left to the PRT. This had allowed PRT-3 to continue its consolidation and exploitation of the battle of Chora with local leaders for the remainder of its deployment that ended on 1 October. After a thorough two and a half week HOTO period PRT-4 under command of lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk took over and continued the course adopted by its predecessors.¹⁶⁶ The new role of the PRT meant that Rietdijk and his staff were leading the TFU's population-centric effort, an opportunity they seized to synchronize and institutionalize what they considered the two most crucial of its aspects. First Rietdijk and his intelligence officer, captain Rob Rulkens, developed and implemented a Key Leader Engagement Plan (KLEP).¹⁶⁷ This plan sought to synchronize (through a so-called contacts matrix) all engagements of the 50 most important local leaders by military and civilian TFU personnel as well as to coordinate with the American and Australian coalition partners as much as possible. Although the latter aspect remained a huge challenge as different views on Jan Mohammed's network (between the Dutch on one side and the Americans and Australians on the other) would remain the norm during the entire TFU campaign, the KLEP was a huge leap forward within the TFU itself. All relevant key leaders were subjected to an engagement profile that not only contained an objective to be reached through the engagement of a specific individual, but also provided an insight on which other members of the task force were dealing with a key leader. However, a fundamental flaw that could not be overcome was the separation between the 'Track 2' program and the regular CIMIC activities. Consequently 'Track 2' remained largely unsynchronized with the wider TFU effort and the asymmetry in budgets between both programs lingered in place, which triggered Rietdijk to add to the complaints filed by his predecessors.¹⁶⁸

A second structural weakness tackled by PRT-4's standardization drive concerned the intelligence obtained from key leaders.¹⁶⁹ PRT-4, for instance, was totally unaware of the engagement of Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan by BG-1 and PRT-1, as no structured record on such actions had been kept. Now the PRT's intelligence section under Rulkens started to feed all intelligence in the TFU's database, which could be accessed by all relevant personnel. This also included the allocation of a specific personal identification number to each key leader. Albeit this system was heavy dependent on the correct submission and collation of

166 Interviews with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008, captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010, see also anonymous PRT-3 staff officer, Wezep, 21 September 2009, colonel Gino van der Voet, commander PRT-3, The Hague, 9 March 2010.

167 Interviews with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008, captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010, Hans van Dalen, 'Key Leader Engagement, Influence by Proxy' (Thesis, Netherlands Armed Forces Staff College, 2010), 60. See also interview with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, by Hans van Dalen, The Hague, 6 January 2009.

168 Wilfred Rietdijk, 'De 'comprehensive approach' in Uruzgan, Schaken op vier borden tegelijk', *Militaire Spectator* 177:9 (2008), 485, Marloes de Koning, 'Trage opbouw verspilt militair succes in Uruzgan', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 12 January 2008.

169 Interviews with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008, captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010. See also interview with colonel Gerard Koot, commander PRT-2, Utrecht, 19 December 2009.

reports, it was again a huge improvement, and guaranteed a transfer of knowledge to future rotations.

With regard to the actual engagement of key leaders PRT-4 certainly succeeded in keeping up the course adopted by its predecessors. In Chora district an attempt by Jan Mohammed to regain his influence was successfully defied when former district chief Obaidullah suddenly showed up with a letter of appointment signed by Karzai and commander Akhtar Mohammed sent armed fighters to support this claim.¹⁷⁰ The majority of the local population revolted with back up from the Dutch who refused to accept Obaidullah's return and supported Rozi Khan, which led to the withdrawal of the former. In the wake of this incident the TFU further augmented its position by providing a reach-out to Jan Mohammed's local ally Commander Akhtar Mohammed. Furthermore empowering Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan, who was deliberately given a leading role as the prime distributor of fertilizer and corn on the east bank of the Deh Rafshan enhanced the position in this area.¹⁷¹ Mohammed Nabi's subsequent increase of power led to a significant improvement of the local security situation as the number of violent attacks sharply decreased.

At the provincial level the ineffective Munib was replaced as part of a nation-wide move to make governmental institutions at the grassroots level less susceptible to corruption and influence from outside the Afghan government. Henceforth the so-called Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG, on which we will elaborate in the next chapter) would manage the appointment of governmental officials in Afghanistan's provinces. For Uruzgan this meant that Asadullah Hamdam, an outsider and Ghilzai Pashtun of the Wardak sub-tribe who had been living in London for years, was installed as new governor.¹⁷² PRT-4 commander Rietdijk considered it his personal task to nurture and guide the new governor, and therefore arranged an introduction program in Uruzgan's districts in which Hamdam was brought into contact with the local key leaders. Needless to say this gave the Dutch some leverage over the new head of the provincial government. Additionally a new chief of police, Juma Gul Hemat, a Babozai from Deh Rawud was installed. Although he later would turn out to be a notoriously corrupt member of Jan Mohammed's network (he reportedly even considered Jan Mohammed his father), for the time being this appointment meant that Matiullah's nomination for the job had been successfully thwarted.¹⁷³ For the moment Dutch influence in the province, thus, further increased.

170 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 173, Bette Dam, 'Wie was Rozi Khan?', *Weblog Vrede en Veiligheid* (Hans de Vreij), 19 September 2008, accessible via <http://hansdevreij.com/2008/09/19/wie-was-rozi-khan/>, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 191, personal documents from captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, obtained 9 February 2010, interview with captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010.

171 Interview with captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010.

172 Interviews with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010, lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008, captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010. See also Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 272. On the IDLG see also Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 126, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 197, David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains*, 156.

173 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 27.

Although most of the credit for this success lies with the PRT, at least a part of it should go to Geerts and his staff as they gradually realized that a purely kinetic focus would not suffice.¹⁷⁴ This started when they learned that the primary root cause of violent contention in Uruzgan was not the Taliban-government contradiction, but mostly determined by the tribally inspired rivalry between Jan Mohammed and his opponents, in which an alliance with the Taliban offered local leaders an opportunity to enhance their position -they had been unaware of this. This insight triggered the staff to adopt the motto 'nothing is what it seems to be'.¹⁷⁵ Whereas the Dutch could fight the Taliban, they could not fight the factional conflict in Uruzgan, and therefore it was most important to engage the local population in order to remove the source of the local conflict. It should also be mentioned that by this time it was understood that historical ties between many local leaders and important Taliban commanders hampered the Taliban's counter-collaboration effort in Uruzgan.¹⁷⁶ Targeted killings by the insurgents would only take place after repeated warnings, or could be averted through negotiations, and the most important local leaders were almost invulnerable to such attempts, which seriously limited Taliban influence. While Geerts was fully aware of the Dutch position to win the population by avoiding any collaboration with Jan Mohammed and Matiullah, he was astonished to learn that the Americans and Australians cooperated with these men.¹⁷⁷ As the TFU-3 commander felt he held insufficient influence over his allies to stop their undermining activities, he chose for the non-kinetic attack as his best option. In consultation with the POLAD he asked The Hague for permission to conduct low profile talks with Jan Mohammed. Geerts was given permission to do so on the condition that he himself would not attend the meetings. Consequently, the POLAD and PRT-4 commander Rietdijk held two meetings with Jan Mohammed in November and December 2007. This meant that the TFU not only had re-established the Barakzai and Achekzai power-block and empowered the Ghilzai community through Mohammed Nabi, but also started a reach out to the Popalzai network; the Dutch task force was now establishing ties with all important factions in the province.

The PRT staff, however, deemed any public association with Jan Mohammed and his network undesirable, as it would alienate the allies of other factions who all considered the former governor and his entourage their mutual enemy.¹⁷⁸ A cunning solution was found by Geerts who would request the US Special Forces for Matiullah's -the main local agent of Jan Mohammed's network- assistance in areas where he deemed this possible without aggrrieving the populace (predominantly the Kandahar-Tirin Kot highway).¹⁷⁹ In doing so the

174 Interview with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010.

175 This was also the title given to TFU-3's commemorative book. See Tjip Prins (ed.), "*Niets is wat het lijkt*", *Herinneringsboek TFU-3*.

176 Interview with captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010, see also Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 171-173.

177 Interview with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010.

178 Interviews with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008, captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010.

179 Interview with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010.

TFU commander also tried to prevent his coalition partners from using Matiullah in areas where this would cause severe problems. This, however, would prove to be an illusion as the Americans, for instance, deployed Matiullah in Deh Rawud district after the Taliban overran it in the fall of 2007, which eventually culminated in a brutal clearing action involving hundreds of Matiullah's men in the beginning of 2008.¹⁸⁰ Albeit it is impossible to prove causality with Geerts' indirect engagement, Matiullah returned to participate in the provincial security council at the end of November 2007.¹⁸¹ The enhanced relationship with the TFU was further stressed when Matiullah showed up to attend Geerts change of command ceremony in January 2008, which actually was the first time both men talked to each other.

Thus, the first two years of the TFU campaign ended with a remarkable low level rapprochement between Jan Mohammed's Popalzai network and the Dutch who had not only requested the former governor's removal, but also were actively empowering his main opponents of the Barakzai and Achekzai as well as the Ghilzai. Equally remarkable was that TFU-3 commander Geerts, who at first considered such activities not his turf, had initiated this precarious diplomatic balancing act. Even more important was that in the meantime the Dutch government had announced its decision to extend the mission until 1 August 2010.¹⁸² The TFU-3 staff now found itself initiating the design of an improved campaign plan, the so-called Focal Paper, which was optimized and completed by TFU-4, the first unit that could truly benefit from the insights gained as a result of the battle of Chora (we will discuss this in the next chapter). Commander Geerts received orders from Prime Minister Balkenende to conduct talks with President Karzai to urge the Afghan government to step up its effort in Uruzgan.¹⁸³ In yet another twist of fate the initially purely military-focused Geerts ended his term as TFU commander conducting a direct non-kinetic engagement with Afghanistan's highest authorities.

9.4 Conclusion

By the end of 2007 the TFU was still far from reaching the Master Plan's -unrealistic- objective of establishing control in all of Uruzgan's population centres within two years. The result thus far was that the Dutch task force had established a foothold in Uruzgan; the TFU kept ties with the province's dominant local power-holders representing the bulk of the population, including societal segments that were previously marginalized by Jan Mohammed Khan and his network. Moreover, TFU-3 had also carefully approached the latter faction through low

¹⁸⁰ On the incident in Deh Rawud see, among others, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 196, PRT4, 'Deh Rawod' (Unclassified Report, Tirin Kot, 22 February 2008).

¹⁸¹ Interviews with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010, captain Rob Rulkens, S-2 PRT-4, Dordrecht, 9 February 2010.

¹⁸² Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 297.

¹⁸³ Interview with colonel Nico Geerts, commander TFU-3, Amersfoort, 9 February 2010.

profile talks and indirect engagement. Additionally the PRT held some leverage over newly appointed Governor Hamdam. This all suggests that the Dutch soldiers were aiming for the construction of a wide basis to serve as the underpinning for definitively establishing and consolidating control in Uruzgan. For the moment, however, the level of control was far from sufficient; it was incipient at best. In Tirin Kot district -traditionally most closely connected to the provincial government- huge areas such as the west bank of the Deh Rafshan, the Baluchi valley, and Mirabad, remained under influence of the Taliban, while the effects of the engagement and reconciliation programs aimed at the Tokhi sub-tribes were not yet fully clear. As a result of Taliban action control in Deh Rawud district was limited to the district's centre in the vicinity of the Dutch base, a situation that would only change in the beginning of 2008. Most positive were the results in Chora district where Taliban influence had been neutralized after the 2007 battle and the local population supported acting district chief Rozi Khan, who was empowered by the TFU. Furthermore, the TFU's actions in this district wielded a strong impact at the provincial political marketplace as they had re-established the influential position of the Barakzai/Achekzai power block. Yet, there remained much to be done to obtain a level control sufficiently acceptable to be transferred to the Afghan authorities. The next chapter will deal with the way the TFU, which had been committed for two more years, sought to expand its control over Uruzgan's fragmented society. But first we will conclude this chapter with a critical analysis of the way the Dutch task force had established a foothold during the first years of its campaign.

The most striking observation on this initial period concerns the failure of the mission's rationale -as ordered by the political decision makers in The Hague- to materialize in a coherent and continuous comprehensive strategy. Whereas all efforts including the diplomatic prelude, DTF deployment and the various rotations of the TFU itself subscribed to the idea of 'augmenting the local population's support for the Afghan authorities, while diminishing support for the Taliban', there were considerable differences and hiatuses in practicing this approach.¹⁸⁴ It started with the removal of Jan Mohammed as a consequence of high level diplomacy. There is no doubt that this move was pivotal for any attempt to enhance the connection between the government and Uruzgan's population; Jan Mohammed's policy was a root cause for the insurgency in Uruzgan. Yet, there was no proper follow-up of this move as there was no effort to curtail his remaining influence in the province. Moreover, the position of Rozi Khan, one of the leading figures of the counter-faction was severely weakened when he was sacked as provincial chief of police due to his functional association with Jan Mohammed. Simultaneously, AHP chief Matiullah Khan, a direct relative of the former governor, was left untouched by the diplomatic offensive. Consequently, new Governor Munib faced a situation in which his predecessor still held much influence in the province, while the most important opposition to this influence was driven away from the local government. Additionally not much was done to empower Munib's position.

¹⁸⁴ Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 193.

The deployment of the DTF offered the Dutch a first chance to start exploiting Jan Mohammed's removal through locally present Dutch forces. In addition to the removal itself, the decision to focus on Tirin Kot and Deh Rawud, Uruzgan's major population centres, suggested a population-centric philosophy underlying Dutch operations. Albeit that it was clear that the DTF's main effort was to build two operating bases and accompanying infrastructure for the commencement of TFU operations, it was also an excellent opportunity to shape the operational environment as well as to enhance the understanding of the circumstances in Uruzgan. Yet, the shaping activities, predominantly conducted by the Special Forces of the Viper detachment, mainly aimed at identifying and mopping up Taliban hotbeds. While for the moment this enemy-centric approach greatly enhanced security and it can be perfectly understood from a traditional military point of view, it was of little support for exploiting the removal of Jan Mohammed. On contrary, the cooperation with US Special Forces, who made extensively use of Matiullah's AHP, openly associated the Dutch with the Popalzai-dominated network of the former governor. The population-centric effort, however, received an unexpected boost in the final days prior to the start of the TFU campaign when Governor Munib took the initiative to remove corrupt government officials linked to Jan Mohammed and simultaneously started to reach out to the previously marginalized sub-tribes of the Ghilzai confederation. Seemingly Munib felt confident to act as a consequence of support from Kabul. The enhancement of the local security situation that had resulted from the shaping operations, however, was also instrumental, as it had created a permissive environment for Munib to conduct talks with tribal leaders from the Deh Rafshan, Baluchi, and Mirabad areas. Yet, overall the DTF period was marked by the absence of a deliberate strategy for exploiting the removal of Jan Mohammed or otherwise shaping the population's attitude towards the forthcoming TFU mission.

With regard to intelligence the shaping actions during the DTF period had delivered great information on location and strength of the locally operating Taliban as well as on operating conditions such a terrain and weather. However, the understanding of Uruzgan's highly complicated fragmented society was far from complete when the TFU campaign started at 1 August 2006. Albeit the TFU's sub-units, BG-1 and PRT-1 had pushed forward their intelligence officers in order to enhance their information position, the gathered knowledge was insufficient. Whereas the POLAD of the US PRT provided considerable information on the local population to these Dutch pioneers, there remained much to learn, as crucial intelligence had not been shared. Furthermore, US forces in Uruzgan adhered to a false, simplified image of the Taliban as a tribal insurgency rooted in the Ghilzai confederation. The Dutch intelligence position was greatly augmented by the civil assessment and an underlying TLO report that contained fine-grained intelligence on Uruzgan's society and its political marketplace. This information, however, was only made available to the TFU in August 2006 when its mission had already started -despite the fact that the TLO report was submitted to the Dutch embassy in July. The civil assessment, thus, simply came too late for

TFU-1, which commenced its campaign and had to design its plans with a less than complete understanding of Uruzgan's complicated operational environment.

Due to the late arrival of the civil assessment, the definite version of the TFU's campaign plan, the Master Plan, was only completed when the mission was two months underway. In combination with an unfamiliarity concerning the task force's organization and its exact (division of) tasks this gave sub-units considerable latitude to pioneer their own approach. Especially BG-1, which already had been preparing for population-centric stabilization and counterinsurgency missions prior to its Uruzgan assignment, seized this opportunity to implement ideas obtained from studying (classical) counterinsurgency. The BG realized that it possessed rather limited capabilities for its main mission, the advance of security, and therefore started to engage the local population in order to mobilize a counter-organization against the Taliban. This established some of the first contacts between the TFU and local leaders, whose militias were to be institutionalized as ANAP forces. Mohammed Nabi Khan Tokhi was the most prominent figure reached through these first engagements, which corresponded with Munib's effort to connect the Ghilzai with the provincial government. Additionally Matiullah Khan was engaged informally to maintain contact with this highly influential actor, without suggesting any alliance with the Dutch forces. Thus, the BG's initiative finally brought some follow-up to the removal of Jan Mohammed, and when it was decided that the PRT would be leading in the engagement of local power-holders, this course was continued. During this time there even was a tacit agreement with Matiullah that he would not deploy his fighters in the Ghilzai areas. The faltering understanding of Uruzgan's complicated societal landscape, however, soon revealed itself once again when the TFU believed Mohammed Nabi to hold sufficient influence to act as a lever for enhancing control in the troubled areas of northern Tirin Kot district up to Chora. While the Dutch soldiers quickly realized that their assumption was wrong, the commitment of Dutch Special Forces to rescue Mohammed Nabi out of an ambush, was a determined demonstration of the fact that the TFU would protect its local allies. In the end the task force's situational awareness -and especially that of the PRT- finally increased when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dispatched a dedicated tribal advisor, the OSTAD, to assist in the implementation of the civil assessment.

While the OSTAD's knowledge was of crucial importance for obtaining an insight in the local dynamics, his appointment also led to a fundamental flaw that would stick for the entire TFU-campaign. Together with the POLAD and OSAD, the tribal advisor deemed it necessary to distinguish between 'Track 1' regular TFU and governmental development activities, and 'Track 2' covert development activities. The latter mostly took place outside the ADZs and were not synchronized with the TFU's effort. This rendered the PRTs CIMIC actions the most important development tool to be used for increasing the task force's leverage, while the bulk of the allocated money for development in Uruzgan was spent outside TFU channels. The immediate impact of the OSTAD, however, was overtly positive; the overall understanding of the conflict rapidly increased and with his assistance PRT-2, which also

benefited from the completed civil assessment, developed a concept for understanding the local conflict as multilayered, with the current government-Taliban dichotomy being the result of other conflicts that had originated either in the tribal sphere, or were related to power struggles between dominant leaders, while others even went back to the *mujahideen* era. This also provided an insight in the position of Governor Munib, who had arrived as an outsider to Uruzgan's politics, and now was caught in a precious balancing act involving the local level as well as Kabul.

Thus, when TFU-1 handed over to TFU-2 it had provided a follow-up to the removal of Jan Mohammed by supporting the reach out to the Ghilzai, curtailing Matiullah's influence and empowering Munib. The only opposition to this approach had come from US Special Forces, who were heavily leaning on Matiullah -another constant for the remainder of the campaign. TFU-1's population centric-approach, however, was not a consequence of a deliberate strategy; it had emerged during a process in which the TFU staff as well as its subordinate units were struggling with the adaptation to their exact roles, tasks, and organization. TFU-2, which benefitted from the insights of its predecessors, intentionally embraced a population-centric approach in which the PRT was leading. By now Dutch soldiers not only had developed a thorough understanding of Uruzgan's society, they were also using their knowledge for interfering in it. The reconciliation program that was initiated to enhance control by connecting with both sides of the heavy divided Tokhi sub-tribe in the Deh Rafshan area provides an excellent example. A rapid deterioration of the situation in Chora, however, forced TFU-3 to concentrate its efforts on this district, for which a comprehensive plan was designed involving the BG as well as non-kinetic TFU assets with the purpose to establish ties with local leaders and enhance the locally operating ANSF. While this plan failed to prevent a Taliban attack, it provided the basis for repelling the assaulters by a combined operation of ISAF forces, local militias (or 'civil defence guards' to legitimize their views with regard to the TFU's political caveats), and ANSF. TFU-2, thus, demonstrated the Dutch commitment to the local population as well as its will to cooperate with local leaders.

Even more important was that the Dutch soldiers had formulated a hypothesis in which the mounting pressure in Chora was assumed to be an attempt by Jan Mohammed to demonstrate his influence and enforce the appointment of Matiullah as provincial chief of police. This illustrates a thorough awareness of the local political environment as well as concurrence with the earlier policy that had led to the removal of Jan Mohammed. Before the battle of Chora contacts with the two main leaders of Uruzgan's most powerful anti-Jan Mohammed faction, the Barakzai/Achekzai power block, had been (carefully) established. The battle itself, however, resulted in the rising of its power as both Abdul Khaleq (mostly through his brother Malem Sadiq) and Rozi Khan became key allies of the TFU. While the former already held formal influence through his position as a member of parliament, the latter was empowered as Chora's new district chief. Thus, Jan Mohammed's power was curtailed as the position of his main rivals increased, and simultaneously Matiullah's appointment as chief of police was being prevented. Moreover, it was also realized that

the ineffective Munib had come under increased influence of Kabul -and therefore of Jan Mohammed- and the TFU started acting in accordance with this insight.

Whereas TFU-2 had intentionally opted for a population-centric approach, TFU-3 focused on kinetic operations in order to consolidate the results of the battle for Chora district. While an understanding of the societal dynamics was considered important as part of the analysis of the environment in which the enemy had to be fought, the actual engagement of the people was considered the exclusive domain of the PRT. As their enemy-centric focus occupied the TFU staff and BG, and operation *Spin Ghar* was launched to relieve Taliban pressure on Chora and the Deh Rafshan area, the PRT enjoyed enormous latitude to continue the population-centric course adopted by its predecessors. PRT-4 seized this opportunity to introduce the KLEP, a program that synchronized the engagement of Uruzgan's 50 most important local leaders by TFU assets (except for 'Track 2'). Additionally it provided a tool for coordinating engagements with coalition partners. Another structural weakness tackled by this PRT was the fact that there was no systematical track record of previous engagements and intelligence provided by local leaders. Therefore a database was launched in which this information was made available to all relevant actors and conserved for future rotations. Furthermore the PRT continued the exploitation of the battle of Chora as it strengthened the ties with the Barakzai/Achekzai faction and immediately started to mentor newly appointed Governor Hamdam, an independent outsider installed by the IDLG. Additionally the Ghilzai were actively engaged by enhancing the position of Mohammed Nabi Khan. Thus, it was the PRT that successfully continued the population-centric strategy embraced by TFU-2.

The TFU-3 staff, however, also learned that its enemy-centric focus was not enough. Remarkably, the staff gradually obtained the insight that the conflict in Uruzgan was largely inspired by the rivalry between Jan Mohammed's network and the various other factions -an insight TFU-2 already possessed upon its deployment. As the TFU-3 commander learned that US and Australian forces were actively cooperating with Jan Mohammed and Matiullah, he decided (with back up from The Hague) that the TFU also should carefully approach those actors in order to gain some leverage that would serve to contain their spoiling influence. This resulted in low level talks with Jan Mohammed and indirect engagement of Matiullah through US forces. Although there is no proof of causality, Matiullah soon again started to show up for the provincial security meeting, which he had increasingly ignored under the Dutch. The hope to prevent Matiullah's fighters from launching actions in areas where they had a bad reputation, however, quickly faded when his men were involved in a brutal action in Deh Rawud, which was overran by the Taliban. Yet, it is undeniable that at the beginning of 2008 the Dutch forces actively cooperated with the most important rivals of Jan Mohammed, a strategy for which the underpinning was provided by the former governor's removal in 2006, while they also had established low profile contact with Jan Mohammed and his most important local ally.

To end this chapter we can conclude that the Dutch strategy with regard to Uruzgan's local population was far from a deliberately formulated plan, but rather a consequence of

initiatives taken by individual TFU-staff rotation and/or sub-units. While at the end of the first two years the TFU had succeeded in exploiting Jan Mohammed's removal, the level of control was still fragile as it only had effectively started to do so after the battle of Chora; the re-establishment of the Barakzai/Achekzai power block had been definitely altering the provincial balance of power in favor of those opposed to Jan Mohammed's network. This is not to trivialize the efforts before this time, especially the reach out to the Ghilzai in the Deh Rafshan was an important move as the Taliban enjoyed considerable support within those alienated communities. Eventually, however, any attempt to establish control in Uruzgan without Jan Mohammed was dependent on his most powerful and numerous rival factions, the Barakzai under Rozi Khan and Abdul Khaleq's Achekzai. While variations in the task force's strategy can be explained by the adaptation to a new task, organization, and environment, as well as the in counterinsurgency typical struggle to abandon the traditional military's enemy-centric, kinetic point of view, the differences between units are remarkable. With the benefit of hindsight we can conclude that especially TFU-3's approach, which did not continue TFU-2's successful policy (that was formulated with use of insights obtained by TFU-1 and its sub-units), sticks out. It can be largely credited to PRT-4 that the population-centric course adopted under TFU-2 was continued. Moreover, the standardization of key leader engagement as well as the intelligence gained from this process was a huge leap forward providing a basis for continuity. The question for the remainder of the TFU campaign was whether or not the Dutch task force would actually succeed to institutionalize and continue the population-centric approach that had started to shift the political situation in Uruzgan's highly fragmented societal landscape. As aforementioned, a restoration of the tribal balance, in which the Barakzai/Achekzai were given the position their power and numerical majority entitled them, was key to any attempt to control Uruzgan. If future TFU rotations could secure the collaboration of this faction and extend the cooperation with previously marginalized factions such as the Ghilzai they held a fair chance of realizing their aim of 'fostering stability and security through augmenting the local population's support for the Afghan authorities, while diminishing support for the Taliban'.¹⁸⁵

185 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 193*.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10: 2008-2010: Counterinsurgency as an underpinning for longterm stability

10.1 Introduction

The original 2006 TFU Master Plan envisioned 2008 as the year in which the task force would establish full control over Uruzgan's population. By the end of 2007, however, it had become clear that this aim was far too optimistic; thus far the TFU had nestled itself and established a foothold in the province, but even within the original ADZs control was far from sufficient. The decision to extend the mission for another two years, until August 2010, gave the Dutch soldiers time to expand their foothold and achieve a level of control sufficient to be transferred to the Afghan authorities and assisting coalition forces. This required a more realistic campaign plan founded on insights and knowledge gained during the first two years. While the soldiers in the field had learned that a population-centric counterinsurgency approach was instrumental in augmenting control, the decision makers in The Hague had prevented a full-fledged acceptance of this theme as they associated it with violent repression of an uprising, which did not concur with the framing of the mission as a 'benevolent' reconstruction mission.¹ By now, however, media coverage of the battle of Chora and the skirmishes in its aftermath (especially those in the Baluchi valley) had revealed that the reality on the ground did not correspond with this image, as Dutch soldiers regularly had to engage in fierce fights with the Taliban.² Contradistinctively, thus, kinetic actions against the enemy opened the way to the formal embracement of counterinsurgency as the TFU's campaign theme by illustrating the need for a robust population-centric approach to the Dutch public and its political leaders.

The TFU's struggle to adapt to its mission and operational environment was exemplary for the Afghan campaign at that moment. Since the completion of the ISAF expansion in 2006 various national contingents had been confronted with the challenge of establishing control over a local society while simultaneously fighting the Taliban. A pattern evolved in which ISAF forces gradually adopted counterinsurgency ideas, but lacked the resources to properly implement such methods; in counterinsurgency terms the coalition could clear, but was unable to hold, let alone build.³ Furthermore, just like with the TFU variations between

1 Early 2008 the combined experiences of the first two TFU staffs as well as those of officers who served in the staff of RC-S were captured in a concept army report that stressed the need to practice population-centric counterinsurgency and urged to adopt the right operational mindset for the implementation of this theme. We will discuss this below. Pieter Soldaat, Dirk Jan Broks, 'Concept Informatiebulletin 08/01, *Observaties over Operaties in Afghanistan*' (Draft doctrinal pamphlet, Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatiën, Amersfoort, 2008), see also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 181-182.

2 See, among others, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 171-179, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 182-184, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 169-170.

3 Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard Of Empires*, 253-255.

different rotations and commanders could be observed in the choice of the exact approach. The British task force in Helmand, for instance, first altered between different approaches that all were to a greater or lesser extent enemy-centric, which were traded for a predominantly population-centric approach late 2007.⁴ Even at ISAF headquarters remarkable differences could be observed as in 2006 the British ISAF commander general Richards embraced a classical population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, while his successor US general McNeill in February 2007 opted for a kinetic approach ‘to teach the insurgents a lesson’.⁵

With both the ISAF staff and the various national contingents seeking to adapt to the requirements of the Afghan War, the integrated approach for the country as a whole that had faltered in 2006 (see Chapter Eight) was far from being repaired by 2008; effectively every contributing nation was still fighting its own campaign. Moreover, President Karzai’s administration increasingly demonstrated signs of incompetence and corruption, which weakened support for the government among a population that was simultaneously confronted with a growing Taliban insurgency.⁶ Consequently, the security environment in Afghanistan as a whole had seriously deteriorated. While the overall ISAF campaign only regained its momentum after the 2009-2010 US surge had finally established unity of command and effort, the measures to improve governance were taken more promptly. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the IDLG had been established in 2007 to strengthen governance at the grassroots level, where the population was directly confronted with corrupt or incompetent governmental officials linked to the central administration in Kabul. This meant a first step in the change of the direction of the state-building effort. Whereas since the Bonn Agreement the emphasis had been on empowering a strong central government in Kabul, it was now felt that decentralization and bottom-up state building were most important (with additional top-down efforts) as they offered a better solution for the situation in Afghanistan with its complicated fragmented society in which personal ties with the Karzai administration had been the most important prerequisite to qualify for governmental posts.⁷ By the time of the 2008 Paris donor conference this shift in emphasis from top-down to bottom-up state building had become widely accepted by participating countries. Together with the lack of synchronization of the ISAF campaign this meant that the next years of the Afghan War would be even more characterized by national contingents focusing on the specific locales they had deployed to.

In this chapter, we will discuss the Dutch TFU campaign in Uruzgan during this period, and more specifically from 2008 until the transfer of authority to the combined US and Australian task force in August 2010. We will seek to answer the question whether the TFU succeeded in augmenting its bridgehead in Uruzgan’s human terrain, which was obtained

4 Theo Farrell, ‘Back from the Brink: British Military Adaptation, and the Struggle for Helmand, 2006-2011’, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, ed. Farrell, T., Osinga, F., Russell, J.A. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 109-113.

5 Sten Rynning, ‘ISAF and NATO: Campaign Innovation and Organizational Adaptation’, 91-92.

6 See, for instance, James A. Russell, ‘Into the Great Wadi: The United States and the War in Afghanistan’, 58, Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 125.

7 Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 125-126.

through collaboration with the Barakzai and Achekzai power block and a reach-out to previously marginalized societal segments. Although pivotal elements of the population-centric approach that had won the TFU its first successes had been standardized by the PRT, the full acceptance of such a counterinsurgency approach by the subsequent TFU rotations was a prerequisite for the successful exploitation of the foothold established during the first two years. As noted above, the media coverage of the violent actions in 2007 served to lift the ban on the embracement of counterinsurgency as the TFU's official campaign theme. The year 2008, therefore, became a crucial year in the Dutch campaign in which the adaptation to counterinsurgency operations in Uruzgan's societal landscape initiated innovations that set the standard for the remainder of the campaign. Consequently, this chapter will first discuss the conceptual and organizational changes that occurred during 2008, as well as their impact on the TFU's interaction with the local population. Next we will scrutinize the Dutch campaign in 2009 and 2010 that can be considered a full-fledged neo-classical counterinsurgency campaign as it built on the innovations of 2008. This analysis will provide an insight in the nature of control obtained by the TFU and how the Dutch sought to transfer this control to the local government (which was further nurtured by the succeeding US and Australian task force). In order to obtain an understanding of the sustainability of the results achieved at the local level in a contemporary multinational counterinsurgency campaign we will also briefly discuss the situation in Uruzgan after the end of the Dutch mission. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the way the TFU sought to augment its foothold by adapting to a neo-classical counterinsurgency campaign that sought to augment and consolidate control over a highly complicated fragmented society as well as by a discussion of the results -and their durability- of this approach. But let us now turn first to the year in which the underpinning for the remainder of the TFU campaign was forged.

10.2 2008: A year of change

Traditionally the small Dutch military has always relied on informal learning as most of its operational experiences remained unprocessed but were shared through the networks forming its tight community.⁸ Yet, as early as 2007 the army's education and training center for operations issued an official information bulletin intended as a doctrinal guideline for counterinsurgency operations.⁹ This first publication explained the conceptual dimension of neo-classical counterinsurgency and in February 2008 a draft follow-up pamphlet entitled *Observations on Operations in Afghanistan* first emerged.¹⁰ The latter report was prepared by army officers who had served in the first two TFU staffs (including the both commanders,

8 Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 181-182.

9 Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatiën, 'Informatiebulletin 07/02, *Counter Insurgency* (COIN) en de militaire bijdrage', (Doctrinal pamphlet, Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatiën, Amersfoort, 2007).

10 Pieter Soldaat, Dirk Jan Broks, 'Concept Informatiebulletin 08/01, *Observaties over Operaties in Afghanistan*'.

colonels Vleugels and Van Griensven), as well as in the staff of RC-S (including former commander major-general Van Loon). These key officers had meticulously recorded their observations on new experiences at the technical, tactical, and operational level. The most important issue emphasized in the thirty-three page bulletin, however, was the need to adapt the mindset from enemy-centric kinetic operations to non-kinetic population-centric counterinsurgency warfare. Furthermore it was stressed that the publication was not intended as a prescriptive doctrine, but rather meant to transfer useful knowledge to future rotations, while simultaneously inviting other officers to submit their experiences for the writing of a new counterinsurgency doctrine. However, for no obvious reasons this carefully prepared bulletin was never officially disseminated within the armed forces.¹¹ The traditional informal learning process, yet, guaranteed that the draft paper was distributed among future TFU staff rotations and informed pre-deployment trainings. Thus, experiences from the first two years shared within the tight community of the Dutch military provided a basis for the adaptation to population-centric counterinsurgency operations during the remainder of the TFU campaign. The question that matters now is how counterinsurgency was definitely anchored in the campaign and in which effect this resulted. Therefore this section first discusses the conceptual and organizational implementation of counterinsurgency in 2008, and subsequently turns to the situation on the ground in Uruzgan during this year.

10.2.1 Enter counterinsurgency

As we have seen in the previous chapter the design of a more realistic counterinsurgency oriented campaign plan, the so-called Focal Paper, had begun during the latter days of TFU-3. The bulk of the work on the plan as well as its implementation, however, took place during the TFU-4 rotation. Under command of colonel Richard van Harskamp, who had previously commanded the third rotation of the Dutch mission in Iraq, the Focal Paper was optimized until a definite version was presented on July 20 2008.¹² The new campaign plan demonstrated a clear awareness that the nature of the mission as well as the geographical scope had changed:

11 Eventually the authors took the initiative to publish the bulletin as two articles in the professional military magazine *Militaire Spectator* in mid 2009 (Colonel Geerts, the commander of TFU-3, and a TFU-4 staff officer now also contributed). The doctrine that was supposed to encapsulate the experiences described in the articles appeared in November 2009, but it seems that the insights from the article were largely neglected as the term counterinsurgency, for instance, is hardly mentioned in this publication. See lieutenant-colonel Pieter Soldaat e.a., 'Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (I)', *Militaire Spectator* 178:5 (2009), lieutenant-colonel Pieter Soldaat e.a., 'Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (II)', *Militaire Spectator* 178:6 (2009), Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatiën, *Land Doctrine Publicatie, Militaire Doctrine voor het Landoptreden* (Amersfoort: OTCOPn, 2009), Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 182-183.

12 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, 'Focal Paper, "Foundations For The Future"' (Unclassified policy paper, Tirin Kot, 20 July 2008), interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010. On Van Harskamp's experiences in Iraq see Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, Arthur ten Cate, *Missie in Al Muthanna, De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in Irak, 2003-2005*, 189-219.

‘TFU, as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), in co-operation with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and in co-ordination with coalition forces is to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations resulting in the expansion of the Afghan Development Zones... of Tarin Kowt, Chora and Deh Rawod [sic] in order to neutralise insurgency influence.’¹³

Thus, the TFU officially adopted counterinsurgency as its mission, and the Focal Paper explained that Dutch forces’ main task was to assist the local government in providing a stable and secure environment by maintaining and augmenting the security situation, while the soldiers would also obtain the support of the local population. Furthermore the TFU would focus on facilitating the development of governmental structures, security forces, as well as development efforts of the Afghan authorities.¹⁴ The new campaign plan combined the military’s methodology of structured backward planning for the long term with the understanding of Uruzgan’s operational environment acquired in the first two years.¹⁵ This led to the remarkable -yet realistic- insight that only in 2050 Uruzgan as a province of the new Afghan state would be sufficiently developed to provide the majority of the population with a middle-income and meet their basic needs, with the local government in full control of all development and security efforts.¹⁶ However, the extension of the TFU mission until 2010 rendered this year as the “‘beacon” on TFU’s planning horizon’, and the end state for the TFU campaign, subsequently, was to provide ‘the first step towards a viable and favourable future for Uruzgan in 2050’.¹⁷ Hence the TFU’s short-term counterinsurgency effort was to establish an underpinning for the Afghan government and its local and international partners to work towards long-term stabilization goals. This corresponds to the in neo-classical counterinsurgency campaigns typical distinction between counterinsurgency and long-term stabilization as described in Chapter Three (section 3.5).

The overall end state for 2010 was a safe and secure Uruzgan with an improved government capable of providing the local population a credible prospect of prosperity.¹⁸ This was split into three separate themes, governance, socio-economic development, and safe and secure environment, for which the end states were to be reached through a total of seven lines of effects. The Focal Paper thereby clearly echoes the influence of US counterinsurgency field manual *FM 3-24* that prescribes this methodology for counterinsurgency campaigns.¹⁹

13 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, ‘Focal Paper, “Foundations For The Future”’, 4. See also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, ‘Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands’ Task Force Uruzgan’, 169-170, Sebastiaan Rietjens, ‘Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan’, 73-74.

14 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, ‘Focal Paper, “Foundations For The Future”’, 4.

15 See also interviews with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010, lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008.

16 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, ‘Focal Paper, “Foundations For The Future”’, 7.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 4, 7-10.

19 See Department of the Army, *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, 5-3-5-17. It should be noted that at this time it was clear that the situation in Iraq was ameliorating after the 2007 surge in which *FM 3-24* was successfully implemented by American units in

The end states in all three fields were generic -and thereby realistic- as they stated that the local government post 2010 would remain dependent on a significant amount of external assistance for executing its essential tasks as well as for further development, and security tasks. However, with regard to the latter it was explicitly stated that the people's perception at the end of the TFU mission should be that the ANSF were capable of securing Uruzgan's three main population centres with coalition forces only operating in their support.²⁰ Yet, even this formulation leaves a lot of latitude, as perception is difficult -if not impossible- to measure and the amount of external support could be adjusted to the actual need at the end of the TFU campaign.

Another important feature of the Focal Paper was that it concentrated the TFU's efforts on Tirin Kot, Deh Rawud, and Chora districts exclusively -in contrast to the rather ambitious 2006 Master Plan that envisioned an expansion of the task force throughout the province. The three districts as well as the areas connecting them were divided in seventeen so-called Focal Areas that allowed a systematical event-driven -i.e. following the situation on the ground- consolidation and expansion of the TFU ink spot; as soon as the security situation in a Focal Area would be sufficiently stable, the task force could shift its attention to the next.²¹ A Focal Area was considered 'ready' as the local situation had demonstrated enough progress in the fields of governance and socio-economic development, and its security was transferred to the ANSF. While this approach meant a huge leap forward in terms of realistic objectives for the expansion of TFU and local government control, its design contained a fundamental flaw as the borders of the Focal Areas were primarily dictated by Uruzgan's challenging terrain. Although the PRT had been consulted with regard to the disposition of communities and tribal distribution, geographic features -traditionally used to divide the battle space in a military operation- still prevailed over societal borders.²² Consequently the borders of the Focal Areas sometimes cut through an area in which an interconnected community was living. Nevertheless, all in all the Focal Paper was a proper population-centric counterinsurgency campaign plan that provided realistic guidelines and objectives for TFU operations until the end of the mission in 2010. Furthermore, the problem with the borders of the Focal Areas would be repaired as a consequence of the implementation of this approach, which we will discuss below.

In addition to these conceptual changes, the TFU also underwent significant organizational changes in order to boost its ability to conduct population-centric counterinsurgency operations in Uruzgan's highly fragmented societal landscape. Most notable was the increase in civilian personnel; whereas the TFU had started its mission with only two civilian officials (a POLAD and a OSAD), soon complemented with a dedicated tribal advisor (the OSTAD),

the field.

20 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, 'Focal Paper, "Foundations For The Future"', 9.

21 Ibid., 5-6.

22 Interviews with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010, lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, The Hague, 5 September 2008, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 27-28.

2008 marked a 'surge' in civilian personnel as their total number grew to twelve and the civilian contingent's role became more prominent.²³ This included the replacement of the OSTAD by two so-called cultural advisors (CULADs), Willem Vogelsang, a Dutch scholar with extensive knowledge of Afghanistan as well as experience on the ground (including a tour as advisor to the Dutch PRT in Pol-E Khomri), and Dutch-Afghan national Mr. Hamidi, who had intermittently served as a TFU interpreter since 2006 (see 9.2.2).²⁴ Both men would fulfill their post until the end of the TFU campaign. Furthermore command of the TFU henceforth was shared by the military commander and the senior civil official, the civilian representative (CIVREP), who formed a dumvirate on basis of equality. This joint civil-military command structure served to enhance civil-military cooperation within the task force and anticipated the PRT's transition from military to civilian command, which was planned for -and actually took place in- 2009. Let us now take a look at how this civilian 'surge' exactly augmented the TFU's capability to conduct a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign.

A first effect of the increased civil capacity was that integration of military planning with tribal and political analysis became the standard.²⁵ While military (intelligence) officers had gradually obtained the insight that population-centric intelligence was instrumental in obtaining the TFU's goals, the capabilities to understand and use ethnographical data and methods to collect such information were greatly augmented by the civil staff, especially the two CULADs.²⁶ Thus, population-centric intelligence became strongly embedded within the TFU's staff process, which of course also functioned to enhance the task force's overall understanding of the operational environment. Second, the deployment of additional civil experts brought the possibility to dispatch these officials on patrols with the soldiers of the PRT and BG.²⁷ From 2007 onwards the TFU's patrols had become increasingly focused on enabling PRT development activities in order to gain influence over Uruzgan's population and liaise between communities and the government. This *modus operandi* received a huge boost as the additional civilian expertise greatly added to the patrols' ability to conduct non-

23 On the increase of the civilian share of the TFU see, among others, Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008* (Den Haag: Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 2009), 11, Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', *Militaire Spectator* 178:7/8 (2009), 401-402, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 36-37, Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 722, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 176,180.

24 On Vogelsang's role and background see also Noël van Bommel, 'Een toekomstvisioen', *De Volkskrant* 5 June 2010, available at <http://www.volkskrant.nl/dossier-archieef/een-toekomstvisioen-a984755/>.

25 Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 401-402, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 176, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 36.

26 Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 722-723. It should be mentioned that throughout the TFU mission there was only one dedicated military human factors analyst, typically an academically schooled junior officer, in the task force's vast intelligence section. When the awareness on the importance of population-centric intelligence grew, also other officers became involved in and more proficient with what was named 'white plate' (population-centric) intelligence.

27 Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 402, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 180.

kinetic development activities. Consequently, patrols became a strong tool for producing non-kinetic effects. Last, the increased ‘civilianization’ of the TFU not only encompassed the deployment of additional Dutch civil officials, it also meant attracting NGOs to conduct development activities in Uruzgan.²⁸ While the PRT’s civilian experts would lead the development effort and liaise with the NGOs as part of the TFU campaign, the ultimate goal was to foster a long-term commitment from these organizations in which they would take over all development tasks from ISAF. During 2008 the number of NGOs operating in Uruzgan gradually increased, and whereas there were only six NGOs active in Uruzgan in 2006, the number of actors had increased to more than twenty by end 2008, and over 54 in 2009.²⁹ It should be mentioned here that the five most prominent Dutch NGOs and twelve Afghan partner NGOs joined forces in the so-called Dutch Consortium for Uruzgan (DCU), which mainly operated with local staff who effectively delivered aid ranging from educational support to agricultural development. Furthermore the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which had been notoriously absent in Uruzgan, agreed to open an office in Tirin Kot in 2009. The Dutch envisioned the United Nations taking over the leading role in the field of development in the post-ISAF era.³⁰ On the short term, the increased involvement of NGOs bolstered the TFU’s counterinsurgency campaign as it stepped up the development effort in Uruzgan.

Thus the civilian ‘surge’ greatly added to the TFU’s capability to conduct population-centric counterinsurgency operations by enhancing the understanding of Uruzgan’s societal landscape and incorporating the use of population-centric intelligence in the TFU’s staff process, augmenting patrols’ abilities to deliver non-kinetic effects, and attracting NGOs to increase development in the province. Equally important as these organizational changes brought about by the increased ‘civilianization’ and the conceptual changes presented in the Focal Paper, was the deployment of the ANA’s fourth brigade to Uruzgan. Albeit the Afghan government had already decided to deploy this unit in fall 2007, the first substantial numbers began to arrive in the course of 2008 and a total of 1,700 soldiers were deployed to Uruzgan.³¹ These ANA soldiers provided the much-needed manpower for further increasing the provincial security situation and to hold areas previously cleared from the Taliban. Consequently, it were not only deliberate changes in the TFU’s campaign plan and composition that beneficially affected its capability to conduct a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign in Uruzgan’s demanding environment, it was also the timely arrival of reinforcements in the form of relatively well-trained and equipped ANA troops.

28 On stepping up the NGO involvement see, among others, Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008*, 11, 14, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D ‘The Next Generation’, *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 37, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, ‘Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands’ Task Force Uruzgan’, 173-174.

29 Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008*, 14, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D ‘The Next Generation’, *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 33-34, 37. The DCU was originally founded in 2006, but took its definite form in 2008.

30 Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008*, 11.

31 *Ibid.*, 12.

Let us now take a look at how this all materialized on the ground and came to provide the underpinning for the remainder of the TFU campaign.

10.2.2 Counterinsurgency on the ground

On 30 January 2008 colonel Richard van Harskamp took over command of the TFU from colonel Nico Geerts. TFU-3 had ended its tour with operation *Kapcha As* as an operation in preparation of a larger forthcoming operation, *Pathan Ghar*, that would be conducted from 17 February until 15 March by TFU-4 in order to re-establish control over the Deh Rawud ADZ. It was in the wake of *Kapcha As* that US Special Forces together with Matiullah's fighters launched a brutal offensive that cleared the district from Taliban presence.³² Consequently, operation *Pathan Ghar* met almost none resistance and the Dutch soldiers and their civilian accompanies seized the opportunity to engage the population to vet the local situation and pave the way to a more durable connection between the TFU and the Afghan government on one side and the people on the other. For this purpose the PRT dispatched the OSTAD and an intelligence NCO as reinforcements for the local mission team. It was found that while the people did not favor the Taliban, the dominant position of the district's Popalzai minority had remained a root cause for grievance and distrust of the government and security forces, which was further exacerbated by Matiullah's recent actions.³³ Consequently, the Dutch deemed it necessary to support the district government, curtail Popalzai influence, and empower the Nurzai and Babozai majority. Albeit this action by the PRT fitted the division of tasks within the TFU that resulted from the experiences in 2006 and 2007, new commander Van Harskamp was surprised by the lack of involvement of the task force staff in the engagement of the local population and its leaders.³⁴

Van Harskamp's experience in Iraq had taught him that establishing influence over local power-holders was essential for obtaining control over the local population. As TFU commander he expected to actively participate in this process and its planning, just like he had done in Iraq. While Van Harskamp came to accept his rather passive role as a tool for escalation supporting the engagement efforts of his subordinate commanders (especially the PRT) and civilian experts, he started to integrate and synchronize KLE at the task force staff level. Van Harskamp thought that the TFU leadership had remained too much in its (military) 'tactical comfort zone', and that the TFU staff had to focus more on non-kinetic counterinsurgency methods for realizing the campaign's objectives.³⁵ Embedding KLE,

32 See, among others, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 196, PRT4, 'Deh Rawod', Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010), 'Getuigenissen van een missie'*, 162-168, Noël van Bommel, 'Het is hier nog nooit zo rustig geweest', *Volkskrant* 23 February 2009, accessible via <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/896494/2008/02/23/Het-is-hier-nog-nooit-zorustig-geweest.dhtml>.

33 PRT4, 'Deh Rawod'.

34 Interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010.

35 Ibid.

which by now was commonly identified as a most important tool for influencing Uruzgan's population, within the staff process was a logical consequence of this vision. The PRT's KLEP was to be at the heart of a larger design that also encompassed the engagement of governmental actors by Dutch diplomats as well as Taliban leaders who would be either engaged or subjected to kinetic targeting (depending on their attitude towards the mission). The rationale of this approach was to address the campaign's center of gravity, Uruzgan's local population, by connecting them to the 'outside world' consisting of the Afghan government and ISAF forces.³⁶

Despite this comprehensive and progressive design, KLE did not evolve in an integral part of the staff process during the TFU-4 rotation.³⁷ While there were also issues with the integration of kinetic targeting and non-kinetic engagement (we will come back to this later as these issues became more apparent during TFU-5), the lack of synchronization between the 'Track 2' program and the PRT's KLEP offers an explanation for this failure to fully implement KLE at the task force level. Albeit the CIVREP and POLAD were given a leading role in the task force's KLE effort, TFU commander Van Harskamp was only sparsely informed about 'Track 2', which the civilian staff deemed too sensitive to be more widely communicated or subjected to an integrated and formalized TFU plan. When Van Harskamp finally learned more on 'Track 2' -after questioning its existence-, he was surprised about the amount of resources available for this program. This highly contrasted the problems he was experiencing in obtaining more funds for PRT projects from the Dutch embassy in Kabul. Consequently, the TFU-4 commander developed the point that 'Track 2' basically was a 'war within a war' and a potential hazard for the TFU campaign's unity of effort.³⁸ The Focal Paper, which became the TFU campaign plan as of March 2008, was to solve this problem by providing goals for the development of the province to which all Dutch actors had to subscribe. Albeit this did not suffice for implementing a comprehensive KLE program at the task force level during the TFU-4 rotation, bringing KLE to the attention of the TFU staff resulted in the incorporation of this tool in every operation that was planned and executed. Furthermore, notwithstanding the lack of synchronization with 'Track 2', the incorporation of KLE in the TFU's staff process gave a huge boost to the cooperation and synchronization between the TFU's staff (especially the intelligence section), its various subordinate units, and the civil experts on matters concerning the engagement of local leaders within the three main ADZs making up the task force's oil spot.³⁹ Overall TFU-4, thus, certainly took a first step in anchoring KLE at the task force level.

Combined with the increase of ANSF and the policy guidelines of the Focal Paper, the enhanced emphasize on engagement of local leaders was operationalized in a

36 Richard van Harskamp, *KLE Briefing*, The Hague, 5 March 2010.

37 Interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010, Hans van Dalen, 'Key Leader Engagement, Influence by Proxy', 22, 92-93.

38 Interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010.

39 See also Hans van Dalen, 'Key Leader Engagement, Influence by Proxy', 93, interview with lieutenant-colonel Wilfred Rietdijk, commander PRT-4, by Hans van Dalen, The Hague, 6 January 2009.

counterinsurgency approach in which BG, PRT, and civilian experts systematically addressed the designated focal areas by use of the so-called USECT (understand, shape, engage, consolidate, transfer) framework.⁴⁰ This phased method sought to obtain TFU's 2010 end state by establishing, augmenting, and consolidating control over the local population of a Focal Area in cooperation with the ANSF and the Afghan government (the engage and consolidate phase respectively), and ultimately transfer the authority over the Focal Area to the Afghan government (the transfer phase). Local leaders were pivotal as they were considered instrumental in strengthening the connection between the local population and the Afghan government and therefore had to be engaged through development aid as well as involved in the local government. Military force, of course, was to create and maintain a permissive environment in a focal area, which required a permanent presence of security forces. Typically this was mutually achieved by ANSF and TFU forces, with the former becoming gradually more important, and ultimately taking over the responsibility for the security of a focal area -which also allowed TFU forces to shift their attention to other focal areas. Most crucial, however, was that the whole process of establishing, consolidating and transferring control of a specific Focal Area was to be based on a thorough understanding of its local population and affairs as well as the role of the insurgency in these circumstances (the understand phase), which was to inform the formulation of a comprehensive strategy for winning the population of that specific area (shape phase). Let us now return to Deh Rawud district in order to illustrate the working of this counterinsurgency approach on the ground.

As aforementioned *Pathan Ghar* had re-established the Dutch forces in Deh Rawud district without any significant resistance and revealed that the bulk of the local populace was not in favour of the Taliban, but aggrieved by the political dominance of the Popalzai network. Roughly the conflict centered on the opposition between a small group of Popalzai, Nurzai, and Babozai leaders connected to Jan Mohammed Khan and President Karzai, and local leaders representing the politically ill-represented Babozai and Nurzai majority.⁴¹ Not only the understanding of the details of this political conflict and the way it permeated local society had tremendously increased during *Pathan Ghar*, the TFU had also concluded that stability in the district required curtailing the Popalzai network's influence and empowering the leaders representing the politically weak majority. Furthermore Governor Hamdam wrote a personal letter to IDLG director Ghulam Jelani Popal asking him for more resources to consolidate the successes and strengthening the connection between the government and the district's population (eleven copies of this letter were sent to ministries and government

40 Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 27-28. USECT harkens back to the 16 September 2002 US *Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations* (although the 'T' in that publication stands for 'transition'). See Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-06, Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations* (Washington D.C.: Joint Staff, 2002), II-8-II-14.

41 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 53-54, PRT4, 'Deh Rawud', Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 5 August 2008.

agencies in Kabul, NGOs, and other international actors).⁴² Although causality cannot be proven, Minister Zia of Rural Rehabilitation and Development visited Deh Rawud at the end of *Pathan Ghar* in order to address an *ad hoc* assembly of 80 local leaders and present the contracts for development projects with a total worth of \$850,000.⁴³ Consequently, the large operation had hugely augmented the understanding of the local circumstances, provided the TFU with a strategy for strengthening the ties between the government and the population, and brought a significant investment in development projects to the district.

In the last days of March, following the conclusion of *Pathan Ghar* (15 March), the Focal Paper was introduced as the TFU's campaign plan. Consequently, the exploitation of the gains from this operation could benefit from the logic of that plan, the increased availability of ANSF, and the emphasized importance of key leader engagement, which all would be delivered by applying the USECT methodology to Deh Rawud ADZ's Focal Areas. Albeit the Focal Paper had distinguished five Focal Areas in the district, the operations at this time concentrated on the most important areas (as did operation *Pathan Ghar*); respectively Focal Areas D-1 (Deh Rawud north), D-2 (Deh Rawud south), and D-3 (west bank of the Helmand river).⁴⁴ The main effort focused on the D-1 and D-2 areas that were most densely populated with daily life evolving around the district's centre Deh Rawud bazaar (close to the local Dutch base Camp Hadrian). Area D-3, however, was also of vital importance as it functioned as the Taliban's gateway connecting the district with insurgent sanctuaries in adjacent Helmand province.⁴⁵ *Pathan Ghar* had predominantly engaged the local population in D-1 and D-2, but also enhanced the understanding and informed a new strategy for the district as a whole. It has to be mentioned that although the USECT methodology was only adopted after this operation, *Pathan Ghar* illustrates that the distinction between phases as well as their sequencing in the reality of counterinsurgency warfare was less rigid than suggested by this acronym. In order to reach the TFU's 2010 objective of a safe and secure environment monitored by an improved local government, the results of the operation were exploited through a continuation of the engagement phase by building various posts for ANSF units and enhancing connections between the local government and local leaders representing all societal segments. While the first measure almost immediately established a permanent security presence in D-1 and D-2 as well as a bridgehead in D-3, reshaping the district's political balance was a more complicated task that required precarious engagement of district authorities and local power-holders by the BG, PRT, as well as the civil experts.⁴⁶

42 Asadullah Hamdam, 'Post-operation measures needed for stability, assistance and reconstruction in Deh Rawood District, letter to director IDLG, 970/790', Tirin Kot, 21 February 2008.

43 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 315*, interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010.

44 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, 'Focal Paper, "Foundations For The Future"', 5-6.

45 Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', 165. For a detailed description of Taliban infiltrations and attacks on the district see Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010), 'Getuigenissen van een missie'*, 142-145, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 209-210.

46 Various police posts were established throughout the district and two ANA posts along the Helmand. This fitted in the Focal Paper's approach to augment the role of ANSF by enhancing their presence at the grassroots level. Consequently the Dutch

This would become the first serious test for the TFU's ability to conduct a coordinated and synchronized key leader engagement program involving several of its assets.

Due to Deh Rawud's relative remoteness, daily operations of the locally operating Dutch forces were conducted quite independently of the main body in Tirin Kot throughout the TFU mission.⁴⁷ Typically this resulted in a tight working relationship between the BG company and PRT mission team(-3) assigned to the district, albeit variations existed between rotations.⁴⁸ Consequently the soldiers of the BG and PRT had been mutually involved in establishing and maintaining contact with the various local leaders and administrators. While the officers of the infantry company and the members of the PRT team remained the most important agents for engaging Deh Rawud's power-holders, the TFU's augmented attention for the district in the aftermath of *Pathan Ghar* allowed for the synchronization of the efforts at grassroots level with the KLE effort at the staff level. This resulted in a clear policy designed by the civil experts within the TFU staff - on basis of their own information and reports from the soldiers in the field - that envisioned the empowerment of the Babozai and Nurzai majority while simultaneously checking the power of the Popalzai-network. Even more important was that this new policy was comprehensively implemented with the soldiers on the ground acting under guidance and with support of the TFU staff's civil experts. Thus, various TFU assets were now jointly and deliberately deployed to re-shuffle the political marketplace of Deh Rawud district and reach out to previously marginalized popular segments; but to what result?

While the soldiers on the ground were achieving some progress with regard to the advance of the Babozai and Nurzai by empowering leaders through development projects, they found it almost impossible to break Popalzai political dominance. This was not least due to district chief Ghulam Jalanay Khan, a Popalzai tribal leader strongly embedded within the Popalzai-dominated establishment. The turning point came early in the summer when Mullah Kудay Nazar, the main Nurzai leader, was killed and his body mutilated.⁴⁹ Many people accused district chief Ghulam Jalany of involvement in this brutal murder and a wave of protest swept through the district and beyond. This triggered a concerted action by Nurzai and others in Kabul that led to the sacking of the district chief, and the appointment of a temporarily acting replacement, Said Usman. This step greatly enhanced the independence

bases *Poentjak* near Surkh Murgab and *Volendam* in northern Deh Rawud were dismantled. See, among others, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 315, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 209. A detailed geographic oversight of posts in the three main ADZs can be found in Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 488, 490-491, 493.

47 Albeit Kamp Holland and Camp Hadrian were only 36 kilometers apart, it took either a six hour convoy drive or a helicopter flight to cover this distance. While there were frequent flights between both bases, convoys were less frequent. Especially in the winter when adverse weather conditions could severely hamper helicopter operations, Deh Rawud would sometimes remain isolated for protracted periods.

48 See, for instance, Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 145-146, 292-294, personal documents from captain Leendert Johan Hazelbag, commander B-company BG-2, presentation major Jeffrey van der Veer, commander mission team 3, PRT-7, *Counter Insurgency in Deh Rawod*, Breda, 3 October 2014. An example of more troublesome cooperation during the rotation of BG-11 (November 2009-March 2010) is also given by Groen; Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 103-104.

49 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 5 August 2008, 22 August 2008.

of the district's government, as Said Usman was the intelligence officer, the S-2, of the locally operating first *kandak* (battalion) of the ANA's fourth brigade, and originated from the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad.⁵⁰ Despite being an outsider less susceptible to local influences, Usman was respected by all parties as he was considered a neutral and skillful administrator. He was strongly supported by the Dutch, who tried to enforce his permanent appointment through diplomatic channels at provincial as well as national level and supported him with a monthly allowance of approximately \$2000 paid from the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵¹ Usman used his influence to institute a new *shura* consisting of *maliks*, representing the various communities living in the district, which was to be held every Sunday, while also maintaining the Thursday *shura* of the traditional establishment.⁵² Both *shuras* together functioned as a kind of bicameral system, with the Sunday *shura* deciding upon proposals concerning local security and projects, and the Thursday *shura* as an advisory board for fine-tuning these proposals. This cunning move not only secured the allegiance of the powerful tribal leaders of the old elite -which was dominated by the Popalzai-, but also opened opportunities for political participation by the previously ill-represented majority. Moreover, as the Sunday *shura* now was the main decision making body, this altered the political balance in favor of the Nurzai and Babozai communities. On one of his first trips to Deh Rawud newly arrived CULAD Vogelsang commented that '... in essence this is a good development that more directly involves the local populace in the local administration'.⁵³ Nurtured and supported by the locally operating Dutch soldiers of PRT and BG and the civil experts at the TFU level, Usman succeeded to break the dominance of the Popalzai at Deh Rawud's political marketplace. Thus, the Dutch ISAF forces and Afghan government firmly established control over the bulk of the district's local population living in Focal Areas D-1, D-2, and D-3. Moreover, the beneficial outcome of the engagement phase also triggered community leaders from the other two Focal Areas to seek active participation in the new political order of the *shura* system.⁵⁴

During the engagement phase all relevant TFU actors had been cooperating in order to advance the position of Nurzai and Babozai leaders under new and independent district chief Usman. Notwithstanding the unity of effort, cultural differences between military and civil organizations continued to exist. An embarrassing example occurred when the PRT was paying Usman his allowance and took his picture; an offense to an Afghan dignitary, but necessary for military controllers who had to account for money paid to locals.⁵⁵ The money,

50 Ibid., see also 19 August 2008, 24 August 2008. Usman is commonly reported as a capable and friendly man. Curiously, he turned out to be related to one of the Dutch national interpreters.

51 Ibid., 28 August, 2008, personal correspondence with major Jeffrey van der Veer, commander mission team 3, PRT-7, 1 October 2014. It should be mentioned here that the Dutch also paid an allowance to Omar Khan, Deh Rawud's ANP chief.

52 On Deh Rawud's *shura* system and its emergence see, among others, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 19, 22, 24 August 2008, interview with TFU CULAD Willem Vogelsang, Tirin Kot, 23 November 2008, personal correspondence with major Jeffrey van der Veer, commander mission team 3, PRT-7, 1 October 2014.

53 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 24 August 2008.

54 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 18 October 2008.

55 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 28 August 2008.

however, directly came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' budget, which did not require a similar accountability. While Usman did not take it as a personal offense, this incident once more illustrates the rigidity of financial control in the military (that had triggered complaints from PRT commanders as discussed afore), which was far from optimal for operations among the people. Nevertheless, in general the cooperation between the actors was good which allowed for supportive actions far beyond the grassroots level. Governor Hamdam, for instance, was approached by the POLAD to request the IDLG for Usman's permanent appointment as soon as possible, and the Dutch embassy in Kabul was also involved in the process.⁵⁶ The consolidation of the positive results in Deh Rawud required the strengthening of the newly adopted government structure. It was agreed that the PRT's mission team would supervise and support this process on a daily basis, while the civil experts within the TFU staff would provide guidance and back up.⁵⁷

At the provincial level equally positive results were obtained during the TFU-4 deployment. The Dutch task force had been continuing its cooperation with the Barakzai/Achekzai power block of Rozi Khan and Abdul Khaleq as well as its policy of closely guiding Governor Hamdam. Among others this led to a definite consolidation of the situation in the Chora ADZ when Rozi Khan was installed as permanent district chief after winning elections on June 7 (organized and prepared by Hamdam) with 851 (30 percent) of 2,600 votes.⁵⁸ As a consequence of Hamdam's support for Rozi Khan, the connection between provincial government and the Barakzai/Achekzai was strengthened much too the benefit of the governor's authority.⁵⁹ With regard to the Ghilzai tribes, the Dutch kept on working with Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan. Ghilzai participation in the government was further enhanced when Mohammed Nabi's fighters were being institutionalized within the ANP as the ANAP program was being terminated.⁶⁰ The indirect contact with Matiullah Khan was also continued as his importance to the Dutch mission had increased considerably. Matiullah's AHP was now re-organized and renamed as the *Kandak-e Amniant-e Uruzgan* (KAU), an operational police unit that was technically under command of the chief of police and part of the ANP structure.⁶¹ His task, however, remained unchanged and concerned securing the highway between Kandahar and Tirin Kot. It was at this time that Matiullah effectively started the economical exploitation of his monopoly by demanding a protection fee of between \$1,700 and \$3,000 per truck in

56 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 12, 24 August 2008.

57 See, for instance, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 18 October 2008.

58 See, among others, Anonymous, 'PRT Tarin Kowt-Chora Residents Turn Out To Elect District Administrator' (Tirin Kot, 12 June 2008), Roelof C. Buffinga, 'District Governor elections: some guidelines, based on the experienced gained in Chora, Uruzgan, on 7 June 2008' (Unclassified report, Tirin Kot, 14 June 2008), Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 315, interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010.

59 Anonymous civil expert, 'Politieke ontwikkelingen' (Unclassified report, Tirin Kot, 25 September 2008).

60 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 295.

61 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 29, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 250-251, see also Joeri Boom, 'Veiligheid in Uruzgan', *De Groene Amsterdammer* 4 July 2008.

a convoy (with an average of 200 trucks a month this made a fortune).⁶² Albeit the TFU still avoided being openly associated with Matiullah, it was heavily dependent on logistical subcontractors who did not hesitate to cut deals with the ‘lord of the highway’ and charge the costs to their Dutch clients.⁶³ At this time, however, Matiullah was not in pursuit of political power and his commercial activities along the highway kept him away from aggrieved popular segments. Therefore he did not negatively influence the results achieved by the TFU-4, which had consolidated previous gains at the provincial level and in the Focal Areas of the Tirin Kot and Chora ADZs, while tremendously expanding control in the Deh Rawud ADZ (of which the most important Focal Areas now also were in the consolidation phase).

While the TFU, thus, had augmented its foothold over Uruzgan’s population as well as its influence in the provincial political marketplace during the first half of 2008, the Dutch task force’s most formidable antagonist in the struggle for control over Uruzgan’s fragmented society, former governor Jan Mohammed Khan felt all but powerless.⁶⁴ TFU-4 commander Van Harskamp did not receive permission to continue TFU-3’s low-profile talks with this most important local power-holder, whereas he witnessed how the locally operating US Special Forces continued to support Jan Mohammed.⁶⁵ A remarkable incident occurred when those US troops without notice used one of their assigned seats in a regularly operating Dutch helicopter flight to fly their ally Jan Mohammed to Kandahar. Even more important, Jan Mohammed felt confident enough to openly offend Governor Hamdam, when he took the latter’s place as the chair of an important *shura* about the organization of the local administration in April. He later told Dutch journalist Bette Dam that he felt free to do so because ‘I am the father of Uruzgan’, indicating that in his opinion the people in Uruzgan still considered him the most important leader.⁶⁶ Yet, Jan Mohammed did not succeed in effectively thwarting the expansion of TFU influence during this period. An attempt to interfere with the affairs in Deh Rawud by preventing the removal of his trustee Ghulam Jalany in the wake of the murder on Nurzai leader Kuday Nazar failed because of the personal involvement of Hamid Karzai, who apparently refused to support Jalany as a consequence

62 Interview with Mr. Hamidi, TFU CULAD, Tirin Kot, 13 November 2008, colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 33, The Hague, 8 March 2010, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 249-252, Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living, America, The Taliban, And The War Through Afghan Eyes*, 255, Martijn Kitzen, ‘Uruzgan Field Notes’, 10-11. A much-heard anecdote that occurred during the summer of 2008, when the Australians tried to hire another security provider, illustrates Matiullah’s monopoly position. Whereas Matiullah demanded \$21,000, the other party accepted the job for \$19,000. Consequently Matiullah called the truck drivers and forbade them to drive, which drove the Australians back in his arms. This time, however, Matiullah demanded \$90,000 for the job, but after talks with the Australians he generously accepted \$21,000. Henceforth it was clear that only Matiullah would provide security on the road.

63 For the title ‘lord of the highway’ see Christopher Reuter, ‘De dilemma’s van Uruzgan, iedereen heeft hier vijanden’, *Vrij Nederland* 70:21, 23 May 2009, 36-38. Joeri Boom uses ‘lord of the road’, see Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 246.

64 Indeed the Taliban were less a threat in the local political arena. Moreover, the insurgents mainly thrived on the consequences of Jan Mohammed’s aggravating policies, which rendered the latter the most important opponent with regard to the fight for control.

65 Interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010.

66 See, interview with Jan Mohammed Khan conducted by Bette Dam, Kabul, 4 August 2008, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 188-189, see also Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 155-156.

of appeals from befriended local leaders (with direct access to the president).⁶⁷ While the TFU obviously won this round, Jan Mohammed's remaining influence in the province as well as his influence in Kabul, combined with his self-confidence as 'the father of Uruzgan' and support from US Special Forces still rendered him a threat to the consolidation of the progress of the Dutch mission.

10.2.3 Jan Mohammed strikes back

When TFU-5 took over from TFU-4 on 31 July 2008, the civilian surge was completed; the new staff not only brought additional experts (including both CULADs, a second POLAD, and a third OSTAD) to boost the level of civilian officials already present, it also introduced the principle of dual command; henceforth the TFU would be jointly led by a duumvirate consisting of the military commander and the CIVREP.⁶⁸ Colonel Kees Matthijssen and CIVREP Peter Mollema were the first officials to put this into practice and fully integrate military and civilian assets in the planning and execution of operations according to the guidelines of the focal paper. Consequently, TFU-5 was the first task force that from its onset could benefit from a comprehensive organization and a campaign plan tailored for conducting counterinsurgency in Uruzgan's complicated operational environment. It would not take long before the new staff had to fully employ its capabilities for preserving all of the TFU's previous results, as Jan Mohammed was about to draw his trump card.

Early September Jan Mohammed organized a meeting in Kabul in which 70 local leaders from Uruzgan (all affiliated to the former governor) had expressed their discontent with the province's local governance, and especially with Governor Hamdam who was blamed of corruption, to President Karzai personally.⁶⁹ Simultaneously Jan Mohammed began to publicly announce (among others also to the US POLAD) his ambition to return to the position of provincial governor as soon as possible. Moreover, he had also been engineering a new method for exerting influence over local affairs from Kabul. Just like before, Jan Mohammed continued his active interference in the appointment or sacking of local governmental officials. This time, however, he started to exploit his position as presidential advisor to influence the decisions of the IDLG, which reported directly to the president.⁷⁰ To Jan Mohammed's advantage he not only had direct access to IDLG director Ghulam Jelani Popal

67 See, interview with Jan Mohammed Khan conducted by Bette Dam, Kabul, 4 August 2008, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 22, 24 August 2008.

68 See, among others, René Bouwhuis, Martijn Bronhorst, 'Stentje voor stentje bouwen aan civilisering', *Defensiekrant* 14 August 2008, Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg. Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 399-402, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 176, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 36, Peter ter Velde, *Kabul & Kamp Holland, Over de stad en de oorlog*, 217-219, interview with Peter Mollema, CIVREP TFU-5, Tirin Kot, 21 November 2008.

69 Anonymous civil expert, 'Politieke ontwikkelingen', Anonymous civil expert, 'Jan Mohammed Khan maakt serieus werk van terugkeer als gouverneur' (Unclassified report, Tirin Kot, 8 October 2008).

70 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 197.

(whose name clearly betrays his Popalzai descent), but also kept close personal ties with him; reportedly Jan Mohammed introduced Popal to President Karzai.⁷¹ Thus the by key donors hailed IDLG and its much-praised ‘technocrat-reformer’ director, which had to bolster the position of the government at the grassroots level by decentralization and bottom-up state building free of corruption and malign local influences, turned out to be less independent than suggested by its name.⁷² With regard to Uruzgan the IDLG functioned as yet another leverage tool of Jan Mohammed Khan, whose position within the Kabul government and remaining influence in Uruzgan still rendered him the TFU’s most formidable antagonist in the struggle for control over Uruzgan’s highly fragmented society. With the benefit of hindsight, it can, therefore, be easily understood why the IDLG suddenly announced a three month trial period in which Governor Hamdam had to improve his performance or face removal in case of failure to do so.⁷³

Matters got even worse on 17 September when one of Jan Mohammed’s most important rivals and key TFU collaborator, Chora district chief Rozi Khan, was accidentally killed in a nightly cross-fire with Australian Special Forces.⁷⁴ This was a serious blow for the Barakzai/Achekzai power block that had provided the TFU with an effective local counterbalance against Jan Mohammed’s influence. Additionally it also meant a severe blow to Governor Hamdam whose support of Rozi Khan had strengthened the connection between the provincial administration and the Barakzai/Achekzai faction -which enhanced the legitimate authority of the provincial government. In order to limit the damage of this unfortunate accident immediate action by the TFU-5 staff was required. A rift between the TFU and the Barakzai and Achekzai had to be prevented, the faction’s power in Chora as well as its role at the provincial political marketplace needed to be secured, while concurrently Jan Mohammed’s newest attempt to re-establish himself as Uruzgan’s dominant local power-holder had to be checked. It was clear that the new TFU staff had to launch a concerted comprehensive effort for safeguarding its interests from the grassroots level in the province up to the governmental level in Kabul.

To start with the TFU POLADs and CULADs, as well as the staff of the embassy in Kabul immediately approached Rozi Khan’s family and the most important leaders of the Barakzai/

71 See Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 27, Martijn Kitzen, ‘Uruzgan Field Notes’, 238-239, Anonymous civil expert, ‘Politieke ontwikkelingen’. Unconfirmed reporting suggested that Jan Mohammed first met Ghulam Jelani Popal when the latter was working as a NGO director in Uruzgan. Contrary to other sources Kilcullen has stated that Popal is Karzai’s cousin. This seems unlikely as the former reports are drawn from well-informed experts. Even if Kilcullen is right, this is just another explanation for the good ties between Jan Mohammed and Popal. See, David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains*, 156.

72 On the position of the key donors and reputation of Popal see Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less*, 126.

73 Anonymous civil expert, ‘Politieke ontwikkelingen’, Anonymous civil expert, ‘Jan Mohammed Khan maakt serieus werk van terugkeer als gouverneur’, Anonymous civil expert, ‘Governance in Uruzgan Province-extended version’ (Unclassified report, Tirin Kot, 6 November 2008).

74 See, among others, Bette Dam, ‘Wie was Rozi Khan?’, Anonymous civil expert, ‘Dood Rozi Khan’ (Unclassified report, Tirin Kot, 22 September 2008), Anonymous civil expert, ‘Politieke ontwikkelingen’, Willem Vogelsang, ‘Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010’, 22 September 2008. Reportedly Rozi Khan was killed when he together with some of his fighters scrambled to rescue a friend who thought that he was under attack of Taliban insurgents. These insurgents, however, were Australian Special Forces moving towards a nearby target. Due to the dark of night recognition was impossible and in the ensuing fire fight both parties thought they were firing at Taliban fighters.

Achekzai block, including *Wolesi Jirga* member Abdul Khaleq for whom an immediate flight to Uruzgan was arranged by the embassy.⁷⁵ Much to their relief the Dutch learned that Rozi Khan's death was unanimously perceived as an unfortunate accident, and that the Barakzai and Achekzai made a distinction between the Dutch forces and the Australian Special Forces involved in the accident. The collaboration between TFU and the faction, therefore, was not endangered, and on request of the locally operating Australian forces the Dutch (especially the Pashto-speaking second CULAD) mediated in the reconciliation between them and the family.⁷⁶ Furthermore the Australians as well as the Dutch invested the incident, while a TFU attempt to conduct a mutual investigation with the Afghan government failed. President Karzai established an own board, including Jan Mohammed Khan, which met TFU commander Matthijssen and CIVREP Mollema at the governor's compound in Tirin Kot. During this meeting the political nature of this committee became obvious as Jan Mohammed extensively deliberated on his period as governor when, according to his view, security was much better, the people supported the provincial government, while he also held an excellent relationship with US Special Forces. In a separate meeting with another member of this official governmental investigation board, *Wolesi Jirga* member and Jan Mohammed affiliate Mohammed Hashim Watanwal (see Chapter Eight, section 8.3.2), diplomats of the embassy learned that on 20 September he advised President Karzai to replace Hamdam.⁷⁷ For now preventing the removal of Uruzgan's governor was most urgent in order to prevent any increase of Jan Mohammed's influence.

The TFU staff together with the UNAMA, US POLAD, and the Asia Foundation (an NGO), agreed that the independent outsider Hamdam offered the best chance for strengthening local government in the province. Therefore it was decided to conduct talks with the IDLG and step up the empowerment of the governor in order to diminish Hamdam's vulnerability to accusations of malgovernance. A threefold strategy was formulated that would strengthen his role in coordinating development activities, improving financial control of the provincial government and enhance transparency through adequate reporting, and last, but not least, bolstering his popular support in the province. While the second measure was realized by appointing additional financial and economical advisors paid by the US and the Dutch, the other measures encompassed an extension of the TFU policy to nurture Hamdam. TFU personnel would coach the governor in his position as head of a newly founded provincial development council, and most important, his visibility in the province would be augmented through regular tours to the districts organized by the TFU. Accompanied by key TFU officials Hamdam would visit the local population and explain which projects were conducted under

75 The following sections on the TFU's reaction to Rozi Khan's death as well as Jan Mohammed's attempt to re-establish his position as Uruzgan's dominant local power-holder are predominantly based on Anonymous civil expert, 'Dood Rozi Khan', Anonymous civil expert, 'Politieke ontwikkelingen'.

76 Interview with Mr. Hamidi, TFU CULAD, Tirin Kot, 22 November 2008.

77 In his meeting with the Dutch diplomats Watanwal stressed that Jan Mohammed Khan would not be the perfect candidate to replace Hamdam. He considered a person of Ghilzai descent more appropriate. Without doubt, however, this person would be related to Jan Mohammed in one way or another.

auspices of the governor and his local representative, the district chief. This brings us to the position of the district chief. As aforementioned Hamdam's support for Rozi Khan had bolstered his authority as it strengthened the connection with the Barakzai/Achekzai fraction. At this time, a similar pattern evolved in Deh Rawud where the Nurzai and Babozai majority was more than happy with his decision to support a permanent appointment for the independent Usman.⁷⁸ Both district chiefs, therefore, were the crucial link between the provincial government and the populace in their district, and essential agents in developing a steady mechanism of governmental control. Moreover, current TFU influence in Deh Rawud and Chora was mainly a consequence of the empowerment of the district chiefs. Consequently any attempt to preserve Hamdam at the provincial level also required the consolidation of the district chiefs with whom he collaborated.

First there was the problem of Rozi Khan's death, which had rendered the seat of district chief in Chora unoccupied. Achekzai leader Abdul Khaleq called upon the TFU to support the appointment of Rozi Khan's inexperienced son Mohammed Daud -in his early twenties- in order to preserve the leading role of the family.⁷⁹ This would prevent a power struggle within the Barakzai segment of the combined Barakzai/Achekzai faction and consequently preclude a weakening of this important power block. Governor Hamdam seemingly realized this for he was quick to announce his intent to appoint Daud as Chora's district chief. Albeit the TFU also favoured Daud's appointment, it recognized that he did not enjoy the same level of authority like his father. Whereas Rozi Khan had managed to maintain stability among the internally divided Barakzai and Achekzai of Chora district (see the 'water conflict' discussed in section 9.3.1), it was questionable whether young Daud could achieve the same.⁸⁰ Therefore, in addition to engagement of IDLG director Popal by the Dutch embassy in Kabul to arrange his definite appointment, a full-fledged empowerment by civil experts and the locally operating PRT mission team(-2) and BG company was deemed necessary. The mission team commander *de facto* (and in coordination with the civil experts of the TFU staff) acted as Daud's personal advisor after the latter asked the advise of a 'wiser, older, well-educated man'.⁸¹ Furthermore the Dutch soldiers held regular *shuras* with tribal elders discussing the attribution of development projects, allowing Daud to make decisions and settle any disputes in this regard.⁸² Thus, Daud's leverage -and authority- over the various popular segments was greatly increased.

Despite all these measures, Jan Mohammed Khan persisted in his attempt to regain dominance at the provincial political marketplace. He also understood that the district chiefs

78 Hamdam elaborated on his view on Said Usman in an interview conducted by Ralph van Kemenade. See interview with Asadullah Hamdam by Ralph van Kemenade, Tirin Kot, 30 December 2009.

79 See also, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 6 October 2008, Ralph van Kemenade, 'The Art of COIN, Adapting Air Assault Infantry Companies for Contemporary Counterinsurgency', 60.

80 See, among others, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 19 September, 6 October 2008.

81 Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 112.

82 Jerry Meyerle, Megan Katt, Jim Gavrilis, *Counterinsurgency on the Ground in Afghanistan, How different units adapted to local conditions* (Alexandria: Center for Naval Analyses, 2010), 141.

were pivotal agents of control for Hamdam and started to influence the IDLG as well as working the grassroots level. In Chora he thwarted Daud's appointment by trying to demonstrate the latter's incompetence for the job. Therefore, Jan Mohammed approached the various parties involved in the 'water conflict' and offered his mediation to definitely settle the conflict on the condition that all would drop their support for Daud.⁸³ As the former governor's old opponents refused to cooperate, this attempt failed. More cumbersome was the situation in Deh Rawud, where the IDLG had decided against Governor Hamdam's and Dutch requests for Said Usman's permanent appointment. Even worse, on 8 October 2008 Haji Zaher Khan, an important Popalzai power-holder from southern Deh Rawud, was formally named as the new district chief.⁸⁴ Obviously, this move was yet another attempt of Jan Mohammed to re-establish his position in Uruzgan; after all Haji Zaher was a highly influential member of Jan Mohammed's network and a personal friend of Hamid Karzai, who sought shelter in his house in 2001 (further he was also a cousin of Taliban second in command Mullah Berader).⁸⁵ On the ground in Deh Rawud this rather unexpected appointment immediately triggered unrest and it was a severe threat to all recent gains as it effectively came down to a restoration of Popalzai dominance in the district. Consequently the TFU's diplomats urged Governor Hamdam to write a letter to Ghulam Jelani Popal, the director of the IDLG, in which he asked for a reconsideration of the decisions 'on behalf of the provincial government, the population of Deh Rawud, and the international community' for the sake of security.⁸⁶ With support of the Dutch embassy in Kabul, which engaged the national government and the IDLG, the appointment of Haji Zaher was eventually withdrawn and Usman's position secured by end October.⁸⁷ Similarly, Mohammed Daud was formally installed as Chora's district chief on 27 October.⁸⁸ Thus, the comprehensive multi-level engagement succeeded in preserving district chiefs capable of connecting the local population to Governor Hamdam's provincial government. Moreover, due to the effective countermeasures Jan Mohammed's offensive stalled, and in a meeting with Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation Bert Koenders IDLG director Popal explicitly stated that Jan Mohammed would not return as Uruzgan's governor.⁸⁹

83 Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 84-87.

84 Asadullah Hamdam, 'Benoeming *district chief* Haji Zaher, brief aan directeur IDLG' (Dutch translation from Pashtu original), Tirin Kot, 24 October 2008, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 36-37.

85 See Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 84-85, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 26, Bette Dam, *Expeditie Uruzgan*, 124, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 20 February 2010.

86 Asadullah Hamdam, 'Benoeming *district chief* Haji Zaher, brief aan directeur IDLG'.

87 See also, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 105.

88 Ibid., 123-124, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 27 October 2008.

89 Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 137.

10.2.4 Embedding KLE at the task force level⁹⁰

The previous episode again illustrated the need for a comprehensive approach for the engagement of local power-holders in Uruzgan's complicated operational environment, where the situation could be influenced by affairs at the grassroots level in the districts, the provincial level, or even by decisions taken in Kabul. Whereas TFU-4 had successfully brought the KLE program to the attention of the TFU staff, TFU-5 set out to permanently embed KLE at the task force level. Therefore personnel of the TFU-5 intelligence section with assistance of the civil experts (especially the POLADs and CULADs) set out to design and implement a fully integrated KLE program at the task force level.⁹¹ This program was based on the staff's own experiences as well as on the pioneering work of PRT-4 and continued TFU-4's work on embedding KLE within existing staff processes such as intelligence and planning. Moreover, its ultimate purpose was to definitely provide the TFU commander and CIVREP with a mechanism to coordinate and synchronize the engagement of all local power-holders by TFU assets (both military and civilian).⁹²

The new TFU KLE program was founded on a 5-stage cyclic process in which all necessary TFU actors were involved.⁹³ The first phase of the process was the identification of local leaders whose co-option was considered vital -or at least relevant- to TFU mission success (i.e. enhanced control over the local population by the provincial government). Once this phase was completed the possible effects (positive and negative, short and long-term) of engagement were assessed by studying a leader's background, behavioral patterns, interests, and mapping of his (influence) network. This assessment phase was not only designed to clarify the effects that could be attained by engaging a specific agent, but also revealed how the TFU could possibly engage this actor. In the next phase this information would be used to determine a unique engagement profile for each individual. The majority of profiles aimed to establish or maintain a collaborative relationship with a key leader by addressing his personal interest through either empowerment or allocation of local development projects as had become common practice during the previous TFU rotations. A study of engagement profiles possible within the limitations of the TFU's political and judicial framework, however, revealed that local power-holders could also be engaged by use of other methods (which we will discuss below). The next phase of the cyclic key-leader engagement program was the decision phase, in which the TFU commander and the CIVREP would mutually decide upon the proposed engagement profiles and order the subsequent execution of the profiles by the various TFU assets including civil experts, the PRT, and the BG (or request the assistance of

⁹⁰ The following sections on the implementation of a KLE program by the TFU-5 staff contains edited material from Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 726-730. The author assisted in designing and implementing the TFU key-leader engagement program and was responsible for writing a TFU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on the subject.

⁹¹ See also Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 410.

⁹² See lieutenant-colonel Hans van Dalen, 'Key Leader Engagement, Influence by Proxy', 139-147.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, 139-147, and lieutenant-colonel Hans van Dalen and Martijn Kitzen, *Key Leader Engagement briefing*, 20 mei 2009, presentation on TFU KLE program.

higher levels such as the embassy in Kabul). The cycle was completed with a measurement phase in which the attained effects were duly evaluated and, if necessary, a key-leader was recycled through the process. Although this systematical approach was abandoned due to the fact that there was no capability for deploying a dedicated program officer, it was successful in definitely anchoring KLE at the task force level as it firmly embedded KLE as a standard component of the TFU staff's tool kit.⁹⁴

As mentioned the KLE program explored other opportunities for engaging local leaders within the limitations of the TFU's political and judicial framework. Whereas political empowerment and allocation of relative small-scale local development projects had sufficed to enhance control over Uruzgan's population, the containment of the spoiling effects of Jan Mohammed and his ilk had proved to be a more troublesome affair. In case of the former governor his removal did not suffice for ending his influence in the province and it was clear that additional measures were needed. The TFU-5 KLE program guaranteed a permanent capability for the kind of concerted multi-level engagement that had successfully defied the former governor's last attempt to re-establish his position (with a crucial role for the embassy for the engagement of Kabul agencies such as the IDLG).⁹⁵ Furthermore, now the TFU staff was synchronizing KLE at the task force level the civil experts within the TFU-5 staff decided to reveal 'Track 2' to their military colleagues in order to link the program to the task force's main effort.⁹⁶ These measures bolstered the TFU's ability to contain the negative influences of spoilers, but did not attack such agents directly. In this regard, removal of malign lower-level leaders -whom contrary to dominant local power-holders held insufficient power to retain their influence after removal- from official positions was identified as a key sanction for fighting actors causing grievance at the grassroots level, including the lower ranking representatives of Jan Mohammed's network.

A case in point is provided by the removal of Toor Jan, a Barakzai sub-tribal commander and ANP officer who was infamous for his corruption, extortion, and predatory behavior towards Mirabad's Ghilzai population of the Hotak sub-tribe.⁹⁷ This lower-level leader was abusing his governmental position for exploiting a feud between the local Barakzai and Hotak. Needless to say that Toor Jan favoured the former and that his brutalities caused a lot of grievance among the Hotak people, who also had to face the fact that their ancestors' graves were situated within the perimeters of his post. Earlier in 2008 this actor had already received warnings from Governor Hamdam after complaints from Hotak elders, but he had

94 See Martijn Kitzen, 'Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind', 728, Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 253-254, Kees Matthijssen, 'Head of Key Leader Engagement Program', letter of C-TFU to deputy chief of staff for operations RC -S, 19 November 2008. In absence of a dedicated official the senior POLAD became the program officer for KLE (in addition to his other work). See Kees Matthijssen, Peter Mollema, 'De Civiele Organisatie in Task Force Uruzgan' (Unclassified policy paper, Tirin Kot, 16 October 2008), 7.

95 Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 411.

96 Interview with anonymous TFU intelligence officer 2, by telephone, May 27, 2011.

97 Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 51-52, 105-106, 156-157, 167, On Toor Jan and his malpractices see also Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 148, interview with Toor Jan conducted by Albert Redderhof, Sar Regin, 21 September 2008.

persisted in his malpractices. In the wake of TFU operation *Bor Barakai* (18-27 October) which sought to establish influence among the Ghilzai of the Mirabad valley, the staff decided to remove Toor Jan and scrap his police post; a move which was supported by Hamdam and effectively realized on November 5.⁹⁸

Another utility that was explored by the TFU-5 staff was the coordination of non-kinetic KLE with the kinetic targeting effort in order to allow for the conversion of Taliban commanders. Traditionally the military aims at either capturing or killing enemy insurgent commanders, but in combination with the KLE program methods became available for approaching such commanders in a non-violent way. Referring to the traditional military color for staff symbols depicting enemy formations, this was dubbed 'RED KLE', as opposed to 'GREEN (regular) KLE'.⁹⁹ In order to illustrate the working of this tool it is necessary to understand that a typical local Taliban commander's power is linked to the area where his supporters were living. Therefore his interest could be harassed by military operations on his territory. In one case an Uruzgan Ghilzai Taliban commander from Deh Rafshan area's west bank had sought refuge in Pakistan as his territory had been subjected to consecutive military operations (among which *Spin Ghar*).¹⁰⁰ This exile severely threatened his position as his rivals within the Tokhi sub-tribe started to claim power. Therefore he decided to offer TFU officials his collaboration in change for a return to power and development aid for the people living in his territory. The TFU staff deemed this an excellent opportunity to switch a local Taliban commander and gain more intelligence on the insurgency in Uruzgan. This particular defection would also augment governmental control in an area inhabited by some of the most alienated people in Uruzgan. Unfortunately the momentum of the action was lost as a consequence of coalition bureaucracy. This particular commander was already on the JPEL (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.4) and could not be easily removed from it.¹⁰¹ Allegedly he was later arrested in Pakistan. Yet it is important to notice that the TFU counterinsurgency approach that emerged during 2008 also sought to reach out to local people still actively affiliated with the Taliban; a first step in establishing an inclusive new political order.

The successful embedding of KLE at the TFU staff level not only enhanced the task force's ability to continuously engage local leaders, these efforts were now also integrated with other TFU activities. Albeit the afore mentioned operation *Bor Barakai* could not yet benefit from the KLE program in its planning phase (at that time the program was still under development),

98 On *Bor Barakai* see Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 69-121, Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 405-407, Anonymous, 'Operatie Bor Barakai', 3D, *de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W. (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 137.

99 See lieutenant-colonel Hans van Dalen and Martijn Kitzen, *Key Leader Engagement briefing*, interview with lieutenant-colonel Hans van Dalen, G-2 TFU-5, Tirin Kot, 14 November 2008.

100 On this particular insurgent commander and his network see also Thomas Ruttig, 'Final Report on Thomas Ruttig's Mission (2 October – 6 December 2008)' (Unclassified report, Oranienburg, 12 December 2008).

101 Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 241. Interviews with anonymous TFU intelligence officer 1 & 2, by telephone, 27 May, 2011.

its exploitation made good use of the new tool.¹⁰² The removal of Toor Jan and his police post served to consolidate the results of the operation, and the TFU staff supported Governor Hamdam in organizing a *shura* with the elders of Mirabad's Ghilzai tribes. TFU commander Matthijssen's address to this *shura* clearly illustrates the *modus operandi* adopted by the Dutch task force for enhancing control over Uruzgan's population:

'The Governor needs to know what the needs are of the people in the area and you are the ones who can provide that. Based on these discussions the Government, supported by us, can then make a plan to start small scale development projects such as the repairing of schools or the improvement of irrigation canals. The Provincial Reconstruction Team of my Task Force stands ready to help.'¹⁰³

Thus, KLE was now a generic part of the TFU's toolbox and was used in order to establish and maintain control over the local population as well as to empower the position of the provincial government led by Governor Hamdam.

The generic and integrated application of KLE not only resulted in an enhanced capability for establishing and maintaining (governmental) control over Uruzgan's population, it also allowed for the utilization of this tool in support of military operations. TFU-5's last action, operation *Tura Ghar* in January 2009, epitomized this approach as it was meticulously planned by a fully integrated team consisting of military staff, cultural, political and development advisors.¹⁰⁴ For the first time this included 'Track 2' efforts as the military officers of the TFU staff were initiated in the program by the civil experts.¹⁰⁵ The result was that tribal elders in the troublesome Baluchi valley were carefully approached, including a 'below the radar' meeting in the Pakistani city of Quetta -most probably conducted by a local contact of the CULADs.¹⁰⁶ As the Dutch promised the allocation of development projects such as schools, roads, and hospitals to the Baluchi valley once their military operation had ceased, the

¹⁰² It has to be mentioned that a regrettable incident occurred during operation Bor Barakai when British troops of 42 Royal Marine Commando arrested Hotak leader Malem Manan. Manan was a key leader in Uruzgan's Ghilzai segment and linked to Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan. Consequently, he was a pivotal agent for establishing control over the alienated Ghilzai sub-tribes. Moreover, Malem Manan previously had established contact with the TFU and was willing to collaborate with ISAF and the government on condition of enhanced security. Despite this incident (and a similar incident one year later involving Australian forces) the Dutch managed to repair the relationship with Manan and they kept good ties until the end of the TFU mission. See Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 90, 213, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 4, 11 August 2009, 2 January 2010. On Malem Manan see also Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 144-147.

¹⁰³ Kees Matthijssen, 'Speech Commander Task Force Uruzgan', delivered during *shura* at governor's compound, Tirin Kot, 25 October 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, nr. 330. On *Tura Ghar* see also, among others, Jan Renger Swillens, 'Comprehensive Approach: de praktijk', *Militaire Spectator* 178:11 (2009), 579-582, Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 405-407, George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, 'The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009', 442-444.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with anonymous TFU intelligence officer 2, by telephone, May 27, 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Bette Dam, 'Afghanistan: How to talk your way out of a conflict', www.rnw.nl (accessed 28 March 2009, no longer available online).

elders were willing to cooperate.¹⁰⁷ This resulted in the decision to construct a permanent ANSF patrol base (Mashal) in the Baluchi valley in order to secure the populace and create a permissive environment for aid projects.¹⁰⁸ The large-scale military offensive, which saw some 800 Dutch soldiers involved, did not meet any resistance. Although a direct causal relationship with the engagement of tribal elders cannot be proven, it is highly likely that the elders urged their tribesmen not to pick up their weapons.

This example clearly demonstrates that by now the TFU mastered KLE sufficiently for application throughout the full spectrum of its activities. To refer back to the USECT method for establishing and transferring control over the Focal Areas, KLE was now being used to augment the consolidation of control in preparation of a future transfer in the three main ADZs by maintaining ties with most important local leaders and empowering the provincial (both with regard to Tirin Kot ADZ and the province as a whole) and district governments (Deh Rawud and Chora). Furthermore, whereas establishing and augmenting contact with local political actors had been a crucial part of the engagement and consolidation phase of operation *Bor Barakai*, operation *Tura Ghar* had deployed such actions from the very start of its planning, which greatly increased the understanding of the local dynamics and shaped the design of the operation's plan and most probably also affected the attitude of the local population. Thus, by the end of its rotation in January 2009 TFU-5 had consolidated TFU-4's progress in the three main ADZs and expanded the task force's influence sphere to the crucial geographical connection between Tirin Kot and Chora, the Baluchi valley, as well as to the Mirabad valley (respectively Focal Areas A-9 and A-6).¹⁰⁹ With regard to the latter two areas, this encompassed establishing a first connection between the provincial government and the Ghilzai tribes since former governor Jan Mohammed's brutal repressive policy had alienated these people and driven them into the arms of the Taliban. Therefore it can be stated that TFU's policy of engaging the leaders of Uruzgan's various (sub-)tribal segments while simultaneously promoting Governor Hamdam's 'independent' government began to bear fruit.

By early 2009 it was clear that the changes of the year 2008 had transformed the TFU campaign into an effective counterinsurgency campaign tailored to the specific demands of Uruzgan's operational environment. Moreover, as typical for modern counterinsurgency campaigns field innovations such as the KLE program that originated from the PRT had

¹⁰⁷ See 'Grote Operatie in Uruzgan', www.depers.nl (accessed 26 May 2011, no longer available online), and Bette Dam, 'I had no guarantee the sons would not fight', www.rnw.nl (accessed 29 March 2009, no longer available online).

¹⁰⁸ Actually *Tura Ghar* was the first operation in which the TFU followed counterinsurgency's logic that any clearing operation should be exploited by establishing a permanent presence among the population. The availability of sufficient ANA troops finally enabled this sustainment. See also Jan Renger Swillens, 'Comprehensive Approach: de praktijk', 582, George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, 'The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009', 443-444, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 180-181.

¹⁰⁹ A 2009 official evaluation by the Dutch government states that the TFU had firmly established itself in the three ADZs by the end of 2008, while a May 2009 survey by TLO explicitly states that Mirabad and the Baluchi valley remained problematic, but that governmental control had increased and violence decreased. See Ministeries van Buitenlandse Zaken, Defensie en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, *Tussentijdse evaluatie ISAF 2008*, 12, The Liaison Office, *Three Years Later*, 24.

been incorporated within the TFU.¹¹⁰ All these developments provided the underpinning for the remainder of the campaign that now started to focus on the transfer of authority to both the local government -to the extent it was deemed 'ready' for assuming authority over Focal Areas as well as different policy fields- and other coalition partners. Despite the good progress and the fact that the campaign itself now could be effectively considered a full-fledged neo-classical counterinsurgency campaign, there remained significant challenges in achieving the 2010 end state of a safe and secure Uruzgan with an improved government capable of providing the populace with a credible prospect of prosperity. Most important, in this regard, is that the past year had added to the experiences of 2007 (especially the battle of Chora) and advanced the insight that establishing control by re-balancing the political order and connecting all societal segments to the local government did not so much suffer from the threat of the Taliban itself, but from the very reason that the Taliban in Uruzgan had become relevant, namely the influence of Jan Mohammed Khan and his Popalzai-dominated network. Dutch journalist Deedee Derksen, in this regard, went as far as stating that 'the Taliban were supporting actors with cap guns...', it was 'war against the wrong people'.¹¹¹ The question that matters to us is how the TFU, in addition to securing the population, would continue its effort to outmanoeuvre Jan Mohammed in order to yield a sustainable and stable inclusive political order that through its connection to the local government would serve as the basis for achieving long-term development after the end of the TFU campaign. Therefore, we will now discuss the last phase of the TFU campaign.

10.3 2009-2010: the road to transfer of authority

On 2 February 2009 brigadier Tom Middendorp (who would become Chief of the Defence Staff in 2012) and CIVREP Joep Wijnands took over command of the TFU from colonel Kees Matthijssen and CIVREP Peter Mollema.¹¹² In an interview with *The Economist* Middendorp immediately elucidated that TFU-6 would make good use of the accumulated insights about the true nature of violent contention in Uruzgan:

'... the Taliban are less of a threat to the tottering structures of the Afghan state than feuding local tribes and predatory warlords. The Uruzgan insurgency is mixed up with a notably vicious tribal war between the Popalzai [sic] tribe and minority Ghilzai tribes. Jan Mohammad [sic]

110 As aforementioned examples of other field innovations were the introduction of an effective approach to mitigate the IED threat and a sophisticated counter-network method for disrupting the Taliban (Chapter Eight, section 8.1). We will not elaborate on these developments as they lie beyond the scope of this studie.

111 Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 164.

112 Anonymous, 'Commando-overdracht TFU', 2 March 2009, available through <http://www.defensie.nl/documenten/videos/2009/02/02/commando-overdracht-tfu>.

Khan, a Popolzai warlord and former Uruzgan governor, marginalised the Ghilzais. This seems to have created lasting turmoil which is exploited by the Taliban.¹¹³

Governor Hamdam, who stated that less than fifty percent of the resistance in Uruzgan, ('and that even might be too much') was connected with the Taliban -and even in that case often related to local feuds-, supported this view.¹¹⁴ TFU-6, thus, continued the campaign based on the idea that the core grievances in the province were caused by the remaining influence of Jan Mohammed and his associates. With the August 2010 end date rapidly approaching-it was already clear that another extension was highly unlikely due to the political climate in Dutch parliament and tensions within the government coalition-, this meant that the last three TFU rotations (TFU-6, -7, and -8) had to overcome many challenges in order to achieve the Dutch end goal of transferring a secure and politically stable situation that could function as an underpinning for long-term development.¹¹⁵

First, the increase in security in the three ADZs had to be consolidated and responsibilities and tasks in this field were to be transferred to the ANSF as much as possible. This fitted the road chosen in the Focal Paper and as such encompassed tailoring this strategy to bridge the gap between the current situation and the desired end goal. For this reason the Uruzgan Security Plan (USP) was developed and implemented by a new security platform, the so-called 'Big Six'; TFU commander Middendorp and CIVREP Wijnands, together with Governor Hamdam, ANP commander Juma Gul, ANA brigadier Abdul Hamid, as well as the head of the local branch of the National Directorate of Security (NDS, the intelligence service), general Aziz Zacharya, would meet every month to discuss and if necessary adjust the implementation of this new security plan.¹¹⁶ Henceforth local ownership of the security situation by the ANSF was progressively promoted and in addition to mentoring the ANA and ANP, Afghan troops were now also prepared for their task by partnering them with TFU forces at the company and platoon level. Further Dutch Special Forces, which had left Uruzgan at the end of 2007, were redeployed for the remainder of the TFU campaign in order to contribute to a durable security situation by disrupting Taliban networks outside the ADZs. Under the name Task Force-55 (TF-55) the detachment conducted highly effective actions against Taliban leadership, enablers,

113 Anonymous, 'The Dutch Model', *The Economist*, 12 March 2009, available through <http://www.economist.com/node/13279199>.

114 Bette Dam, 'Gouverneur Uruzgan allang in gesprek met Taliban', www.rnw.nl (accessed 22 July 2009, no longer available online).

115 With regard to the attitude of Dutch politicians towards a possible 2010 extension see Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 235.

116 See, among others, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 344*, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, *Militaire Spectator* 179:4 (2010), 199, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Defensie, *Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006-2010* (Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2011), 130. On the 'Big Six' see Anonymous, 'Big Six' bespreken veiligheidsplan Uruzgan', 12 March 2009, available through <http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2009/03/12/big-six-bespreken-veiligheidsplan-uruzgan>, interview with colonel Richard van Harskamp, commander TFU-4, The Hague, 8 March 2010, Annieke Kranenberg, 'Een diplomaat, maar wél een die de baas is', *Volkskrant*, 20 November 2013, available through <http://www.volkskrant.nl/dossier-archief/een-diplomaat-maar-wel-een-die-de-baas-is-a3547847/>. For Zacharya see also Martijn Kitzen, 'Uruzgan Field Notes', 214.

and caches in Uruzgan's remote outskirts as well as in adjacent provinces.¹¹⁷ Among those actions was a series of five operations in the second half of 2009 that would lead to the second *Militaire Willemsorde* for a Dutch Special Forces officer, major Gijs Tuinman, who was awarded the decoration in December 2014.¹¹⁸ The fact that during the TFU-6 rotation in May 2009 the last large-scale operation of the TFU campaign (*Mani Ghar*, which established a permanent combat outpost (Tabar) on the west bank of the Deh Rafshan) was conducted bears testimony to the effectiveness of the combined USP and the TF-55 actions.¹¹⁹ Consequently by August 2010 the security situation within the three ADZs was not only consolidated, but could also be maintained by the locally operating ANSF, with ISAF forces in a supporting role.

Even more important was that the TFU would end its campaign by leaving a politically stable province that could be subjected to long-term development efforts. As aforementioned this required the consolidation of the balanced political order that had gradually come into existence during the TFU campaign, as well as linking this order to an inclusive provincial government. While TFU-5 had successfully outmanoeuvred Jan Mohammed Khan for the moment, there were sufficiently of his straw men left in powerful positions in the province. Most prominent was chief of police Juma Gul, of whom by now it had become known that he was closely associated with the former governor and even considered him as his father.¹²⁰ Albeit the Dutch had successfully thwarted Jan Mohammed's attempt to re-establish his grip over the provincial and district governments, he still could be linked to key officials in sixteen (out of 25) of the provincial government's departments.¹²¹ This contradicted to the Dutch objective of a more or less independent government open to all segments of Uruzgan's fragmented societal landscape and therefore the Dutch stressed the need to step up the effort to guard over the dependency of the local government. In order to forward Hamdam's 'independent' government any malign local influences had to be purged from it. This, however, not only pertained to Jan Mohammed and his network exclusively, but also to any other actors endangering the reputation of the government -especially in the eyes of previously marginalized popular segments. In this regard the episode of Barakzai police officer Toor Jan who extorted Mirabad's Ghilzai tribesmen, and the anecdote in this book's prologue on chairman Obaidullah of the 'independent' election commission who tried to deny the Ghilzai of Deh Rafshan and Mirabad access to polling stations, should be mentioned.

117 On TF-55 see Arthur ten Cate, Martijn van der Vorm, *Callsign Nassau*, 278-323. The deployment of TF-55 coincided with the US surge under general McChrystal who reorganized the command structure of ISAF Special Forces. Consequently TF-55 operated under the Special Operations Command and Control Element RC-S, and, thus, was not under direct orders of the TFU -in contrast to the earlier Viper detachment. This gave the operators the ability to execute tasks in the greater Kandahar region, of which Uruzgan's Taliban networks were greatly dependent.

118 See, among others, Ministerie van Defensie, *Uitreiking Militaire Willemsorde aan Gijs Tuinman* (Den Haag: Ministerie van Defensie, 2014), Emilie van Outeren, "In Afghanistan zijn we boven onszelf uitgestegen", *NRC Handelsblad*, 4 December 2014.

119 On *Mani Ghar*, its results, and Tabar see, for instance, Anonymous, 'Presentie in West Deh Rahsan', 3D, *de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W. (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 152-155; Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 268-269, 325-336. For a complete oversight of large-scale TFU operations see Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Defensie, *Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006-2010*, 129-131.

120 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 27.

121 *Ibid.*

Thus, the main challenge for the remainder of the TFU campaign was not only to contain Jan Mohammed's influence on the provincial political marketplace for that moment -i.e. maintaining the tribal balance-, but also to bolster the provincial government's independent position in order to guarantee a durable link with all different societal segments that would be strong enough to withstand any new attempts to weaken this connection.

The experiences of previous TFU rotations had revealed how to mitigate significant obstacles with regard to maintaining a balanced political order and empowering the provincial government. Whereas the TFU KLE effort effectively dealt with such issues as influence from Kabul and synchronization within the TFU, coordination with locally operating US and Australian coalition forces remained troublesome. The latter, for instance, had weakened the Barakzai and Achekzai block by the accidental killing of Rozi Khan and offended the Achekzai by organizing a deliberate search in Malem Sadiq's house in which many weapons were confiscated.¹²² More structural was the persistent rift between US Special Forces and the TFU regarding the collaboration with Matiullah Khan. Albeit US State Department officials (including those on the ground in Uruzgan) seemed to share the Dutch view of Matiullah as a spoiler preventing a durable political solution, the locally operating US Special Forces preferred to maintain their rather short-term view of Matiullah as a powerful ally in fighting the Taliban.¹²³ The Dutch, on their part, did not involve Matiullah in the 'Big Six' and the USP, and thereby placed this powerful local actor and his militia outside the institutional structure of the provincial government -despite the fact that the KAU was nominally part of the ANP. By now Matiullah's position was quickly rising thanks to his thriving entrepreneurship that gave him enough financial resources to buy influence in Uruzgan's political marketplace.¹²⁴ As a consequence of his increasing power, Matiullah now had become a competitor to his uncle Jan Mohammed. Moreover, he also demonstrated that he had learned from his relative's mistakes as he created dependency by use of generous deeds and even financed his own development projects to address the needs of the local population. Of course, this 'hearts and minds' campaign was also intended to win the support of the foreigners. Yet, Matiullah's past rendered him an unpopular figure in the eyes of many societal groups, including the Barakzai, Achekzai, and the previously marginalized Ghilzai tribes. His rising power and the nearing end of the TFU campaign more than ever demanded consensus between the TFU and US coalition forces in order to contain Matiullah's potentially spoiling effects on a durable politically stable situation.

Next to coalition forces (by this time seven nations had deployed troops) and accompanying development agencies the international effort in Uruzgan now also encompassed a variety of NGOs (54 in 2009, among which the 17 members of the DCU) and international organizations such as UNAMA. In order to align all international and local parties for achieving the TFU's

122 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 14 November 2008.

123 See Anonymous civil expert, 'Governance in Uruzgan Province-extended version'.

124 See, among others, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 32-34, Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living, America, The Taliban, And The War Through Afghan Eyes*, 256-257.

2010 end goal of a sufficiently secure and stable situation that could serve as a platform for further development, it was deemed necessary to revisit the campaign plan once more; TFU-6 set out to replace the Focal Paper by an updated, more comprehensive plan, the Uruzgan Campaign Plan (UCP).¹²⁵ The upgrade of the rank of the TFU-commander from colonel to brigadier, the March 2009 transfer of command over the PRT from a military commander to the CIVREP, and the appointment of an Australian lieutenant-colonel as chief of the TFU staff were additional measures to increase the task force's leverage over all civilian and military actors in order to enhance unity of effort for the remainder of the campaign.¹²⁶ Let us now take a look at how exactly the UCP aimed to establish a secure and stable province with an improved government, and which effects followed from its implementation.

10.3.1 The Uruzgan Campaign Plan on paper and in practice

In the evolution of the TFU's campaign plan the UCP was a logical next step that took the Focal Paper's counterinsurgency approach further in order to adapt it to the current operational environment (including local and international actors) and the pending requirements for realizing the task force's 2010 end goal.¹²⁷ As aforementioned the main purpose of this updated campaign plan was to enhance unity of effort among the various actors operating in the province in order to boost the campaign in preparation of the upcoming transfer of authority. Like the Focal Paper the UCP acknowledged that realizing long-term stability and development objectives would require 'decades' of efforts beyond 2010, which was to be specified by the Afghans themselves and their future international partners. Consequently, the TFU mission remained to establish a safe and secure situation that could function as a platform for long-term stabilization:

¹²⁵ On the UCP see Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, "Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan', Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, "Comprehensive Planning in Uruzgan" (Paper presented at 15th International Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium, "The Evolution of C2", Santa Monica, 22-24 June 2010), available through http://www.dodccrp.org/events/15th_iccrts_2010/papers/160.pdf, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, *Comprehensive planning in Uruzgan*, Santa Monica, 23 June 2010 presentation delivered at 15th ICCRTS conference, available through http://www.dodccrp.org/events/15th_iccrts_2010/presentations/160.pdf, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171-173.

¹²⁶ See also personal correspondence with anonymous PRT-7 staff officer, 17-18 December 2014, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 36-37, Peter Mollema, Kees Matthijssen, 'Uruzgan: op de goede weg, Civiel-militaire samenwerking in een complexe counter-insurgency operatie', 401-402.

¹²⁷ Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, "Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan', 200, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, "Comprehensive Planning in Uruzgan", 4, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171.

'TFU will primarily focus on creating a stable and secure environment in which political, social, economic conditions are created under which the Afghan government, and national and international development organizations, can operate without TFU assistance.'¹²⁸

The UCP explicitly stated that the TFU would cooperate with ANSF and coalition forces in order to expand the influence spheres of the ADZs, including establishing geographical connections between those areas. The cooperation with ANSF specifically would concentrate on the transfer of responsibility for security to these forces, as was agreed in the USP. Social and economical development would be conducted in close collaboration with UNAMA and various other international organizations and NGOs, which were considered capable of continuing these tasks after the TFU withdrawal. In cooperation with the Afghan government the TFU stepped up its effort to establish a representative provincial administration that largely would be able to exert control autonomously by August 2010. In the final version of the UCP all these matters converged in a clearly formulated and realistic objective for the TFU campaign:

'The TFU campaign objective, within the context of the UCP, as part of ISAF, in partnership with ANSF and in coordination with GIROA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the International Community, is to contribute to a reliable and effective government that can bring the government and the people closer together, and is able to provide a stable and secure environment and development progress in Uruzgan, in due course without ISAF support.'¹²⁹

The campaign objective, thus, was to be reached through activities aimed at enhancing governance, socio-economic development, and security; a continuation of the three major lines of operations of the Focal Paper, which were also identified in the 2006 Master Plan.¹³⁰ This time, however, these lines were subdivided into nine 'Reconstruction & Development' themes on which progress should be achieved. As a means of providing common ground for all actors involved in the province these themes were projected in a conceptual comprehensive framework that also identified 'disablers' and 'enablers' that could affect

128 2009 UCP quoted in Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, 201.

129 2010 UCP quoted in Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 74, see also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171.

130 For the UCP comprehensive conceptual framework see Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, 201-203, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, 'Comprehensive Planning in Uruzgan', 5-8, Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171-172.

progression in either a negative or a positive way. Local conflicts, insurgent influence, and unsupportive key leaders were, among others, identified as ‘disablers’, while supportive key leaders, security forces presence, NGO and other development activities were considered important ‘enablers’. It should be noted here that the UCP stressed the importance of key leaders as both spoilers and valuable collaborators, and thereby the importance of KLE was finally anchored in the TFU campaign plan. Furthermore the UCP conceptual framework was based on a set of basic principles that were broadly propagated by the international community. Of those principles tribal balance and Afghan ownership were most relevant to Uruzgan at this time, but they also encompassed universal values such as human rights and gender equality. Thus, the conceptual framework of the UCP sought to buy in other actors and achieve unity of effort by emphasizing shared basic principles and communicating their (potential) role as ‘enablers’ of the TFU campaign, whereas threats to this campaign were indicated as ‘disablers’.

The conceptual framework was translated into an actionable population-centric approach by tailoring it to the needs of the people on the ground.¹³¹ This not only encompassed measures at the provincial level (such as institution building), it also required addressing the specific situation in Uruzgan’s different locales. For this purpose thirteen so-called ‘areas of influence’ were discerned, for each of which specific objectives and a customized approach were formulated, including the role of enablers and threats caused by ‘disablers’. Contrary to the seventeen Focal Areas, the confines of the newly identified areas were determined by use of societal and socio-economic characteristics rather than by geographical features. Thereby, the areas of influence allowed for optimal engagement of local communities. In addition to the areas of the three main ADZs, the Shahidi Hassas/Charchena district and Khas Uruzgan were now also incorporated in the plan, despite a lack of TFU presence in these areas. This can be explained by the fact that the UCP sought to establish an underpinning for long-term development in Uruzgan as a whole, as well as the fact that the Dutch task force also sought to actively involve actors operating in these districts (such as for instance US forces, ANSF and the Afghan government, local actors, and several NGOs).

Not only the Focal Areas themselves were replaced, also the USECT methodology that was introduced for systematically establishing and transferring control over these areas. Consistent with RC-S, where Dutch major-general Mart de Kruif now had assumed command, the TFU started to use the ‘shape, clear, hold and build’ phasing methodology for counterinsurgency operations.¹³² In the shaping phase an area and its people are meticulously analyzed to obtain a thorough understanding of local circumstances. On the basis of this understanding the insurgency is denied direct influence over the local populace

¹³¹ This section on the areas of influence is based on Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, ‘Comprehensive and iterative planning’ in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, 205-207, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, ‘Comprehensive Planning in Uruzgan’, 9-12.

¹³² See, among others, George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf, ‘The Dutch COIN approach: three years in Uruzgan, 2006-2009’, 437, Mart De Kruif, ‘Commandant in Kandahar, Ervaringen als Commandant ISAF Regional Command South in Afghanistan’, *Militaire Spectator* 180:1 (2011), 14-15, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, ‘Comprehensive and iterative planning’ in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, 200.

through military operations against insurgent fighters; the clearing stage. Once a locale is sufficiently cleared, socio-economic and political measures will be employed to consolidate the results as part of the hold phase. During this phase the ANSF start to gradually take over responsibility for the security situation. In the building stage the actual transfer of security responsibility as well as the transfer of control to the Afghan government takes place. By now the target area has become sufficiently stable to begin long-term development, for which purpose projects are planned and gradually started. Just like with USECT, the distinction between the different stages is not as clear-cut as suggested by the terminology. Shaping activities to enhance the understanding of local society are typically also part of the other phases. This also applies to security measures that typify the clearing stage. Given the fact that the three main ADZs had already achieved USECT's consolidation phase by August 2008, and that since that time governance at the district level and presence of ANSF had improved, they could be largely categorized as in the build phase. Consequently, those areas could be expected to be ready for transfer of authority at the end of the TFU campaign. The districts in northern Uruzgan as well as the peripheral areas connecting the ADZs (especially the Baluchi valley, west bank Deh Rafshan, Mirabad valley, and the Tangi valley that connected Tirin Kot with Deh Rawud) were more troublesome as they could be categorized as being in an incipient holding stage at best. As the TFU henceforth would focus on the main ADZs as well as their geographical connections, these latter areas of influence would need close attention during the last year of the TFU campaign.

The UCP, thus was yet another population-centric campaign plan that sought to enhance autonomous governmental control through a multi-actor comprehensive approach delivering progress on the terrains of governance, socio-economic development, and security at the grassroots level. While the plan itself was well-contemplated and clearly formulated in order to provide a common ground for all (inter-)national civil and military actors active in Uruzgan, implementing the UCP in the reality of counterinsurgency warfare in a highly complicated environment was a challenge of a different order. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the TFU encountered some major troubles in its effort to enhance the unity of effort in the preparation of the transfer of authority. Let us now take a look at these difficulties, which were caused by internal factors within the TFU as well as by external factors related to other actors active in Uruzgan province.

First, the introduction of the UCP coincided with the enhanced civilianization of the PRT. This was to function as an accelerator for the cooperation with other civil actors and mainly encompassed a transfer of command from military authority to the CIVREP, while the main body of the PRT would still consist of military personnel. Albeit the staff of TFU-5 had already carefully prepared this move, the soldiers of PRT-7, who deployed under TFU-6 in March 2009, were not well informed about the details of the plan.¹³³ Moreover, the CIVREP proved to be too busy to operate as director of the PRT, which caused unclarity with

133 See Kees Matthijssen, Peter Mollema, 'De Civiele Organisatie in Task Force Uruzgan', and personal correspondence with anonymous PRT-7 staff officer, 17-18 December 2014.

regard to the exact chain of command. Due to this confusion the UCP and its 'shape, clear, hold, build' methodology were not clearly communicated to the PRT, which had conducted pre-deployment training with the USECT method. Although these issues were ultimately solved by the deputy CIVREP and the commander of the PRT's military staff, they caused huge interference with the implementation of the UCP as the PRT was the main vehicle for achieving unity of effort with the numerous NGOs and international development actors. Another complicating factor, in this regard, was the fact that the UCP was classified as NATO secret -in accordance with military standards-, which made it impossible to share the document with actors such as NGOs.¹³⁴

Another problem that seriously weakened the position of the PRT was that the extensive civil-military cooperation on the ground in Uruzgan prompted higher foreign affairs and development cooperation officials to cut their contribution to the budget for the military's CIMIC projects. Despite protests by TFU commander Middendorp and CIMIC officials at the defence staff in The Hague, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to allocate money from its funds to the relatively small CIMIC budget -it should be remembered here that during the entire mission there was a huge asymmetry between those budgets with a total of 126 million being spent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs versus 4 million spent on CIMIC projects.¹³⁵ Subsequently the PRT had to prioritize its projects and even declared a project stop in June. This situation was only solved after two months when the budget issues were apparently cleared and funds again started to pour in. Like aforementioned these projects were the main means for delivering development aid at the grassroots level within the TFU ink spot and a crucial tool of leverage for engaging local power-holders. As a consequence not only the PRT was seriously hampered by this bureaucratic struggle, but the TFU as a whole suffered from a temporary decline of its ability to deliver non-kinetic effects necessary for addressing the development and governance lines of operation of the UCP.

Last of the internal factors that troubled the implementation of the UCP was the TFU staff's emphasis on kinetic military action against the Taliban. This, among others, revealed itself as a consequence of repeated rocket attacks against *Kamp Holland*, in one of which a Dutch soldier was killed and five others were injured. In response the west bank of the Deh Rafshan area, where the attacks originated from, became a top priority and the already mentioned large-scale operation (more than 1,000 soldiers) *Mani Ghar* was quickly launched to clear the forty square kilometres area of Taliban in order to mitigate the threat and establish a permanent presence.¹³⁶ This all occurred without a proper understanding of the complicated local circumstances and in absence of an exact indication of the culprit of the missile attacks. Despite statements that the Taliban insurgency was not the main problem in Uruzgan, key

¹³⁴ Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 74, see also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171.

¹³⁵ Personal correspondence with anonymous PRT-7 staff officer, 17-18 December 2014, see also Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 34.

¹³⁶ Bette Dam, 'Offensief is antwoord op aanval Kamp Holland', *Weblog Vrede en Veiligheid* (Hans de Vreij), 16 May 2009, no longer available online.

members of TFU-6's military staff relapsed to the military default mode that prescribes the use of force against the enemy, without linking this to a thorough understanding of the societal background of the insurgency in the province.¹³⁷ In combination with the aforementioned decline of non-kinetic capacity this preference for kinetic action further troubled the implementation of the UCP's directives with regard to development and governance.

External interferences with the implementation of the UCP were mainly caused by different views among coalition partners on some of Uruzgan's key local actors, especially Matiullah Khan. Both US and Australian Special Forces were cooperating with Matiullah, and due to his recent ascent to power their respective countries increasingly shared the view of Matiullah as a 'security provider'.¹³⁸ In this view Matiullah and his militia were instrumental in realizing a safe and sustainable security situation in Uruzgan. This, of course, directly opposed the Dutch policy that considered him a powerful spoiler and a threat to durable political stability in the province. Both allies did not comply with the TFU course and continued their cooperation with Matiullah based on the arguments that international forces in Uruzgan were already totally dependent on the 'lord of the highway' for the protection of their supply route, and Matiullah's excellent reputation as a provider of security and highly effective anti-Taliban fighter (propagated by US and Australian Special Forces whose commendations and tokens of appreciation decorated Matiullah's office).¹³⁹ Furthermore, the Chief of the Australian Defence Force later defended the cooperation by pointing at Matiullah's generosity towards the local population -as mentioned in section 10.3 this was part of his own 'hearts and minds' campaign.¹⁴⁰ Albeit the Dutch through their logistical sub-contractors indirectly paid for Matiullah's protection along the Kandahar-Tirin Kot highway, they refused to do business with him and continued to prevent his appointment in an official governmental position (chief of police), while simultaneously continuing their policy to promote opposed local power-holders such as for instance the leaders of the Barakzai/Achekzai block and Tokhi prominent Mohammed Nabi Khan.

This deep rift between the Dutch policy and that of their Australian and US allies could not be repaired by the introduction of the UCP. Even worse, relations between US Special

137 Personal correspondence with anonymous PRT-7 staff officer, 17-18 December 2014. This confirms informal talks with staff officers (conducted by the author) during the TFU-6 period. Reportedly the Australian chief of staff, who held a Special Forces background, was one of the fiercest hardliners emphasizing the need for kinetic actions.

138 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 34-35, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 44.

139 See, among others, Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 34-35, Mark Dodd, Jeremy Kelly, 'ADF plays down warlord's role crucial supply chain', *The Australian* 28 April 2009, accessible at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/archive/news/adf-plays-down-warlords-supply-role/story-e6frg6no-1225704502772>, Dexter Filkins, 'Rule of the Gun, With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire', *New York Times*, 5 June 2010, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/06/world/asia/06warlords.html>, Jeremy Kelly, 'Long road to Tarin Kowt', *The Australian* 28 April 2009, available through http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/long-road-to-tarin-kowt/story-e6frg6so1225704435431?nk=39833_2607e20c24eee96a1339a2c4d2a, Gareth Porter, 'U.S. Dependence On Afghan Warlords', *Inter Press Service* 29 October 2009, accessible at <http://www.ipsnews.net/2009/10/afghanistan-us-nato-forces-rely-on-warlords-for-security/>.

140 Dan Oakes, 'Military chief defends warlord ally', *Sidney Morning Herald* 30 October 2010, available through <http://www.smh.com.au/world/military-chief-defends-warlord-ally-20101029-177iv.html>. See also Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 32.

Forces and the Dutch TFU staff hit a low in July 2009 when the former learned that the Dutch were suspecting Matiullah of duplicity after seven Dutch soldiers had been wounded during a Dutch convoy on the Tirin Kot-Kandahar highway.¹⁴¹ This cumulated in a shouting match between a US Special Forces commander and one of the Dutch POLADs that occurred at the TFU staff compound in presence of Matiullah (who had been taken there by the US commander). A similar difference in interpretation concerned police commander Juma Gul, a *protégé* of Jan Mohammed Khan. Whereas the Dutch had gradually adopted the point of view that this actor should only be supported to prevent Matiullah's installation and simultaneously should be actively engaged in order to contain his negative influence (especially corruption) on Uruzgan's ANP, US forces on the ground propped up this predatory spoiler and even presented him a customized armoured Humvee.¹⁴² Unlike Matiullah's case, however, US policy levels did not favor Juma Gul and officials from the US embassy in Kabul discussed this with, among others, President Karzai and IDLG director Popal.¹⁴³ Yet, this latter case demonstrates that even when unity of effort was achieved at higher levels, this not necessarily led to an alignment at the grassroots level. It is hardly surprising therefore that a September 2009 TLO report explicitly called for a more cohesive engagement of Uruzgan's local actors by the various coalition contingents.¹⁴⁴

Albeit these pivotal political differences between key coalition members would haunt the TFU campaign until its end, the TFU-6 staff succeeded in enlarging the unity of effort among the kaleidoscope of parties operating in the province. By the end of its rotation TFU-6 had sorted most internal organizational problems and established a workable civil-military interface (with the PRT as its main vehicle) capable of coordinating and delivering non-kinetic effects.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the task force could build on the results of its predecessors, which meant that the support to the district officials in Chora and Deh Rawud had been continued as well as the empowerment of Governor Hamdam's provincial administration. Consequently governmental control in the three main districts reached an unprecedented high; the approximate figures of 80% in Tirin Kot district, 90% in Deh Rawud, and 50-60% in Chora district were reported (in comparison governmental control in 2006 was estimated at respectively 30-40%, 20%, and 20%).¹⁴⁶ Additionally, May 2009 witnessed the start of

141 Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 241-243, Bette Dam, 'The story of 'M': US-Dutch Shouting Matches in Uruzgan', Guest Blog for Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 July 2010, accessible at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/guest-blog-the-story-of-m-us-dutch-shouting-matches-in-uruzgan/>. The Dutch convoy mission *Taki Ghar* took place during the first days of July and consisted of 56 vehicles and estimated 110 Dutch soldiers, and some 200 ANSF personnel. See Lex van der Vegt, *PC Infanterie Battlegroup 9, Ervaringen en uitdagingen*, Breda, 17 February 2010, presentation for Netherlands Defence Academy staff, Anonymous, 'Militairen gewond na aanval konvooi Uruzgan', *NRC Handelsblad* 6 July 2009, available through <http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/van/2009/juli/06/militairen-gewond-na-aanval-konvooi-uruzgan-11751191>.

142 Anonymous, 'Uruzgan, s [sic] Shifting Sands' (Kabul, 12 April 2009).

143 Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 236.

144 The Liaison Office, *Three Years Later*, 33.

145 Personal correspondence with anonymous PRT-7 staff officer, 17-18 December 2014.

146 The Liaison Office, *Three Years Later*, 24. Percentages are approximate levels of government access which correspond with governmental control in the respective districts.

the construction of a 40-kilometres asphalt-topped road between Tirin Kot and Chora.¹⁴⁷ This prestigious project, for which the German development organization *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ) had already been awarded a contract by the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation in December 2007 (totaling 34 million for development activities throughout the province, GTZ's so-called Uruzgan Provincial Development Project (UPDP), including some 15 million for the road), aimed at improving the geographical connection between the Tirin Kot and Chora ADZ through what the UCP labeled 'sustainable infrastructure'.¹⁴⁸ Even more important was the political agenda of this project; the new road would run through the Deh Rafshan area and the Baluchi valley, the home areas of previously marginalized Ghilzai sub-tribes, thus the road construction was also intended to enhance the provincial government's control over these communities by augmenting their economical and political opportunities.¹⁴⁹ We will come back to this project below when discussing the final stage of the TFU campaign. TFU-6's biggest achievement, however, concerned the aforementioned advance in security that resulted from the increased unity of effort between TFU and ANSF units as agreed in the USP and coordinated through the monthly 'Big Six' meetings. This not only augmented safety at the grassroots level in the districts, it also prepared Afghan forces for assuming full authority over the security situation. The upcoming presidential elections of 20 August 2009 would be the first big test as it was agreed by all involved parties that the ANSF would be responsible for the safety of the 49 polling stations with TFU forces in a back up role.¹⁵⁰

TFU-6 did not witness the course of the elections in Uruzgan as it transferred command to the TFU-7 staff under the leadership of brigadier Marc van Uhm and CIVREP Michel Rentenaar (who previously had worked as POLAD during the Dutch mission in Iraq) on August 3 2009.¹⁵¹ The new rotation greatly benefitted from the efforts of its predecessors. In preparation of the elections TFU-6 had organized a series of six meetings with the 'Big Six', the independent

147 See, among others, Hans de Vreij, 'Uruzgan: aanleg weg naar Chora begonnen', *Weblog Vrede en Veiligheid*, 2 May 2009, <http://hansdevreij.com/2009/05/02/uruzgan-aanleg-weg-naar-chora-begonnen/>, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 'Wiederaufbau: Deutsche Strasse am Hindukusch', 2 May 2009, accessible at <http://www.n24.de/n24/Nachrichten/Politik/d/675370/wiederaufbau--deutsche-strasse-am-hindukusch.html>.

148 Interview with Dr. Annette Kleinbröd, UPDP program manager GTZ, conducted by Ralph van Kemenade, Tirin Kot, 1 January 2010, Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, 204.

149 Afghan Analysts Network co-founder Thomas Rutig was hired to vet local circumstances in order to advise how the road construction could contribute to reconciliation and security. See Thomas Ruttig, 'Final Report on Thomas Ruttig's Mission (2 October – 6 December 2008)'. For a similar case of the use of road construction in order to augment governmental control took place in Afghanistan's Kunar province (the Pech river road) during 2007-2008 and is described in David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 87-102, see also Martijn Kitzen, 'Boekbespreking The Accidental Guerrilla', *Militaire Spectator* 178:11 (2009), 641-642.

150 Anonymous, 'Veiligheidsovereenkomst verkiezingen ondertekend', 28 July 2009, accessible at <http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2009/07/28/veiligheidsovereenkomst-verkiezingen-ondertekend>.

151 Anonymous, 'Commando-overdracht Task Force Uruzgan', 3 August 2009, available through <http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2009/08/03/commando-overdracht-task-force-uruzgan>, on Rentenaar's experience as POLAD in Iraq see Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, Arthur ten Cate, *Missie in Al Muthanna, De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in Irak, 2003-2005*, 61-147.

election committee, and the UNAMA.¹⁵² It was mutually agreed that the ANP would secure the direct vicinity of each polling station (Tier 1), while the ANA would cover the outer area (Tier 2), and if necessary TFU forces would assist. Further a permanent Operational Coordination Centre-Provincial (OCC-P) was established to function as the ANSF's headquarters (located within *Kamp Holland's* outer perimeter).¹⁵³ On election day brigadier Van Uhm monitored ANSF operations in the OCC-P, while CIVREP Rentenaar spent the day with Governor Hamdam.¹⁵⁴ Both men reported a satisfactory performance of the ANSF, with no security incidents and all polling stations open to the public. Thus, the local ANSF for the first time demonstrated their capability to autonomously take the leadership over security affairs; a huge step in preparation of the 2010 transfer of authority.

The success in the increased effectivity and autonomy of the ANSF, however, could largely be attributed to the ANA's fourth brigade. Uruzgan's ANP under command of Jan Mohammed *protégé* Juma Gul was notorious for its corruption and lack of resoluteness.¹⁵⁵ Chora district chief Mohammed Daud, for instance, complained that the provincial chief of police 'keeps the money and supplies that are meant for the police force up here'.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, Juma Gul was actively competing with Matiullah and his KAU for access to international and local resources. The ANA, on the other hand, was a professional military organization without ties to local actors and communities. Consequently it could operate relatively independent of local influences. During 2009 the fourth brigade reached its full strength and assisted by Dutch, French, Australian and American OMLT teams the brigade quickly developed into an efficient and capable military unit.¹⁵⁷ Most important was that this greatly improved the possibility to enhance governmental control through permanent security. Fourth brigade commander Abdul Hamid demonstrated a clear awareness about this matter as he emphasized the manning of permanent posts and continuous patrols in order to convince the local population of the government's capability to offer protection.¹⁵⁸ Among others, this approach was used to enhance grip over the troublesome peripheral areas connecting the main ADZs (Deh Rafshan, Mirabad, Baluchi and Tangi valley). In case of the Mirabad valley, ANA forces formed the backbone of TFU-led operation *Baz Panje* in which the valley was

152 Robbert van Leerdaam, 'COIN Community Core Building by social activation in Uruzgan' (Unclassified report, Kandahar, 27 September 2009), 7-8, available at <http://www.jung-coach.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/27092009-COIN-COUMMUNITY-BUILDING.pdf>.

153 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 366.

154 Michel Rentenaar, 'Blije stemmers in Uruzgan', 25 August 2009, column at www.rnw.nl available through <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/blije-stemmers-uruzgan>, Anonymous, 'Verkiezingen verlopen rustig in Uruzgan', 20 August 2009, accessible at <http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2009/08/20/verkiezingen-verlopen-rustig-in-uruzgan>.

155 See, among others, personal correspondence with anonymous PRT-7 staff officer, 17-18 December 2014, Christopher Reuter, 'De dilemma's van Uruzgan, iedereen heeft hier vijanden', 34-38, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 267-268, Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de Taliban*, 147-148.

156 Interview with Mohammed Daud, Chief of Chora District, by Ralph van Kemenade, Chora district centre, 14 January 2010.

157 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 366.

158 Interview with brigadier Abdul Hamid, commander 4 ANA brigade, 205 corps, conducted by Ralph van Kemenade, Tirin Kot, 24 January 2010.

swept once again (in conjunction with predominantly Australian forces) and a permanent patrol base (Wali) was established.¹⁵⁹ Seemingly contradistinctive the increased role of the ANA as a key security provider triggered yet another conflict; the corrupt ANP feared for its position and the relationship between both core components of the ANSF quickly soured.¹⁶⁰ This culminated in a shoot-out in the streets of Tirin Kot in December 2009 in which four civilians were killed. Consequently the ANA was banned from the capital, which secured the interest of the ANP. Thus, while Uruzgan's ANSF forces had become increasingly capable and the overall provincial security situation was relatively good, the imbalance and rivalry between ANA and ANP damaged the unity of effort among the ANSF and caused worries for the upcoming transfer of authority.

Yet, with safety at an acceptable level, the TFU increasingly focused on the development and political lines of operation. CIVREP Rentenaar emphasized that the balance of the mission ('80 percent') lay with the non-kinetic effort in order to provide a durable platform for long-term stability.¹⁶¹ Under TFU-7 the socio-economical development effort was further boosted as the increased security in the province attracted more development organizations. By September 2009 a total of 54 actors, including five national Afghan programs, six UN agencies, three international companies, twelve international organizations, 22 Afghan NGOs, and six donor organizations were active in the province.¹⁶² Further the four-year DCU program yielded its first results in the fields of education and health care, and in Deh Rawud and Chora district the first steps were taken to transfer from CIMIC projects to structural long-term development.¹⁶³ The only setback concerned the involvement of UNAMA, which withdrew a significant amount of its personnel from Uruzgan as part of a nation-wide reaction to an October 2009 attack on the UN in Kabul. The UCP had originally envisioned the UNAMA as the body that would take over the coordinating role of the TFU in the field of development.¹⁶⁴ However, the reduction in UNAMA presence meant that it could not step up to this role. Consequently, the coordination of long-term development would most likely be transferred to a combination of actors including the local government, international organizations and the UNAMA. Despite this uncertainty with regard to the future coordination, the TFU campaign's development effort gained increased momentum due to the contributions of the numerous involved actors, and the afore mentioned first

159 See also Hans de Vreij, 'Nieuwe 'inktvlek' in Uruzgan', *Weblog Vrede en Veiligheid*, 12 November 2009, available through <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/nieuwe-inktvlek-uruzgan>, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 388.

160 Bette Dam, 'Strijd tussen leger en politie Uruzgan kost burgers het leven', 4 January 2010, accessible at <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/strijd-tussen-leger-en-politie-uruzgan-kost-burgers-het-leven>.

161 Hans Ariëns, 'Interview Michel Rentenaar', *Internationale Samenwerking 2010-3*, online available at <http://www.oneworld.nl/wereld/interview-michel-rentenaar>.

162 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 366, Jaïr van der Lijn, 3D 'The Next Generation', *Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations*, 37.

163 Michel Rentenaar, 'Task Force een-na-laast', 31 December 2009, column at www.rnw.nl available through <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/task-force-een-na-laast>.

164 Ingrid van Bommel, Aletta Eikelboom, Paul Hoefsloot, 'Comprehensive and iterative planning' in Uruzgan, *De ontwikkeling van het Uruzgan Campaign Plan*, 201.

steps to transfer from CIMIC to long-term development at the district level signified good progress towards the end of the TFU campaign.

The pivotal political effort continued to focus on the empowerment and professionalization of Governor Hamdam's provincial government and the district levels in Chora and Deh Rawud.¹⁶⁵ Back in 2008 the TFU had started to improve the provincial government's financial control and enhance transparency through adequate reporting (see 10.2.3). During 2009 these measures were resulting in effect as, among others, ten highly qualified advisors were recruited and integrated in the governor's office by the Asia Foundation.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, GTZ had been contracted to bolster local institutions through education; scores of civil servants had received additional courses in management skills and administration. Of course this all served the purpose to augment the position of Governor Hamdam's administration, which had to become as independent as possible in order to connect to all societal segments of Uruzgan's fragmented societal landscape. Hamdam himself benefitted from an increased role -thanks to Dutch empowerment- in the coordination of development activities that in combination with the increased security situation (through permanent presence) gave him sufficient leverage to establish ties with local communities at the grassroots level. This capability was not only used to link local power-holders to the government, but also to mediate in the reconciliation between various parties in order to '...bring all together the community' by balancing 'tribal issues' and share power among parties.¹⁶⁷ Such direct reach out by the provincial government mainly intended to support the positions of the district chiefs, the administration's most crucial agents of control at the grassroots level. Hamdam stressed that the government should be structured as localized as possible to address the specific needs of the various societal segments. Among others the governor was working on a proposal (to the IDLG) to establish separate districts in Tirin Kot and Deh Rafshan (which currently were under the governor's direct authority).¹⁶⁸ In Chora district the TFU rehabilitated the office of the district government, the white compound, which had been the centre of the 2007 battle. On January 14 2010 the new seat was opened and handed over to district chief Mohammed Daud, who for that occasion had organized a *shura* with approximately 40 local elders and Governor Hamdam as well as three provincial ministers in which governance, agriculture, education, and the judicial system were discussed.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Daud requested the provincial administration to send representatives to his district at least once a month to allow for a swift reaction to popular

¹⁶⁵ See, among others, Hans Ariëns, 'Interview Michel Rentenaar', Hans Ariëns, 'Aan de thee met de CULAD, "Dutch Approach klinkt nogal zelfvoldaan"', *Internationale Samenwerking* 2010-1, 16, 17, also online available at <http://www.oneworld.nl/wereld/dutch-approach-klinkt-nogal-zelfvoldaan>, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 366, 388.

¹⁶⁶ Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 366.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Asadullah Hamdam by Ralph van Kemenade, Tirin Kot, 30 December 2009.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Mohammed Daud, Chief of Chora District, by Ralph van Kemenade, Chora district centre, 14 January 2010, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 388, Michel Rentenaar, 'White Compound: de typische Nederlandse aanpak', 31 December 2009, column at www.rnw.nl available through <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/white-compound-de-typisch-nederlandse-aanpak>.

demands. This all greatly added to the prestige of the now 26 year old Daud, whose position as district chief at this time not only had become legitimized through his father's heritage, but also by his personal deeds -which often resulted from TFU empowerment. Thus, at least at the provincial and district level 'the tottering structures of the Afghan state' had received a huge boost which resulted in a local administration that was actively seeking to explore its capabilities for augmenting and consolidating governmental control over Uruzgan's population by establishing durable ties with the various local societal segments. This, of course, is not unimportant for a government that is expected to autonomously exert control as soon as possible -preferably by August 2010, the end of the TFU campaign.

All together the increased safety, the boosted socio-economic development effort and the strengthening of the local administration materialized in good progress on the ground. In addition to the building activities in the three ADZs, the local government and its allies now also held more grip over the peripheral areas connecting the main districts. These latter areas therefore could qualify as in a more advanced hold phase (with the main ADZs remaining in the build phase), which meant that the situation was becoming acceptable for a transfer of authority; after all the Afghan government and its security forces could exert control over the ADZs relatively autonomously, whilst assisting coalition forces could start to prepare the Afghans for expanding their authority to the outer areas.

Yet, during the last month of the TFU-7 rotation some potentially spoiling political developments revealed themselves. First, there was the issue of remaining interference from the national administration in Kabul with local affairs in Uruzgan. This became clear when in January 2010 the effective and independent Deh Rawud district chief Said Usman was suddenly sacked by Kabul on the ground of vague complaints about his policies, including the installation of a women's *shura*. He was replaced by Khalifa Sadaat, a local Babozai leader who served as the town's mayor under Jan Mohammed Khan, but was removed by Governor Munib.¹⁷⁰ Albeit Khalifa Sadaat eventually turned out to be a competent administrator who continued Usman's *shura* system that had brought a more equal division of power in the district, his appointment by Kabul caused a stir as it came as a total surprise to both the provincial administration and the TFU.¹⁷¹ There was absolutely no guarantee against such unexpected and disturbing intervention in the future.

Second, whereas the August 2009 elections had been a success in the field of security, its political outcome was more dubious. In addition to the presidential election, Uruzgan's inhabitants could also elect a new provincial council. During the previous elections in 2005 the US PRT had backed up candidates from the Barkazai and Achekzai block and the council had evolved in a vehicle for re-balancing the political marketplace and involving previously marginalized tribes (especially the Ghilzai) in the provincial government (see Chapter Eight,

170 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 26, 28 January, 20 February 2010.

171 For details on Khalifa Sadaat as district chief see Jos Groen, *Task Force Uruzgan (2006-2010)*, 'Getuigenissen van een missie', 290-302. Governor Hamdam extensively praised Said Usman in a 30 December interview. Moreover Said Usman himself was still awaiting a permanent appointment that he expected to obtain with support from the Dutch embassy. See Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 2 January.

section 8.3.2). In the current elections, however, all incumbents were outvoted. While this could be interpreted as a clear signal of discontent with the previous council, the reality was more nuanced.¹⁷² Nationwide voter turnout for the 2009 elections was extremely poor; a 50 percent decrease with the 2004 elections was reported. Uruzgan was no exception as of about 140,000 registered voters only 23,646 cast their vote for the presidential election and 28,326 for the provincial council. Among those scarce voters the Popalzai were overrepresented. Consequently the new provincial council was dominated by the Popalzai, whose political power had been curtailed by the preceding council.

A reason for the large turnout of Popalzai voters is given by the fact that other popular segments, especially the Ghilzai, apparently doubted the fair character of the elections and expected local strongmen to influence the outcome by use of corruption.¹⁷³ Fact is that a majority of the new provincial council could be linked to either Jan Mohammed Khan or Matiullah Khan. Moreover, both new members of the national parliament's upper house, the *Meshrano Jirga*, which were nominated by the Provincial Council, were supported by Matiullah (including Uruzgan's first female senator, Hilla).¹⁷⁴ When the new provincial council was installed on January 17 2010, the exact consequences of this shift were still unclear as the council held no formal powers.¹⁷⁵ However, this episode illustrates that Jan Mohammed as well as Matiullah still held significant influence in the province, which apparently was sufficient for discouraging large parts of the local population to participate in the elections. It was against this worrying background that the last TFU staff under the leadership of Brigadier Kees van den Heuvel and CIVREP Jennes de Mol took over command of the mission on 1 February 2010.¹⁷⁶

10.3.2 The endgame

Up until now it had been clear that the TFU mission in its current form would end on 1 August 2010. As aforementioned (in section 10.3) the climate in Dutch parliament and tensions within the government coalition did not favor a new prolongation. Yet, during the last months a discussion had evolved over another extension of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan, this time with a much smaller mission focusing on the PRT.¹⁷⁷ The new debate was fuelled by the wish

172 See, for instance, Hans de Vreij, 'Bevolking Uruzgan zeer ontevreden over provinciebestuur', *Weblog Vrede en Veiligheid*, 13 November 2009, available through <http://hansdevreij.com/2009/11/13/bevolking-uruzgan-zeer-ontevreden-over-provinciebestuur/>, The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 32-33.

173 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, viii.

174 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 27. On Matiullah's support for Hilla specifically see Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living, America, The Taliban, And The War Through Afghan Eyes*, 251-267.

175 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 388.

176 Anonymous, 'Commando TFU in nieuwe handen', *Defensiekrant* 4 February 2010.

177 On the debate over a second extension and the fall of the cabinet see, among others, Jan van der Meulen, Mirjam Grandia Mantas, 'Brussels calling, National politics under international pressure', *Mission Uruzgan, Collaborating in Multiple Coalitions for Afghanistan*, ed. Beeres, R., Van der Meulen, J., Soeters, J., Vogelaar, A. (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2012), 27-30. Christ Klep, *Uruzgan, Nederlandse militairen op missie, 2005-2010*, 59-66. David Auerswald, Stephen Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan, Fighting*

of the United States and NATO to extend the Dutch contribution until August 2011. When on 4 February 2010 the Dutch government received an official request from NATO's secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen for a one-year smaller mission, a decision could no longer be postponed. Thus, a couple of days after the start of the TFU-8 rotation a fierce debate on Uruzgan dominated the political scene in The Hague. Within the government coalition the Christian Democrats of the CDA (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*) favoured a new mission, while the Social Democrats of the PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid*) stood solidly against any renewed military presence in the province. Soon this evolved in a full governmental crisis cumulating in the fall of the Dutch government in the early morning of 20 February. Consequently, it was clear that the TFU mission would definitely end on August 1 2010, a contingency that the military had always planned for. But what did this mean for the last TFU rotation and the situation on the ground in Uruzgan?

In the last days of TFU-7 local power-holders had already expressed their worries about a possible Dutch retreat and the consequences for the balance of power on the local political marketplace.¹⁷⁸ Especially the Barakzai/Achekzai power block echoed its concerns during a *shura* organized by Chora district chief Mohammed Daud in which the local leaders proved remarkably well informed on the political debate in The Hague. Daud and his allies wanted to know what would happen after the Dutch mission, they were especially anxious over Matiullah's rising power, as he repeatedly had sneeringly expressed his excitement on the upcoming withdrawal of the Dutch.¹⁷⁹ Additionally rumours of Jan Mohammed Khan's return as provincial governor swirled around. This corresponded with the image that emerged from the 2009 elections; in the perception of the local population both Popalzai power-holders still held significant influence in Uruzgan's affairs. With the definite end of the Dutch mission in sight many locals feared a loss of the empowering force beyond the counter-balance against the two Popalzai strongmen, which would inevitably lead to a renewed dominance of the Popalzai on the provincial political marketplace. Mohammed Daud himself learned about the Dutch decision to withdraw before he was informed by TFU staff members, who were awaiting official instructions. Daud dramatically stated to CULAD Vogelsang that 'he will leave as well, and preferably with us [the Dutch]', an outcry that would be repeated many times during the final months of the TFU campaign (also by other non-Popalzai leaders such as Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan).¹⁸⁰

Of course the TFU sought to preserve the tribal balance in order to achieve its end goal of a politically stable province, in which all parties held a share in power. For the Dutch, however, the announced withdrawal inevitably led to a loss of leverage, despite the remaining

Together, Fighting Alone, 155. Anonymous, 'Kabinetscrisis 2010: de Uruzgan-crisis', *Weblog Parlement & Politiek*, available through http://www.parlement.com/id/vicxczwrts4/kabinetscrisis_2010_de_uzuzgan_crisis.

178 Emiel de Bont, *Onder Taliban en krijgsheren, Nederland en de oorlog in Afghanistan*, 257-260.

179 See also Bette Dam, 'The story of 'M': US-Dutch Shouting Matches in Uruzgan'.

180 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 22 February, 25 April, 21 June 2010. See also Hanneke Chin-A-Fo, 'Bestuurder Uruzgan weg uit angst', *NRC Handelsblad* 17 April 2010, available through http://vorige.nrc.nl/buitenland/article2526617.ece/Bestuurder_Uruzgan_weg_uit_angst.

presence in the province until August. Within a month this became painstakingly clear as Governor Hamdam was called to Kabul and fired on allegations of corruption. Reportedly Hamdam was indicted on thirteen points such as withholding money and self-enrichment by abusing his influence in the allocation of contracts for development work.¹⁸¹ Most of these accusations were related to the construction of the road between Tirin Kot and Chora, which was intended to enhance the position of Hamdam's independent government, but now contradistinctively had contributed to its end. However, even if the accusations were true, they were an absurd reason for dismissal in the Afghan context; corruption was widespread among government officials, and some of the most severe cases (such as Uruzgan's chief of police Juma Gul) were left untouched. In an interview with Radio Netherlands Worldwide Hamdam pointed at the true reason for his sacking:

'This is a political power game, in which the Afghan government seeks to install another governor, and therefore wanted my removal... it's an insult to involve corruption. That is only an excuse for realizing political wishes.'¹⁸²

Although we probably will never receive clarity about the exact reasons for Hamdam's removal, indirect evidence supports his explanation. As aforementioned Jan Mohammed held significant influence with President Karzai and IDLG director Popal, further it was commonly known that the US, which was the most likely candidate to become the new lead nation in Uruzgan with the Australians as their main partner, favoured a more powerful position for Popalzai strongmen Matiullah Khan and Jan Mohammed Khan.¹⁸³ Therefore, it is not unlikely that Hamdam's removal was a first step in preparing a return of Popalzai dominance in Uruzgan. Additional support for this interpretation is given by the fact that Karzai immediately installed Khudai Rahim as interim governor (previously deputy governor), a cousin of Jan Mohammed, and maternal uncle of Matiullah to whom he was most close.¹⁸⁴ Apparently Kabul now felt free to act this way and sack the independent Hamdam -who had always enjoyed Dutch support for his position *vis-à-vis* the central government- due to the upcoming end of the Dutch involvement in Uruzgan.

181 Bette Dam, 'Trouwe bondgenoot in Uruzgan ontslagen wegens corruptie', www.rnw.nl 22 March 2010, accessible at <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/trouwe-bondgenoot-uruzgan-ontslagen-wegens-corruptie>, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 294, 299-300.

182 Hans de Vreij, 'Gouverneur Uruzgan bevestigt ontslag', www.rnw.nl 25 March 2010, available through <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/gouverneur-uruzgan-bevestigt-ontslag>.

183 Ibid., see also, Bette Dam, 'Alles wordt anders in Uruzgan', *Vrij Nederland* 25 February 2010, accessible at <http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Buitenland/Artikel-Buitenland/Alles-wordt-anders-in-Uruzgan.htm>, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 294, 303

184 See also Chapter Nine, section 9.2.2, and Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 26, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 13 April 2010.

Mohammed Daud immediately reacted by convening a large *shura* of more than 100 tribal leaders to discuss the ramifications of the nearing end of the TFU mission.¹⁸⁵ During this meeting, which was attended by Dutch CULAD Mr. Hamidi as well as the US and Australian POLAD, the Dutch were praised for pursuing tribal balance, while the US and Australians were bashed for violent interference with local affairs without an appropriate understanding of the delicate relationships between various societal segments (which triggered false reporting in which whole sub-tribes were labeled as Taliban). Almost all important local power-holders, except for those of Popalzai descent, participated in the *shura* or had dispatched a representative (for instance Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan sent his brother due to repeated attempts at his life in the last weeks). The Australian POLAD, also on behalf of his American colleague, pleaded for a dialogue with Matiullah Khan, which was considered a non-option by many participants. Instead the meeting led to the formulation of a declaration that asked the Dutch politicians in The Hague to reconsider their decision:

'We Elders, Maleks and Commanders of tribes from the districts Tarin Kowt, Chora, Dehra Wood and Gizab in Uruzgan with firm faith in God Almighty and believing in the sacred religion of Islam appeal on behalf of the people of Uruzgan to the representatives of the Dutch people. ... We fear that a withdrawal of Dutch soldiers from Uruzgan [has] lasting significant negative consequences for until now now the very successful process of social and economic development of the Province of Uruzgan. ... We appeal to the elected representatives of the Dutch population, do not leave Uruzgan in the middle of the process of Province Building and please vote for a temporary extension of the ISAF Mission in Uruzgan in the interest of peace in Uruzgan, Afghanistan, and throughout the region.'¹⁸⁶

Although the petition proved to no avail, the *shura* leading to its presentation revealed that young Barakzai-leader Mohammed Daud (now commonly referred to with the suffix Khan) had grown to prominence as a well-respected authority capable of unifying various (sub-)tribal groups in defense of their shared interest. Thus, Mohammed Daud Khan had become the main antagonist opposing Matiullah Khan and Jan Mohammed Khan.

Both Popalzai strongmen launched an effort to erode Daud's position. They sought the support of Daud's uncle and rival within the Barakzai sub-tribe, Shah Mohammed (brother of the late Rozi Khan, see 8.2.3).¹⁸⁷ Initially this approach was very successful, but

¹⁸⁵ This section on Daud's *shura* and the resulting declaration are based upon Bette Dam, 'Afghaanse petitie tegen vertrek Nederlanders', www.rnw.nl 25 March 2010, available through <http://internationaljustice.rnw.nl/nederlands/article/afghaanse-petitie-tegen-vertrek-nederlanders>, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren*, *Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 295-300.

¹⁸⁶ A translation is given in Bette Dam, 'Afghaanse petitie tegen vertrek Nederlanders', a digital picture of the petition is in possession of the author.

¹⁸⁷ See Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 22 February, 21, 24, 26 June, 9 August 2010.

as Daud naturally distrusted his uncle (because of their intra-factional rivalry), there were no tangible results. On contrary, at some point the relation between Shah Mohammed and Jan Mohammed soured, and the former turned for support to Daud (whom he also needed to act as a mediator for solving problems with Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan -again stressing the respect Daud enjoyed among Uruzgan's leaders). Daud decided to help his uncle who according to Daud himself now spent his days complaining about Jan Mohammed and Matiullah and repeatedly and publicly declared that he had been misled by both Popalzai strongmen in 'plotting against his own house'.¹⁸⁸

A more successful attempt to discredit Daud led to Australian forces openly accusing the young Barakzai leader of ties with Taliban commanders and supplying the insurgents with (components for) IEDs.¹⁸⁹ Daud told the Dutch that he indeed had rung various Taliban commanders from the remote north of the province at the explicit request and in presence of US and Australian Special Forces. In one case a Taliban commander even was attacked during or shortly after such a conversation. Later this commander had received photographs of Daud's meeting with the Special Forces. Apparently Matiullah's men who were accompanying the US and Australian operators were responsible for this.¹⁹⁰ Consequently Daud had decided that he would no longer provide information on Taliban commanders to the Special Forces, which made him a dubious player in their eyes. CULAD Vogelsang captured the ramifications of this all in his personal notes:

'Daud has now found himself in the position that he is neither being trusted as a broker by some of the Taliban leaders, and neither by the Australians and US. This is a situation that is really worrying. The Australians and US are now without a very useful source of information, but it could also affect the relationship between our successors on the one hand, and the Barakzai/Achekzai and Tokhi on the other.'¹⁹¹

The Popalzai strongmen were also actively seeking Daud's replacement as Chora's district chief. Acting Governor Khudai Rahim preferred Daud's long time advisor and mentor colonel Abdul Mohammed as the new head of the district government. The latter started to openly criticize Daud's policies after he had accepted money (reportedly 50,000 Afghani) from Matiullah and had visited Jan Mohammed.¹⁹² Additionally it was announced that IDLG

188 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 9 August 2010.

189 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 26 July 2010. The date is erroneous and should be 26 June. The accusations were expressed during that day's 08:00 TFU Daily Commander's Update briefing.

190 Shah Mohammed provided information on the basis of which a member of Daud's household had also been caught spying for Matiullah. See Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 1 July 2010.

191 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 26 July 2010.

192 Ibid., see also 1 July 2010.

director Popal together with Jan Mohammed Khan would soon visit Uruzgan's districts in order to reorganize the local administration.

The effect of all these schemes was that Daud felt discouraged to continue his work as district chief. As aforementioned he repeatedly proclaimed his intent to resign as district chief and leave Uruzgan. Yet, he did not do so. The reason for his decision to stay was continued Dutch support and the fact that (future) Australian civil officials had also offered their back up -which meant that Daud still would enjoy benefits from ISAF forces after the Dutch withdrawal.¹⁹³ Now the provincial government increasingly came under influence of the Popalzai strongmen, the TFU was mainly propping up the counter-balancing faction through the construction of the road between Tirin Kot and Chora. Security of this project became the responsibility of an alliance centered around Daud's Barakzai/Achekzai block and the Tokhi under Mohammed Nabi Khan.¹⁹⁴ Initially (in 2008) GTZ opted for Matiullah as the main security provider for the project. However, when Dutch parliament after reporting by *Groene Amsterdammer* journalist Joeri Boom learned of the proposed \$200,000 a month contract with this strongman the TFU sought not to support, the deal was rejected.¹⁹⁵ Albeit Matiullah reacted indifferently to this incident -after all he held plenty sources of income-, the assignment of Daoud and Mohammed Nabi Khan as main contractors was significant; it not only united the Barakzai/Achekzai block and an important segment of Uruzgan's Ghilzai tribes, it also secured empowerment of this faction after the Dutch withdrawal (road construction was completed in October 2011).¹⁹⁶ Thus, the Australian commitment to his case as well as the continuing support through the road security contract functioned as guarantees that convinced Daud to remain in office as district chief and, even more important, to stay in Uruzgan as the main leader of the counter-balancing faction.

Another measure taken by the TFU in order to come to a durable tribal balance was advocating the Australian and US idea of a reconciliation dialogue between Mohammed

193 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 21, 24, 26 June, 11 October 2010.

194 See, among others, Personal correspondence with Willem Vogelsang, TFU CULAD 2008-2010, 15 January 2015, Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 13, 25 April, 10 August 2010. Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 26, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 296, The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 46.

195 Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 246-253, Hans Ariëns, 'Nog steeds werk aan de weg', *One World* 2011-1, 44. For the original article and debate in parliament see Joeri Boom, 'Veiligheid in Uruzgan', Tweede Kamer, *Aanhangsel van de Handelingen 2007-2008*, no. 3435, Vergaderjaar 2007-2008.

196 For Matiullah's reaction see Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 294. It has to be mentioned that a part of the security assignment was outsourced to a Kandahar-based private security company called Asia Security Group. This company was owned by President Karzai's cousin Hashmat Khalil Karzai and apparently secured GTZ personnel. Albeit some sources hint at a larger role in coordinating road security, this is highly unlikely as the Asia Security Group was co-founded and partly owned by Jan Mohammed Khan, which meant that the latter would have significant leverage over the other parties involved in the process. Of course this would have been unacceptable to both Mohammed Daud Khan and Mohammed Nabi Khan. See, among others, Joeri Boom, 'Wat laten we achter in Uruzgan? Veiligheid te koop', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 31 March 2010, Joeri Boom, *Als een nacht met duizend sterren, Oorlogsjournalistiek in Uruzgan*, 287-288, Christopher Reuter, 'De dilemma's van Uruzgan, iedereen heeft hier vijanden', 38-39, Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 24, Anonymous, 'Karzai, Hashmat Khalil', *Afghan Biographies*, available at http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=847&task=view_&total=3049&start=1341&Itemid=2, Maria Abi-Habib, Zia Sultani, 'Senior Aide to Karzai Is Killed in attack', *The Wall Street Journal* 18 July 2011, accessible through <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304567604576452452918688670>.

Daud Khan and Mohammed Nabi Khan on one side, and Matiullah Khan on the other. Dutch officials repeatedly urged both Daud and Mohammed Nabi to attend such a meeting, to which they reacted not unwillingly.¹⁹⁷ Yet Mohammed Nabi explained that this would be difficult to explain to his people, who had suffered many losses at the hands of Matiullah. Therefore he suggested that rapprochement should be primarily achieved through Mohammed Daud as the Barakzai did not suffer from a similar track record. Mohammed Daud indeed had informed the Dutch that he worked together with Matiullah in the past, and considered a meeting a serious option on the conditions that all parties would stop their interference in each other's affairs, a fair representation and distribution of projects, as well as fair and heeded agreements. The Dutch advised Daud that these points should be the objectives of the dialogue rather than pre-conditions, which led to the promise that he would reconsider his position while adding that he previously held good working relationships with Matiullah. Furthermore former governor Munib indicated that there was sufficient ground for reconciliation and even offered the Dutch to mediate between both parties. Eventually in early July a meeting between Matiullah Khan, Mohammed Daud Khan, and Mohammed Nabi Khan was organized by Australian and US Special Forces at the PRT's location.¹⁹⁸ Although there were some tensions during the meeting, it was regarded a successful first step that would be followed by a more inclusive gathering with other elders that would take place after the end of the TFU mission.

Where does this all leave us with regard to the results of the TFU campaign? Certainly, when on 1 August 2010 authority was transferred to the US-Australian Combined Team Uruzgan (CTU) under command of US colonel James Creighton the Dutch could look back at significant successes.¹⁹⁹ Progress was achieved in all three lines of operations. In the field of socio-economic development there were greater job opportunities, an improved agricultural sector, increased access to health care and education, as well as far better coverage of media and mobile phone networks.²⁰⁰ Especially in the three main ADZs the security situation had shifted as a result of TFU operations and an influx of ANSF, which now totaled some 2,000 to 3,000 ANP members and about 4,000 ANA soldiers.²⁰¹ Albeit the latter were highly capable and proficient in operating independently, the lacking professionalization of the ANP ultimately prevented a full transfer of security leadership in the ADZs.²⁰² In these three key districts, where most of Uruzgan's population was living, governmental control had increased to an approximate level of 75% for Tirin Kot, 45% for Chora district (which was

197 The following section is predominantly based on Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 13 April 2010, see also *Ibid.*, 1 July 2010.

198 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 53-54.

199 Anonymous, 'Amerikaanse opvolger aan de slag in Uruzgan', 14 July 2010, available at <http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2010/07/14/amerikaanse-opvolger-aan-de-slag-in-uruzgan>, Anonymous, 'Task Force Uruzgan afgesloten', 1 August 2010, accessible through <http://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2010/08/01/task-force-uruzgan-afgesloten-video>.

200 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, vi-vii.

201 *Ibid.*, 34-37.

202 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Ministerie van Defensie, *Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006-2010*, 103.

not fully incorporated in the ink spot), and 85% for Deh Rawud district.²⁰³ Although these figures are a bit more conservative than those published in 2009 (see section 10.3.1), they still are impressive in comparison to the situation in 2006 when numbers were estimated at 30-40%, 20%, and 20% respectively.²⁰⁴ In ISAF's counterinsurgency lingo the three main ADZs were firmly in the build phase, and as a consequence of TFU efforts during the last year even the peripheral areas connecting the key districts could now be classified as advanced hold or incipient build. The combined effect of all these results was a situation that seemed sufficiently stable and secure to commence with the transfer of control to the local government that would now start to exert its authority as autonomously as possible. This was completely in line with the TFU's campaign objective as formulated in the UCP, and therefore it might be concluded that the campaign fully achieved its aim. Yet, at this point the developments that took place during the last months of the Dutch mission came to play a role.

The TFU's campaign objective specified the nature of the local government that would take over control and function as the cornerstone for long-term development in Uruzgan as '*reliable and effective*', and capable of bringing '*the government and the people closer together*'.²⁰⁵ Of course the TFU had greatly contributed to this by empowering Governor Hamdam's independent provincial administration and connecting this body to well-respected district chiefs who enjoyed the legitimacy of the people at the grassroots level. Under Hamdam the previously marginalized Ghilzai were included in the government, as well as almost all other tribes.²⁰⁶ This formalized the tribal balance that had been so actively pursued by the Dutch in order to establish control over the population and which they sought to preserve as a platform for stability in the province. However, as we have seen, Hamdam was sacked by Kabul in March 2010 and replaced by interim Governor Khudai Rahim, who was closely connected to the Popalzai strongmen, and Matiullah Khan in particular. In the perception of the local population this not only weakened the provincial administration, but it also endangered the tribal balance as the Popalzai clearly had positioned themselves in an advantageous position *vis-à-vis* their rivals led by Mohammed Daud Khan.²⁰⁷ Thus, while the TFU campaign achieved significant progress in the fields of socio-economic development, security, and governance, its most pivotal achievement, the restoration of Uruzgan's tribal balance, was now threatened by the same local government that was supposed to build

203 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 44. Percentages are approximate levels of governmental control in the respective districts.

204 The small variations between the 2009 and 2010 numbers cannot be explained by a deterioration of the situation, as this was not the case. They might be clarified by the fact that the new numbers are better estimates, as there was more knowledge available about the situation on the ground. Additionally a more conservative assessment is a clear signal to all involved parties that there remains much work to be done.

205 2010 UCP quoted in Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 74, see also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171. Italics by author.

206 The Liaison Office, *The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan: 2006-2010*, 30.

207 *Ibid.*, 28-30.

forth on this delicate equilibrium. Consequently, the sustainability of the stability brought by the TFU campaign was questionable. It was a grim omen that Khudai Rahim during the last provincial government meeting attended by TFU personnel provocatively stated that ‘nothing in Uruzgan will remember us to them [the Dutch]’.²⁰⁸ Equally significant -and perhaps cynical- was that the Dutch, who throughout their campaign had emphasized the importance of formalizing local power structures by connecting them to the local government, ended their campaign propping up the counter-balancing faction of Barakzai, Achekzai, and Tokhi through a non-governmental project; the construction of the road between Tirin Kot and Chora.

10.4 Epilogue: return of the Popalzai

A month after the formal end of the TFU mission IDLG director Popal visited Uruzgan and attended several meetings at Jan Mohammed Khan’s and Matiullah Khan’s houses, which could be interpreted as a clear sign that the Popalzai strongmen were seeking to strengthen their position and get rid of their rivals in official positions, especially Mohammed Daud Khan.²⁰⁹ Moreover, Matiullah once more started to influence Daud’s uncle and intra-factional rival, Shah Mohammed, in order to erode the position of the young Barakzai leader.²¹⁰ With the Dutch gone and Australian support focusing on informal empowerment, these latest efforts in what Daud and his allies unanimously considered an orchestrated attack by Jan Mohammed and Matiullah finally ushered his dismissal as Chora’s district chief during the fall of 2010.²¹¹

The position of the Barakzai, Achekzai, and Tokhi alliance was further weakened when Achekzai leader Abdul Khaleq was not re-elected in the 2010 *Wolesi Jirga* election (which in Uruzgan suffered from a very low turnout of 6,4%), while all newly or re-elected men were strongly linked to either one of the Popalzai strongmen.²¹² Furthermore, Khaleq’s brother and confidant Malem Sadiq was killed in a suicide attack in November. Albeit such attacks had become a signature of the Neo-Taliban, it was not the first time that a suicide attacker was used to settle a local dispute in Uruzgan where such assets could be hired through local Taliban commanders.²¹³ All these developments led to a loss of strength of

208 Anonymous, ‘De basis gelegd’, *3D, de Nederlandse militaire inzet in Afghanistan*, ed. Tabak, W. (The Hague: Ministerie van Defensie, 2010), 173.

209 Willem Vogelsang, ‘Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010’, 28 September 2010.

210 Willem Vogelsang, ‘Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010’, 2 October, 30 November 2010.

211 Willem Vogelsang, ‘Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010’, 11, 13 October 2010, see also The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover* (TLO: Kabul, 2012), 86-87, Bette Dam, ‘Hopen dat de rust terugkeert’, *Vrij Nederland* 29 October 2010, available at <http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Buitenland/Artikel-Buitenland/Hopen-dat-de-rust-terugkeert.htm>. Albeit no exact date of Daud’s dismissal could be found, Vogelsang’s personal notes suggest that this took place somewhere between 1 and 9 October 2010.

212 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 68.

213 See, Arnold Karskens, ‘Niets is zeker in slangenkuil Uruzgan’, *De Pers* 17 November 2010, another version is online available through http://www.arnoldkarskens.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=512, Tweede Kamer, Dossier

the counter-balancing faction, which, among others, also materialized in disputes over access to international financial resources. In one case it was reported, for instance, that Matiullah's brother Rahimullah threatened entrepreneurs from the rival faction (including Daud's brother Khushal).²¹⁴ Most important, however, was that the Popalzai strongmen now had firmly re-established themselves as the most important actors in Uruzgan's political marketplace. Although even in Popalzai-dominated villages people had a high regard for Daud, it was clear that Matiullah and Jan Mohammed held the most influence in the local administration and had the best ties with coalition forces. CULAD Vogelsang, who remained in Uruzgan until December 2010, personally witnessed the ramifications of this shift as local leaders expressed their concerns and dissatisfaction with the provincial government.²¹⁵ Additionally he also observed how people at the grassroots level had adopted the view 'that ISAF works very closely together with the militia of Matiullah, and that Matiullah is seen as using and manipulating ISAF'.²¹⁶ Thus, before the end of the year, the tribal balance, which the Dutch had so arduously established and sought to preserve beyond their mission, had again shifted to an uneven division of power in which the Popalzai strongmen dominated Uruzgan's political landscape as well as the provincial administration.

Mohammed Daud had already informed coalition forces that while Jan Mohammed and Matiullah Khan concordantly cooperated in their effort to sideline him, they also had a lot of differences.²¹⁷ The two strongmen and relatives were actually rivals competing for exclusive power in Uruzgan. Whereas Jan Mohammed had dominated the province until 2006, his influence had decreased as a consequence of the Dutch intervention. Matiullah, on the other hand, had emerged more powerful due to the exploitation of his access to (inter-)national resources, despite the TFU's policy to limit his influence. By 2010 he was actively challenging Jan Mohammed 'by working hard on his image as a generous and inclusive leader' and even created a *shura* to discuss reform in the province.²¹⁸ Jan Mohammed gradually lost terrain and in July 2011 even complained to journalist Anand Gopal that his relative Matiullah 'has gone mad with power', adding that if he could return as provincial governor, he would save Uruzgan from Matiullah's dictatorship.²¹⁹ A few days later the power struggle came to an abrupt ending when on July 17 2011 a Taliban assault team detonated a car bomb at the front

29924, no. 70. Another case of the deployment of a Taliban suicide attacker to kill rivals was the 2009 bombing of Deh Rawud's district centre, which was a retaliation attack against an important tribal leader, Haji Payend Akha. See Bette Dam, 'Opinie: Extra troepen voor Afghaanse vetes?', www.rnw.nl, 17 December 2009 (no longer available online).

214 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 30 November 2010. In this case it concerned the delivery of gravel for the construction of an airstrip in Tirin Kot. Whereas Rahimullah asked \$50 per shipment, Khushal only asked \$18-28. Consequently Rahimullah accused Khushal of ruining the market and threatened to burn his trucks if he would not increase his prices.

215 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 13 October, 30 November 2010.

216 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 30 November 2010 (2).

217 Willem Vogelsang, 'Personal Documents, Tirin Kot, 2008-2010', 11 October 2010.

218 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 33-36. See also Paul Fishstein, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Uruzgan Province* (Somerville, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2012), 7 Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 207.

219 Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living, America, The Taliban, And The War Through Afghan Eyes*, 271.

gate of Jan Mohammed's place in Kabul and subsequently stormed the house with rifles and grenades killing the Uruzgan strongman and presidential advisor.²²⁰

The assassination of Jan Mohammed Khan fitted a pattern of targeted killings of government officials and members of Karzai's inner circle by the Taliban; only a couple of days before Jan Mohammed's death, Ahmed Wali Karzai, the half brother of the president and the head of Kandahar's provincial council as well as the major Popalzai powerbroker of the greater Kandahar region, had been killed (12 July 2011). These killings not only cleared Matiullah's direct rival, they also rendered him one of President Karzai's key allies in southern Afghanistan.²²¹ Subsequently, on August 7 2011 Matiullah's long wished dream came true; Karzai named him Uruzgan's chief of police and thereby his *de facto* status as the province's key security provider was finally consolidated in an official position.

Matiullah's appointment was not only a consequence of Karzai's need to strengthen his network in the south, it was also a ramification of a deterioration of the security situation in Uruzgan. Following the Dutch withdrawal there had been a significant increase in local Taliban activity during the spring of 2011, which culminated in a complex Taliban attack on governmental targets in Tirin Kot on 28 July (resulting in 29 dead and 35 wounded; even nation-wide the scale of this event was exceptional).²²² Local rumours had it that this insecurity at least for a part could be attributed to Matiullah who reportedly had deliberately adopted a rather passive stance when Jan Mohammed blocked his appointment as chief of police following Juma Gul's removal in April 2011. Matiullah, therefore, had a strong interest in seeing the new chief of police, Uruzgan outsider Fazal Ahmad Sherzad, fail in order to prove that he was the only credible security provider in the province. Well-informed sources deemed this explanation quite likely.²²³ It should not remain unnoticed here that the surge in Taliban violence also demonstrates that whereas the TFU succeeded in *temporarily* outmanoeuvring the Taliban as a relevant actor during its mission, it apparently did not succeed in denying Uruzgan's insurgent networks a capability for quickly re-emerging and mounting complicated violent actions that revealed their *continued* relevance.²²⁴ It was only after Matiullah's appointment as provincial chief of police that the security situation in Uruzgan rapidly ameliorated. This resulted in an increase of governmental control in all three key districts in the south as well as in the more remote areas in the north, which had not been incorporated in the TFU's ink spot. Approximate figures of 80-90% for Tirin Kot, 95%

220 Ibid., Thomas Ruttig, 'Who was Jan Muhammad Khan?', 18 July 2011, available through <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/who-was-jan-muhammad-khan/>, Dan Green, *The Valley's Edge*, 208-209, The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 67-68. Jan Mohammed's protégé and Wolesi Jirga member Hashim Watanwal was also killed during the assault.

221 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 74-75, Susanne Schmeidl, 'Uruzgan's New Chief of Police: Matiullah's Dream Come True', 8 August 2011, accessible at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/uruzgans-new-chief-of-police-matiullahs-dream-come-true/>.

222 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 113-114, 145, Joeri Boom, 'De Nederlandse bomen worden alweer gekapt', *NRC Handelsblad* 15 June 2013.

223 Ibid., 72-75, 113-114, Susanne Schmeidl, 'Uruzgan's New Chief of Police: Matiullah's Dream Come True'.

224 For an excellent analysis of the effects of the TFU campaign on Uruzgan's Taliban networks see Emma Brandsen, 'The Taliban's Centre of Gravity & Task Force Uruzgan, Counteracting supportive networks?' (Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2012).

for Deh Rawud, and 50% for Chora district were reported (in 2010 respectively 75%, 85%, and 45%).²²⁵ Yet, despite the increased security situation, the Taliban had firmly re-established themselves and remained capable of launching violent actions throughout the province.²²⁶

Of course, the re-emergence of the Taliban in Uruzgan can also be linked to the shift in the tribal balance that occurred after the end of the TFU campaign. The successful actions of the Popalzai strongmen to diminish the position of the Achekzai, Barakzai, and Tokhi alliance certainly caused grievance among those societal groups. The local power-holders leading the counter-balancing faction, however, realized that cooperation with the government and international assets offered the best chance to secure their interests. For the time being the contract for securing the construction of the Tirin Kot-Chora road guaranteed them a fair share of influence in the province (as well as access to international (financial) resources). Furthermore Mohammed Daud, Mohammed Nabi Khan, as well as Abdul Khaleq were well-connected to governmental officials in Kabul and to regional powerbrokers in Kandahar (most notably Nangarhar governor and Barakzai strongman Gul Agha Sherzai, see 8.3.1).²²⁷ Allegedly, the removal of Juma Gul in April 2011 and the appointment of the independent outsider Sherzad as his replacement was a direct result of the exploitation of such contacts by the leaders of the counter-balancing faction.

The position of Daud's alliance had also received a boost by the appointment of an outsider as Uruzgan's new governor. Mohammed Omar Sherzad, a well-educated Khogiani Pashtun (from the Karlani confederation, not endogenous to Uruzgan) from Nangarhar had been a long-time friend of the Karzai-family.²²⁸ Albeit his welcoming reception on 13 December 2010 was overshadowed by Jan Mohammed Khan, who received a massive applause for his return to the province, Governor Sherzad gradually proved to be a professional and highly competent administrator who was hailed by local communities for his neutrality and impartiality. Moreover, by the end of 2011 he held good relationships with all key tribal leaders and reportedly he had evolved into 'an important symbol for Uruzgan's non-Popalzai tribes'.²²⁹ The latter was extremely important as the road between Tirin Kot and Chora was opened in October 2011, ending the lucrative security contract that had served as a guarantee for power sharing.²³⁰ Yet Mohammed Daud expressed his concerns over the future as he stated that he needed additional weapons to protect his people against Matiullah, who he

225 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 116-121. Percentages represent estimated levels of governmental control in respective districts.

226 See, for instance, Martine van Bijlert, 'Transition in Uruzgan (1): The fights that don't get mentioned', 12 June 2013, available at <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/transition-in-uruzgan-1-the-fights-that-dont-get-mentioned/>, Deedee Derksen, 'Transition in Uruzgan (2): Power at the centre', Joeri Boom, 'De Nederlandse bomen worden alweer gekapt'.

227 Susanne Schmeidl, *The man who would be king*, 28, The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 73.

228 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 70-72, Noël van Bommel, 'Opvolgers in Uruzgan laten 'Dutch approach' varen', *Volkskrant* 30 December 2010, accessible via <http://www.volkskrant.nl/dossier-afghanistan/opvolgers-in-uruzgan-laten-dutch-approach-varen-a1466346/>. It should be noted that the governor is not related to chief of police Fazal Ahmad Sherzad.

229 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 71.

230 Hans Ariëns, 'Nog steeds werk aan de weg'. Eventually the costs for the construction of the road totaled € 22.5 million.

perceived as ‘worse than the Taliban’.²³¹ Although the Australians stepped in to mediate and arranged a meeting between Daud and Matiullah, the former felt increasingly threatened and started to spend more time in Kabul for his safety. Despite this measure the young Barakzai leader Mohammed Daud Khan was killed on 30 October 2011 at the hands of his friend Sameullah Popalzai, who recently had received shelter in Daud’s Kabul house.²³² Matiullah’s involvement, of course, could not be proven, but there is little doubt that Daud’s death served his interest as this eliminated his main remaining rival (as aforementioned Jan Mohammed Khan had been killed in July 2011). Thus, by the end of 2011 the counterbalancing faction of Barakzai, Achekzai, and Tokhi on the one hand had lost their leader and main source of influence and income, but on the other hand they had gained the support of Governor Sherzad. It was to be seen whether this was sufficient to secure the faction’s interest *vis-à-vis* Matiullah, now by far the strongest actor in the province.

Of course Matiullah continued his power play; Governor Sherzad now found himself on a collision course with Matiullah, who confronted the governor to express his dissatisfaction and initiated a lobby for Sherzad’s removal.²³³ Consequently the well-respected Sherzad was sacked in April 2012 and replaced by another Uruzgan outsider with good connections to President Karzai, Amir Mohammed Akhundzada (the younger brother of former Helmand governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada).²³⁴ The new governor developed a similar policy of working towards an inclusive government, which after a while again -inevitably- triggered a rift between Uruzgan’s provincial governor and Matiullah Khan. This time Matiullah accused the governor of corruption (contradistinctively Akhundzada enjoyed a reputation as a wealthy man who did not care for self-enrichment) and organized protests by Tirin Kot residents as well as a lobby in Kabul.²³⁵ In March 2014 the game was over for Governor Akhundzada as Karzai fired him while appointing Amanullah Taimuri as his replacement.²³⁶ With regard to the latter, little information is available, which can be explained by the international media’s faded attention for Uruzgan. This is a direct consequence of the withdrawal of foreign troops from the province in December 2013 when the CTU mission came to an end in anticipation

231 Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living, America, The Taliban, And The War Through Afghan Eyes*, 272.

232 Rafael Epstein, Dan Oakes, ‘Afghan leader latest to die in troubled province’, *The Sidney Morning Herald* 2 November 2011, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/afghan-leader-latest-to-die-in-troubled-province-2011101-1mtut.html>, Bette Dam, Twitter message confirming Mohammed Daud’s death, 30 October 2011.

233 The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 72.

234 See Anonymous, ‘Shirzad, Mohammad Omar’, *Afghan Biographies*, accessible via http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=1696&task=view&total=3048&start=2616&Itemid=2, Anonymous, ‘Akhunzada, Amir Mohammad’, *Afghan Biographies*, available at http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=2570&task=view&total=3052&start=202&Itemid=2, René Moelker, ‘The Genesis of the “Dutch Approach” to Asymmetric Conflicts: Operations in Uruzgan and the “Softly, Softly” Manner of Approaching the Taleban’, *Armed Forces & Society* 40:1 (2014), 105, Joeri Boom, ‘De Nederlandse bomen worden alweer gekapt’.

235 Anonymous, ‘Akhunzada, Amir Mohammad’, Amanda Hodge, ‘On the edge in Uruzgan’, *The Australian* 17 December 2013, available through <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/on-the-edge-in-uruzgan/story-e6frg6z6-1226784378444>.

236 See, for instance, Anonymous, ‘Karzai appoints Taimori as Uruzgan governor’, *Central Asia Online* 6 March 2014, accessible at http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/newsbriefs/2014/03/06/newsbrief-16, Anonymous, ‘Taimuri, Amanullah’, *Afghan Biographies*, accessible via http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=3011&task=view&total=1&start=0&Itemid=2. The latter source connects Amanullah to relatives in Gizab district, which might indicate that Amanullah is not a complete outsider to Uruzgan and its political marketplace.

of the 2014 (nation-wide) conclusion of the ISAF campaign.²³⁷ Thus, after more than seven years of ISAF presence and almost ten years of PRT operations, Uruzgan was finally being governed by an autonomous local administration with support of locally operating ANSF. Yet, Matiullah's overall power as well as his official position and influence in governmental affairs left little doubt about the fact that the provincial government again was dominated by a Popalzai strongman.

Although Uruzgan's autonomous administration was far from independent, it neither was of an exclusive nature -unlike Jan Mohammed's government. Even among those previously critical of Matiullah -and his past-, his reputation had increased.²³⁸ This could be partly attributed to Matiullah's 'hearts and minds' campaign that brought security and development to local communities. More important was the pragmatic reasoning of both local power-holders previously opposing the Popalzai strongman as well as Matiullah himself; with foreign troops and aid providers gone the former lost their main guarantee for a relatively stable and secure environment, while the latter was deprived of his main source of income and power.²³⁹ Consequently, collaborative relationships emerged between Matiullah and the leaders of Uruzgan's societal segments including the Barakzai, Achekzai, and even some previously marginalized Ghilzai tribes. Therefore it seems that ultimately a form of inclusive government materialized in Uruzgan as co-optive arrangements between local power-holders and Matiullah Khan served to connect societal segments to the provincial government, a rather unexpected consequence of dynamics brought about by foreign intervention and -remarkably- the consecutive withdrawal of international forces.

The assassination of Matiullah by a burqa-clad Taliban suicide attacker in Kabul on 18 March 2015, however, ushered an abrupt end to Uruzgan's new political order.²⁴⁰ A Popalzai attempt to install one of Matiullah's brothers as his replacement failed -he was also killed- and by the end of May a new violent power struggle emerged between Uruzgan's various factions (this was wrongly interpreted by Dutch media as a Taliban take over of the province).²⁴¹

237 For the end of CTU and PRT presence see *Facebook* pages of both units, respectively <https://www.facebook.com/CombinedTeamUruzgan>, and <https://www.facebook.com/PRTUruzgan>.

238 See, for instance, The Liaison Office, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, 75, Deedee Derksen, 'Transition in Uruzgan (2): Power at the centre', Hans Ariëns, 'De grote uittocht', *One World* 2014-1, 30-39.

239 See, among others, Deedee Derksen, 'Transition in Uruzgan (2): Power at the centre', Amanda Hodge, 'On the edge in Uruzgan'.

240 See, among others, Azam Ahmed, 'Powerful Afghan Chief Police Killed in Kabul', *The New York Times* 19 March 2015, available through <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/20/world/asia/powerful-afghan-police-chief-killed-in-kabul.html>, Paul McGeough, 'Death of new-age warlord Matiullah Khan leaves Uruzgan at edge of abyss', *The Sydney Morning Herald* 20 March 2015, accessible at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/death-of-new-age-warlord-matiullah-khan-leaves-oruzgan-at-edge-of-abyss-20150320-1m3vjw.html>, Hans Ariëns "'Woestijnkoning' Matiullah Khan vermoord in Kabul", *One World*, available through <http://www.oneworld.nl/wereld/woestijnkoning-matiullah-khan-vermoord-kabul>. Remarkably the killing of Matiullah Khan went almost unnoticed by Dutch mainstream media.

241 See, for instance, Peter ter Velde, 'Taliban dreigen Uruzgan in te nemen', [www.nos.nl](http://nos.nl/artikel/2037899-taliban-dreigen-uruzgan-in-te-nemen.html) 27 May 2015, available at <http://nos.nl/artikel/2037899-taliban-dreigen-uruzgan-in-te-nemen.html>, Floris van Straaten, 'Groot offensief Talibaan in Uruzgan', *NRC Handelsblad* 27 May 2015, Harm Ede Botje, 'De Taliban neemt Uruzgan helemaal niet over', www.vn.nl 27 May 2015, accessible through <http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Buitenland/Artikel-Buitenland/De-Taliban-neemt-Uruzgan-helemaal-niet-over.htm>, Bette Dam, 'Matiullah Khan, Ilzeren Vuist van Uruzgan', *Vrij Nederland* 76:40, 3 October 2015. In the latter two articles well-informed Dutch journalist Bette Dam explains that the fighting in Uruzgan in May 2015 was a ramification of Matiullah's death. Of course the involvement of the Taliban is highly likely as different factions through existing (sub-tribal) ties might engage in *ad hoc* alliances with local Taliban groups in order to increase their fighting power.

New Afghan President Mohammed Ashraf Ghani (installed 29 September 2014) reportedly favours Uruzgan's non-Popalzai sub-tribes, but the local government still depends on the well-equipped and organized militia of the late Matiullah Khan for maintaining security in the province. Thus, a new fragile balance arose in which Matiullah's heritage has secured significant Popalzai leverage over the provincial political marketplace, while the other factions also hold a firm share in power as a consequence of support from Kabul. Despite the emergence of this more or less tribally balanced new order- exactly what the TFU was trying to establish-, this newest episode in Uruzgan's seemingly ever-recurring cycle of power struggles has raised growing concerns about the sustainability of stability in Uruzgan. Therefore, it remains questionable whether the current inclusive political order can serve as an underpinning for long-term development.

10.5 Conclusion

In the last two years of its campaign the TFU successfully consolidated and expanded the bridgehead in Uruzgan's human terrain that resulted from the first two years. Instrumental in achieving this success was the full-fledged embracement of counterinsurgency that occurred during 2008. The conceptual and organizational changes brought about an adaptation that bolstered the TFU's capability for establishing and consolidating control over Uruzgan's fragmented societal landscape. Moreover, the revision of the campaign also led to more realistic expectations about the pace of advance in the province as it was accepted that only in 2050 the local government and economy would be sufficiently developed to function as a stable province of the new Afghan state. With the end of its mission set for 2010, the TFU mission now was redesigned to take 'the first steps towards a viable and favourable future for Uruzgan in 2050' by providing a safe and secure environment as well as improving the local government in order to give the local population a credible prospect of prosperity.²⁴² Thus, the reorientation of the mission towards counterinsurgency was meant to establish an underpinning for long-term stabilization efforts -as typical in modern counterinsurgency- after the withdrawal of the Dutch troops. In this conclusion we will analyze how the adaptation to counterinsurgency spawned augmented control over the local population and consecutively discuss the nature of this control in relationship to the campaign's end goal of providing a stable platform for further development.

The new TFU campaign plan introduced by the staff of TFU-4, the Focal Paper, clearly echoed the spirit of the population-centric counterinsurgency approach described in the 2006 US field manual *FM 3-24* as it sought to enhance governmental control by securing the people's collaboration through improved governance, socio-economic development, and security. Now it had been acknowledged that even after the 2010 end of the TFU campaign the local government would require significant assistance, the end states in all three fields were

242 Task Force Uruzgan / G5, 'Focal Paper, "Foundations For The Future"', 4, 7-10.

deliberately formulated in a generic way emphasizing the importance of progress rather than setting absolute goals. This gave the Dutch some latitude to match their campaign to the actual situation on the ground instead of imposing a tight schedule of objectives of which it was unclear whether or not they were achievable within the time span of the TFU campaign. The only explicitly stated goal was that by 2010 the people living in the three main ADZs would perceive the ANSF capable to provide security with coalition forces only acting in a back up role. Yet, even this goal is not as clear-cut as it seems; it is almost impossible to determine the perception of Uruzgan's population. This end state, however, illustrates that from now on the TFU campaign would concentrate on the three key districts, another important feature introduced in the Focal Paper -the 2006 Master Plan aimed at the province as a whole. For this purpose the districts of Tirin Kot, Deh Rawud, and Chora were subdivided in seventeen so-called Focal Areas that allowed a systematical expansion of the TFU ink spot. An individual Focal Area would be addressed by a tailored approach to achieve progress in the fields of security, governance, and socio-economic development, and as soon as the situation was sufficient stable, the Dutch task force would shift its attention to an adjacent area. The ideal result of this approach encompassed a full transfer of security authority to locally operating ANSF. Albeit the Focal Paper thus allowed for a localized population-centric counterinsurgency approach, its fundamental flaw was that the Focal Areas had been primarily determined on the basis of geographical features which did not necessarily correspond to the ethnographic reality on the ground. Despite this mistake in its design the Focal Paper was a descent campaign plan that not only introduced counterinsurgency as the predominant campaign theme, but also adopted realistic objectives in order to establish an underpinning for long-term stability.

In addition to these conceptual changes an increase of the civil capacity and ANA presence boosted the TFU's capability to conduct counterinsurgency operations in Uruzgan's complicated operational environment. With regard to the former the appointment of two dedicated CULADs as well as the augmentation of the team of POLADs and OSADs, all under the leadership of the CIVREP, turned out to be a true force multiplier; it greatly augmented the process of gathering and processing population-centric intelligence and brought a capacity for dispatching civilian officials on patrols together with the soldiers of the PRT and BG. Most important was the decision that command of the TFU from now on would be shared by a duumvirate consisting of the military commander and the CIVREP. This civil surge not only served to enhance the integration between civil and military assets within the TFU, it also encompassed an increase in NGOs which were attracted by the 'civilianization' of the development effort. Thus, in addition to the Focal Paper, the strengthening of the civil contribution was a key factor in the TFU's adaption to counterinsurgency warfare. Next to these more or less internal changes, an external factor contributing to the ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations was the deployment of the ANA's fourth brigade to the province. The arrival of 1,700 relatively well-trained troops during 2008 finally provided

a capability for establishing permanent presence in areas cleared from the Taliban. But how were all these changes put into action for obtaining results on the ground?

Even before the completion of the Focal Paper TFU-4 was seeking to rebalance the kinetic and non-kinetic efforts of the task force. As part of this action KLE was introduced at the task force level as a quintessential tool for influencing the local population. This initiative successfully incorporated KLE in the staff process used for the planning, execution, and evaluation of all task force activities. However, due to a lack of coordination with the 'Track 2' program and troubles with the integration with kinetic targeting, TFU-4 did not succeed in establishing a full-fledged KLE program for the TFU as a whole. Yet, when combined with the Focal Paper, the increased civil capacity and the expansion of ANSF personnel, the engagement of local leaders materialized in a localized counterinsurgency approach that addressed the populace of each specific Focal Area. This systematical approach, known by the acronym USECT, was based on a thorough understanding of the societal landscape in the target area in order to formulate a comprehensive plan for establishing, enhancing, and transferring control over its population (the understand and shape phases). The actual engagement concerned strengthening the connection between the people and the government through local leaders who for that purpose were allocated development projects and actively involved in governmental affairs. Of course security was conditional in stepping up the people's collaboration, and typically TFU as well as ANSF forces were operating together to create and maintain a secure area. The latter would gradually become more important, establish a permanent presence, and take over the responsibility over security in the Focal Area -freeing TFU soldiers for operations in another area. These activities (all part of the engagement and consolidation phases) would ultimately lead to a full transfer of authority to the local administration (transfer phase). Thus, a localized population-centric counterinsurgency approach for establishing control over the population at the grassroots level emerged as a consequence of the revision of the TFU campaign plan, the increase of civilian capacity, the influx of additional ANSF personnel, and initiatives by the TFU-4 staff to rebalance the task force's kinetic and non-kinetic efforts.

The new approach effectively consolidated the TFU's previous gains in the province and led to a tremendous expansion of control in Deh Rawud district. At the provincial level the position of the Barakzai/Achekzai power block was firmly entrenched when Rozi Khan was officially installed as Chora's district chief after winning elections for that position. Governor Hamdam's support for the Barakzai leader strengthened the connection between the provincial administration and this powerful alliance representing a majority of Uruzgan's population. The Dutch also continued their cooperation with the Tokhi of Mohammed Nabi, a previously marginalized faction that now was actively participating in governmental affairs. The results of the new population-centric counterinsurgency approach, however, were most visible on the ground in Deh Dawud district where, based on the insights obtained during operation *Pathan Ghar*, a permanent security presence was established in the most important Focal Areas of the ADZ and a coordinated effort was launched to alter the political balance.

Soldiers of locally operating BG and PRT units mutually engaged local power-holders in order to curtail Popalzai influence and empower the Nurzai and Babozai majority. This effort was closely guided by the civil experts of the TFU staff who had designed the policy to reshuffle Deh Rawud's political marketplace and synchronized all assets involved in its implementation, including the Dutch embassy in Kabul. The political engagement soon bore fruit as an independent outsider, ANA officer Said Usman, was installed as acting district chief and a new *shura* of local leaders was instituted to decide upon security and development projects, with the role of the old Popalzai-dominated *shura* being limited to advises only. In addition to the allocation of development aid and advancing security at the grassroots level, the Dutch also empowered the new district administration by paying Usman an allowance (from budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Furthermore the civil experts at the TFU staff pushed Governor Hamdam to appeal with the IDLG for Usman's permanent appointment, while the Dutch embassy in Kabul was also lobbying to achieve this. Thus, in addition to consolidating the results in Tirin Kot and Chora, the TFU expanded its control in Deh Rawud by increasing Babozai and Nurzai influence and simultaneously curtailing Popalzai power.

The comprehensive and synchronized approach for the engagement of local power-holders that had emerged during the TFU-4 rotation was continued by TFU-5, the first staff effectively acting under dual civil-military control. Consequently, when Jan Mohammed Khan launched an attempt to re-establish his position in Uruzgan by using his influence in the province as well as his position in Kabul (and especially his close ties with IDLG director Popal) to replace Hamdam and appoint new district chiefs, this was effectively countered through a concerted multi-level engagement that even involved officials of the Dutch government. TFU empowerment had not only secured Governor Hamdam's position, it had also preserved district chiefs Said Usman and Mohammed Daud (who had succeed his perished father Rozi Khan), both capable of connecting the people in their districts to the provincial government. Thus, Jan Mohammed was effectively thwarted while at the same time the influence of the local administration had been augmented. Equally important was that this episode paved the way for permanently embedding KLE at the task force level.

TFU-5 designed and implemented a fully integrated comprehensive KLE program based on the afore mentioned experience and the efforts of its predecessors. The program succeeded in definitely anchoring KLE as a standard component of the TFU staff's tool kit for establishing, consolidating, and enhancing control over the local population. In addition to political empowerment and allocation of development projects, methods for the containment of spoilers were also included. Whereas lower-level leaders could be relatively easily removed from official positions, more powerful spoilers could only be touched by a more subtle indirect method. This concerned the capability to conduct synchronized multi-level engagements which often empowered rivals at the grassroots level, but also sought to limit a spoiler's influence in Kabul. Additionally 'Track 2' was also linked to the KLE program in order to bolster the TFU's ability to withstand the powerful spoilers active in Uruzgan province. Another feature of the new program was combining kinetic targeting with non-

kinetic engagement in order to turn susceptible insurgent commanders. Furthermore KLE was generically applied in the preparation, execution, and exploitation of operations. Operation *Tura Ghar* in January 2009 epitomized this approach as tribal leaders were engaged in order to enhance the understanding of the local population and shape the operational environment as well as adjust the plan of the operation. The exploitation of this operation not only encompassed establishing a permanent security presence, but also setting up (or strengthening) a connection with the provincial government through the allocation of development projects to local leaders. The engagement of local actors for influencing Uruzgan's political marketplace as well as in support of operations illustrates that by early 2009 the Dutch task force generically applied KLE throughout the full spectrum of its activities.

The adaptation to counterinsurgency during 2008, including the embedding of KLE, greatly enhanced the TFU's and local government's grip over Uruzgan's population. First TFU-4 had successfully established control over the most important Focal Areas of all three ADZs, and consecutively TFU-5 had managed to consolidate this result and even had started to expand the task force's influence sphere to increase those Focal Areas connecting the ADZs. Yet, there were still significant obstacles to clear for advancing the local situation as far as possible in order to provide an underpinning for long-term development after the 2010 end of the TFU campaign. A key insight resulting from the actions in 2008 was that while the TFU was conducting a counterinsurgency campaign against the Taliban, former governor Jan Mohammed Khan was actually the most formidable antagonist in the struggle for control over Uruzgan's populace. The Taliban had become relevant in the province as a consequence of the predatory and oppressive behavior of Jan Mohammed and his Popalzai-dominated network. In order to prevent a renewed relevance of the insurgency, the Dutch envisioned a sustainable inclusive political order that through its connection with the local administration would provide a stable platform for wider development. It was pivotal, therefore, that the remainder of the TFU campaign would not only enhance governmental control by strengthening the ties between the government and local leaders, but also would focus at obstructing a return to dominance of Jan Mohammed and his associates.

At the time of TFU-6's deployment it had become clear that the political climate in The Netherlands deemed a post-2010 extension of the campaign highly unlikely. This prompted another revision of the campaign plan in order to achieve the end goal of transferring a secure and politically stable situation to the local government and succeeding ISAF forces. With regard to security a separate plan, the USP, was developed to transfer leadership over security operations in the three ADZs to the ANSF by August 2010 (with coalition forces remaining in support). The all-important political stability was to be achieved by enhancing the unity of effort among all international and local actors active in Uruzgan. In order to create common ground the revised campaign plan, the UCP, discerned disabling and enabling factors that could affect the progress of the international effort in Uruzgan. It should be mentioned that, among others, both the spoiling influence of some local leaders

as well as the positive influence of other key leaders were emphasized. Thusly the importance of KLE became anchored in the TFU campaign plan. Furthermore the UCP was based on a set of universal principles of which propagating tribal balance and Afghan ownership were most relevant to the situation in Uruzgan. Based on this underpinning, activities in the fields of governance, socio-economic development, and security were delivered in a coordinated manner 'to contribute to a reliable and effective government that can bring the government and the people closer together, and is able to provide a stable and secure environment and development progress in Uruzgan, in due course without ISAF support'.²⁴³ This objective and the continued relevance of the three major lines of operations clearly indicate that the UCP was a logical next step in the evolution of the TFU strategy as it adjusted the population-centric approach adopted by its predecessors, the 2006 TFU Master Plan and the 2008 Focal Paper, to the operational reality dictated by the approaching end of the Dutch campaign.

The introduction of the UCP also brought a change in the way the conceptual approach was delivered at the grassroots level. First the Focal Areas were abandoned in favor of so-called 'areas of influence'. These new areas were primarily identified by use of socio-economical and demographic characteristics to allow for an optimal engagement of societal segments. This was a significant improvement over the geographically defined Focal Areas. Additionally the USECT methodology was replaced by the 'shape, clear, hold, build' phased approach for counterinsurgency operations that had gradually become more popular within the wider ISAF mission. The latter approach encompassed acquiring a thorough understanding of the environment (the shaping phase) in order to launch a military effort to deny insurgents direct influence over the local population (the clearing stage). Once a locale had been sufficiently secured, socio-economic development and political measures would be deployed to consolidate the situation and start with the transfer of security leadership to locally operating ANSF (the holding phase). In the building stage the actual transfer of security responsibility as well as the transfer of control to the local government would take place. According to this classification the three main ADZs in Uruzgan could be largely categorized as in the building phase, which corresponded to the objective for the TFU campaign. The main challenge for the remainder of the Dutch mission was enhancing control over the strategic areas connecting the three key districts that could be typified as in an incipient holding stage at best. Thus, in addition to advancing the ADZs as far as possible towards the transfer of authority to the provincial administration, the TFU also had to focus on increasing control in the areas of influence between these districts.

Albeit the UCP intended to boost the final stage of the TFU campaign by increasing the unity of effort among the kaleidoscope of civil and military actors operating in Uruzgan province, its implementation was hampered because of conflicting views, both within the Dutch task force as well as externally. Internally the introduction of the UCP coincided

243 2010 UCP quoted in Sebastiaan Rietjens, 'Between expectations and reality, The Dutch engagement in Uruzgan', 74, see also Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens, Frans Osinga, 'Soft Power the Hard Way: Adaptation by the Netherlands' Task Force Uruzgan', 171.

with the PRT's transfer of command from military to civil authority. Due to a lack of communication and unclarity with regard to the new chain of command the UCP was initially not well explained to the PRT, which prevented it from sharing the new approach with NGOs and other development partners. A related problem was that increased civil-military cooperation triggered a bureaucratic reaction at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to halt its contribution to the small CIMIC budget. Albeit this was eventually solved after two months, it damaged the task force's capability to deliver non-kinetic effects at the grassroots level within the TFU ink spot as projects had to be prioritized and even a temporarily stop was announced. The last internal factor hampering the implementation of the UCP was the emphasis on kinetic actions of some key officers within the TFU-6 staff. Despite repeated statements by senior TFU officials that the Taliban were not the main enemy in Uruzgan, a series of missile attacks at *Kamp Holland* caused a relapse to the military default mode that was not linked to a thorough understanding of the societal dynamics underlying the insurgency. Combined with the problems experienced by the PRT this preference caused an imbalance between kinetic and non-kinetic activities that further hampered the introduction of the UCP.

The main external interference with the UCP's implementation was caused by a deep rift between the Dutch policy and the US and Australian views concerning Matiullah Khan. Since 2008 this Popalzai strongman had increased his power through the exploitation of his monopoly on securing the Kandahar-Tirin Kot highway. Whereas the Dutch considered him a powerful spoiler who had participated in the brutal oppression of Ghilzai tribes under the regime of his uncle Jan Mohammed, the US and Australian Special forces had been actively cooperating with him for years. Moreover, his recent ascent in power also led to a review of higher level policy of these important allies who now came to accept the view of Matiullah as a key security provider. Of course this directly opposed the Dutch policy to avoid cooperation with Matiullah as much as possible in order to prevent the idea of an association that would be unacceptable to the Ghilzai as well as to the Barakzai/Achekzai block, the main Dutch allies in Uruzgan's societal landscape. Yet, it was true that the Dutch mission had become heavily dependent on the Popalzai strongman as all logistical contractors made use of Matiullah's services for the protection of their supply convoys. The Americans and Australians, consequently, argued that cooperation with Matiullah was a logical outcome of the reality on the ground. Furthermore, Matiullah had launched his own 'hearts and minds' campaign among the local population, which gave the US and Australian additional arguments to plead for collaboration with this powerful agent. The Dutch, however, maintained their view of Matiullah as a spoiler, whose power had to be restrained in order to establish a new political order in which formerly marginalized societal segments -which had been oppressed by Matiullah- were also represented. This difference in views between the most important coalition partners active in Uruzgan would haunt the TFU campaign until its end.

Despite the afore mentioned internal and external interferences, TFU-6 ultimately succeeded in enhancing the unity of effort among the various actors operating in Uruzgan. The task force regained its balance when the organizational problems were solved. The resulting civil-military interface was capable of delivering non-kinetic effects as well as coordinating with NGOs operating in the province. The task force had yielded good progress by continuing its support to Governor Hamdam and district chiefs Mohammed Daud and Said Usman and overall governmental control at this time was estimated at 80% for Tirin Kot district, 90% for Deh Rawud, and 50-60% in Chora. Equally important was the commencement of the construction Tirin Kot-Chora road. This project would not only secure the geographical connection between these ADZs, but also functioned to strengthen the government's ties with previously marginalized Ghilzai tribesmen, to whom the construction also opened a road to economical and political participation. Another important result was that the USP began to bear fruits and that the ANSF were ready to assume responsibility for the security of the presidential elections of August 2009, with TFU forces in a back up role.

TFU-7 fully benefitted from the work of the preceding rotation. First, it witnessed how the ANSF indeed proved capable of securing the presidential elections. This success could be largely attributed to the ANA, which performed far better than the ANP led by the corrupt Juma Gul, a *protégé* of Jan Mohammed. By now the ANA's fourth brigade had evolved into a trustworthy partner and its forces were pivotal for conducting counterinsurgency operations in the troublesome areas connecting the three ADZs. Consequently, the provincial security situation reached an acceptable level -despite a conflict between ANA and ANP-, and the TFU increasingly focused on development and governance activities in preparation of the upcoming transfer of authority. Some 54 different actors were now cooperating with the Dutch to promote the socio-economic development of the province and the TFU initiated the first steps in guiding the joint effort towards long-term development. With regard to governance the Dutch continued their policy to bolster the local administration to create a representative platform capable of connecting with all different societal segments in the province. This meant a continuation of the empowering of Governor Hamdam and his district chiefs Mohammed Daud and Said Usman, who by now either had proven their will to accommodate previously irrelevant or marginalized political actors or represented societal segments which had suffered from Jan Mohammed's divide and rule policy. As a consequence these three actors had become well-respected and legitimate authorities and even youngster Mohammed Daud had earned respect through his personal deeds -which often resulted from TFU empowerment- rather than from his father's heritage. Thus, at the beginning of 2010 it seemed that the TFU was succeeding in its plan to leave behind a representative government capable of exerting control over the three key districts relatively autonomously.

This overall success was overshadowed by the sudden removal of Said Usman as Deh Rawud's district chief as well as the outcome of the provincial council elections (coinciding with the presidential vote), which had resulted in a council dominated by members linked to either Jan Mohammed Khan or Matiullah Khan. Both incidents demonstrated the remaining

influence of the Popalzai strongmen in the province; the new Deh Rawud district chief, Khalifa Sadaat, was associated with Jan Mohammed and the Popalzai dominance of the provincial council was a result of a disappointing voter turnout of other societal segments, which could be attributed to doubts concerning the fair character of the elections. Another indicator for the remaining influence of the Popalzai strongmen was that early 2010 the local power-holders of the Barakzai/Achekzai block started to echo their worries about the ramifications of the upcoming Dutch retreat for the tribal balance in the province. It was feared that a loss of TFU empowerment would inevitably lead to a decline of their position and a full re-emergence of the Popalzai-dominated network.

TFU-8 was almost immediately confronted with this grim reality when following the announcement of the definite withdrawal of Dutch troops from Uruzgan, Governor Hamdam was suddenly sacked and replaced by acting Governor Khudai Rahim, a relative of both Popalzai strongmen (most closely associated with Matiullah Khan). Although the independent Hamdam was officially removed on allegations of corruption, it seems highly likely that his removal was the consequence of Jan Mohammed's influence in the central government. With the definite end of the TFU campaign in sight Kabul apparently felt free to act against the policy of the Dutch, a decision that might also have been prompted by the fact that most probably the US, who favoured a more powerful position for both Popalzai strongmen, would take over the lead in Uruzgan. Thus, the Dutch were losing leverage even before their actual withdrawal had begun. How could they preserve the so-carefully fostered tribal balance under these circumstances?

The crisis in Uruzgan's political landscape revealed that young Barakzai-leader Mohammed Daud had grown to prominence as a well-respected authority capable of unifying an alliance of Barakzai, Achekzai, and Tokhi in defense of their shared interest; the preservation of power *vis-à-vis* the Popalzai strongmen. Daud became the main antagonist of Jan Mohammed and Matiullah, who subsequently launched an effort to erode his position. The Dutch, on their turn, continued their empowerment of Daud and sought a way to secure his position beyond their stay in the province. Whereas the TFU had mainly been supporting Daud through his official position of district chief, this shifted to delivering aid through a more informal channel outside the structure of the Afghan state. Together with Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan, Mohammed Daud was accepted as main security provider for the construction of the Tirin Kot-Chora road. Propping up the counter-balancing faction this way not only gave its leaders revenues and a share in power, it also secured these benefits for the immediate future as it was expected that the project would certainly wind on for another year. Together with the Australian (who would remain in the province as the key US partner) commitment to his case this served to keep Mohammed Daud from giving up his official position as district chief and, even more important, to stay in Uruzgan as the leader of the counter-balancing faction.

Thus, by the end of the campaign in August 2010 the TFU had secured the position of the alliance led by Mohammed Daud. At the same time it had become clear that any permanent

solution for a stable political order would need to incorporate the Popalzai strongmen, who had managed to keep their influence in the province despite the Dutch policy to curtail their power. How should we consider this when assessing the TFU campaign? Of course, the TFU could certainly look back at a successful campaign as since 2006 the provincial security situation had tremendously increased, there had been significant progress in socio-economic development, and the local government had become far more effective, was in control of the three ADZs, and even held significant influence in the areas connecting these districts. In ISAF's counterinsurgency terminology most areas that had been the focus of TFU operations could be classified as firmly in the build phase, which rendered them ready for a transfer of control to the local government. Yet, such a transfer did not occur, and the very reason for this was -again- the remaining influence of Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan. Whereas the Dutch had righteously aimed at enhancing governmental control by connecting a balanced political order to a government equally representing this order, the removal of Governor Hamdam had revealed that the Popalzai strongmen held significant leverage over the provincial administration. Consequently, at this time the (provincial) government favoured the Popalzai-dominated network, which led to a decline of its legitimacy in the eyes of the people at the grassroots level. The major flaw of the TFU campaign, therefore, was that while it did much to obtain the collaboration of previously marginalized or politically sidelined societal segments -as prescribed by population-centric counterinsurgency doctrine-, it did too less to contain the influence of the spoilers that had driven these segments towards the Taliban. At best the Popalzai-network had been temporarily outmanoeuvred for the duration of the Dutch mission, but now the Dutch troops were leaving it was quickly re-emerging as the dominant factor in the provincial political marketplace. This raises questions about the sustainability of the power of the counter-faction once it would definitely lose the benefit of Dutch support.

Initially it seemed the Popalzai strongmen would crush their opponents as, in spite of a reconciliation dialogue initiated in the last month of the TFU campaign, the effort to weaken the position of the counter-faction was continued in a rapid pace. Among others, Mohammed Daud was removed as Chora's district chief and Malem Sadiq was killed. Before the end of 2010 the political balance had shifted in favour of the Popalzai. During 2011 the Taliban re-emerged in unprecedented strength, which led to a huge deterioration of the provincial security situation. Moreover, the assassination of Jan Mohammed as part of the Taliban's targeted killing campaign rendered Matiullah the dominant political actor in Uruzgan. The latter's *de facto* power was now finally formalized as he was appointed provincial chief of police. At the same time the counter-faction received a huge blow when in rapid succession it lost its last source of Dutch support (the construction of the Tirin Kot-Chora road was finished) and its leader Mohammed Daud, who was murdered by a friend with a Popalzai background. Thusly Matiullah became the uncontested political leader of Uruzgan, and remarkably most people gradually came to approve his authority. Matiullah's 'hearts and minds' campaign was partly responsible for this fact, but more important was that the departure of the international

forces unintentionally urged the leaders of the Barakzai, Achekzai, and Ghilzai to cooperate with Matiullah and *vice versa*. While Matiullah lost his main source of income and power, the societal segments of the counter-faction lost their main guarantee of security. Consequently, the ultimate -and unplanned- result of the international intervention in Uruzgan was an inclusive political order in which all societal segments were connected to the most dominant local power-holder -whose power the TFU had sought to curtail- through ties of mutual dependency. Although Matiullah's assassination in 2015 made an end to this situation and triggered a renewed violent power struggle, the resulting political order still echoes the remnants of the international intervention as up to today his well-equipped and equally organized militia gives the Popalzai a cutting edge in securing a significant share of political power. Furthermore, the factions of the block that once with help of foreign powers stood up against Jan Mohammed Khan are now supported by the Afghan government in Kabul. Thus ultimately a tribally balanced new order has emerged in Uruzgan -exactly what the Dutch were aiming for. Yet, it remains to be seen whether or not this will suffice as a platform for long-term development.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11: The Uruzgan campaign as a case study of co-option of local power-holders in modern counterinsurgency warfare

11.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters we have scrutinized the Dutch experiences with co-option of local power-holders during the 2006-2010 TFU campaign in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province. In this chapter we will discuss the thusly obtained insights in the light of this book's analytical framework for understanding co-option in order to obtain a profound understanding of the role and utility of co-option in the reality of contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns. Moreover, by use of the more general findings on co-option in modern counterinsurgency warfare resulting from the theoretical and historical analyses in the first part of this book, we will draw conclusions on the application of co-option in contemporary counterinsurgency warfare. Combined with the conclusions from our case study on the Aceh War this will ultimately (in this book's conclusion) allow us to answer the question of how counterinsurgents have co-opted local power-holders in order to obtain control over the population in a weblike society. Thus, this chapter provides a robust understanding of co-option in the practical reality of modern counterinsurgency warfare by use of Dutch experiences during the Uruzgan campaign.

Whereas modern counterinsurgency originally embraced classical counterinsurgency's imperatives of modernization and the advance of liberal democracy -it might be remembered here that modern counterinsurgency emerged under the label neo-classical counterinsurgency-, it has gradually adopted cultural legitimation as its main prerequisite for establishing control over the population at the grassroots level (see Chapter Three, section 3.5). This adaptation from rational/legal legitimacy to local patterns of legitimacy was the consequence of the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan where Western forces faced the challenge of establishing control over highly fragmented weblike societies with limited resources and within a limited amount of time. While modernization and democratization remain long-term objectives -albeit this is still the subject of discussion-, the counterinsurgency effort focuses on providing an underpinning for such long-term stabilization as it seeks to establish, consolidate, and ultimately transfer (to the host-nation) control over the population at the grassroots level through the provision of security as well as through socio-economical and political measures. Co-option of local power-holders has become a pivotal feature of this approach as it allows the counterinsurgents to connect to the various societal segments under control of local leaders. Thus, as a consequence of the societal environment in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the need to establish control over the population with limited resources and time, cultural legitimation has become firmly embedded in contemporary counterinsurgency.

The second fundamental mechanism through which co-option establishes control over the population, the mobilization of resources at the grassroots level, is also fully embraced in modern counterinsurgency warfare. This is not only triggered by the intervening forces' lack of capabilities and time, but also by the fact that in a weak or failed state the host-nation's security apparatus is only weakly developed. Although the state's top-down mobilization process will be augmented as part of wider stabilization measures that already start during the counterinsurgency phase, the counterinsurgency effort itself focuses on rallying local (self-defense) militias in order to create a secure environment and win the fight for control over the population on the short term. Western reluctance to work with such militias has largely disappeared as a consequence of the reality on the ground that has revealed that any serious attempt at success necessitates collaboration with local armed groups. However, in order to control negative effects such as predatory behavior or marginalization of other societal segments and to provide an underpinning for long-term development, proper institutionalization of mobilized armed groups within the framework of the host-nation government is essential. Especially in Afghanistan where large warlord militias dominated the scene after the 2001 US-led invasion this proved difficult, and consequently lower-level armed groups that are more susceptible to state control have become the preferred partners for grassroots mobilization in contemporary counterinsurgency warfare.

Of course this latter point influences the overall co-option strategy as it hugely affects the practical issue of whom to co-opt. Modern counterinsurgency clearly prefers co-option of local power-holders at the lowest societal levels as this not only enhances the ability to control co-optees, but it also allows for co-option of leaders of marginalized societal segments. Such an approach, however, is impossible without also addressing dominant local power-holders whose power might have secured them significant influence over the local administration and alienated less powerful factions - a situation commonly met in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently modern counterinsurgents find themselves co-opting and mitigating spoiler effects of dominant local power-holders, collaborating with local administrative officials in order to secure governmental independence, and reaching out to lower-level local power-holders for connecting to the various (alienated) societal segments. The answer to the question of whom to co-opt in contemporary counterinsurgency, therefore, typically depends on a thorough understanding of the local societal landscape that includes the interests and motives of all local power-holders as well as the relationships between various (competing) societal factions. In terms of the spectrum of co-option this mix of dominant and lower-level local power-holders potentially covers the complete range, but tries to focus as low as possible.

The ultimate challenge faced by contemporary counterinsurgents is to link both dominant and marginalized local power-holders to the local government without allowing the former to become too dominant and capture the government. Thus, the methods of co-option in modern counterinsurgency warfare seek to guarantee governmental independency and strengthen the connection between all power-holders in a locale's societal landscape

and the local administration. Typically co-option materializes in a KLE program that allows a shift between the coercive and persuasive methods of the co-option continuum. The emphasis, however, is on the persuasive side as empowerment and allocation of resources are the primary tools used in KLE, while the coercive side mainly depends on soft coercion either through replacement (from official positions) and deprivation of resources. The use (or threat) of force is restricted to extremist agents marked as unsuitable for co-option. Consequently, the capability for co-option domination in modern counterinsurgency warfare is severely limited, as replacement or deprivation of resources can certainly harm a local power-holder's interest, but do not form an absolute guarantee for compliance. As today's insurgents do not suffer from similar limitations with regard to the use of force, they hold an advantage in the struggle for collaboration. Protection of co-optees -either by the counterinsurgents or their own militias-, therefore, is a prerequisite for establishing durable co-optive relationship that are controlled through allocation and withdrawal of resources or empowerment and replacement. Therefore, the provision of security, soft coercion, and persuasive methods are the main tools of KLE that serve to establish, augment, and consolidate control by connecting both dominant and less powerful local power-holders to the local government.

In this part we have seen how all these matters came together when the Dutch TFU struggled to establish and augment Uruzgan's provincial government's control over the highly fragmented societal landscape by mitigating the influence of Jan Mohammed's Popalzai network and advancing the position of other factions such as the Barakzai/Achekzai block and the previously marginalized Ghilzai sub-tribes. While there were significant difficulties in implementing this approach as a consequence of the TFU's need to adapt to its mission and operational environment, it eventually succeeded to re-establish the tribal balance in the local political marketplace. This final chapter provides an analysis of these difficulties by scrutinizing the evolution of co-option throughout the Dutch Uruzgan campaign. Yet, a definite conclusion on co-option in the reality of contemporary counterinsurgency warfare as experienced by the TFU should also include the rapid decline of results that was the consequence of the political decision to end the mission and the consecutive withdrawal from Uruzgan. This is of pivotal importance as modern counterinsurgency not only aims to establish control on the short term, but also serves as an underpinning for long-term stabilization. Therefore we will also critically delve into the faltering durability of the TFU campaign's effects. In order to draw a definite conclusion this chapter follows the logic of the framework for understanding co-option and will consecutively address the fundamental issues of cultural legitimation and mobilization as well as the way these were operationalized by addressing the questions of whom exactly and how to co-opt.

11.2 Cultural legitimization

Collaboration with legitimate local power-holders has gradually become a key feature of contemporary counterinsurgency warfare. As aforementioned the reality on the ground triggered a shift from a rational/legal approach that sought to impose democracy and centralized government to an approach that first focuses on exploiting local patterns of legitimacy. In Chapter Three (section 3.5.1) we have seen that in Iraq, for instance, tribal authorities were first considered an anachronism, but were later acknowledged as the key agents for establishing control over Iraq's weblike society. Moreover, it even became accepted that local traditional tribal politics temporarily put a halt to the introduction of democracy in a locale. In Afghanistan the light footprint adopted by US forces during and after the 2001 invasion urged those forces to rely on local power-holders as force multipliers. Despite this dependency, the Western intervention in Afghanistan developed into a 'liberal project' that emphasized centralization and democratization as laid down in the Bonn-agreement. This ambiguous situation *de facto* resulted in an Afghan state ruled by a weak central government backed up by foreign support and heavily dependent on strongmen in control of the country's numerous locales. Although co-option of local power-holders has been a key feature of the Afghan state since the days of the Durrani empire, the political order that arose in the wake of the 2001 intervention was too much dominated by local strongmen who even held considerable leverage over governmental institutions. Even worse, due to their powerful position dominant local power-holders often reverted to 'dark side' practices such as predatory behavior and repression of competing factions. Five years into the Afghan campaign this situation had created sufficient ground for the re-emergence of the Taliban, which culminated in a violent insurgent offensive in the spring of 2006. Thus it became clear that in order to counter the revived insurgency Western forces needed to intervene in the local political marketplaces and establish co-optive relationships with legitimate local power-holders of all societal segments that -equally important- could be effectively controlled by the Afghan state.

Especially in southern Afghanistan the behavior of warlord-like Pashtun tribal entrepreneurs well-connected to President Karzai had produced fertile soil for the Taliban. The individual countries deploying as part of ISAF's stage III expansion experienced a huge mismatch between the overarching national strategy (ANDS) that was formulated in concurrence with the ideas of the 'liberal project' and the situation on the ground. Consequently, national contingents found themselves formulating a localized strategy for fighting the insurgency and establishing control in the locales under their responsibility. A first sign that cultural legitimization was included in various of these individual strategies (notably the British and the Dutch) was the removal of several of Karzai's trustees from positions as governors, chiefs of police or other important offices at the provincial level. This move was intended to create an independent government at the local level that could effectively connect to all societal segments and thus it shaped the conditions to exploit

the local pattern of legitimacy. The removal of office of Uruzgan's Popalzai powerbroker Jan Mohammed Khan is a case in point as the Dutch considered this a prerequisite for any attempt to enhance the connection between the provincial government and the various societal segments that make up Uruzgan's fragmented societal landscape.

With regard to the Dutch campaign in Uruzgan the removal of Jan Mohammed, the continuous struggle to guarantee an independent provincial administration, as well as the reach out to the Ghilzai, and collaboration with the leaders of the Barakzai and Achekzai, seemingly leave no doubt that the TFU was practicing cultural legitimation. Yet, if we consider the Dutch campaign as a whole we have to conclude that the answer is not as clear-cut as it seems; the TFU encountered some severe difficulties in exploiting the pattern of legitimacy of its target society. Benefitting from our analysis of the Uruzgan campaign, these difficulties can be attributed to issues caused by the adaptation to a population-centric approach and the implementation of co-option as well as to more fundamental issues, which, as we will argue below, can be partly related to a lack of will to fully embrace cultural legitimation. As the latter point predominantly revealed itself after the Dutch campaign had gained momentum by successfully establishing co-optive ties with local power-holders such as Rozi Khan, Abdul Khaleq, and Mohammed Nabi Khan, we will now first address the problems with practicing cultural legitimation that resulted from the TFU's adaptation to population-centric counterinsurgency warfare.

Whereas the diplomatic and political offensive to sack Governor Jan Mohammed Khan that started in the latter part of 2005 suggests that the Dutch were well-informed on socio-political circumstances in Uruzgan even before the start of their campaign, the soldiers who deployed to Uruzgan as part of the DTF and first TFU rotation generally had a poor understanding of the local society. The fine-grained intelligence provided by the civil assessment and its context analysis (which was presented to the Dutch embassy in Kabul in July 2006) only became available to the TFU when it was already deployed, and even after the report's release it proved difficult for military units to gain access to this information (as was experienced by PRT-2 when it sought to incorporate the civil assessment in its pre-deployment training, see 9.2.2). While the reasons for this late and limited availability of the civil assessment's intelligence are unknown, it fits in a pattern in which information on the local population and power dynamics was only sparsely available to the military units of the first TFU deployment, whereas there was abundant classic military intelligence on Uruzgan's challenging terrain and the OMF. This situation changed after a dedicated tribal advisor had been appointed in the fall of 2006. In conjunction with insights from the PRT this gradually led to an enhanced understanding of the conflict ecosystem in Uruzgan as multi-faceted and consisting of multiple layers. Under TFU-2 this understanding was linked to a population-centric approach for establishing control, which, among others, resulted in the co-option of Rozi Khan. Yet, this successful approach was abandoned by the TFU-3 staff that emphasized an enemy-centric approach. While this might be understandable, as these soldiers had witnessed how TFU-2 had been engaged in some heavy fighting with the Taliban during

and after the battle of Chora and traditionally kinetic actions against the enemy are the core business of the army, this change in mindset and policy led to a loss of understanding of the societal landscape at the task force level. However, the population-centric approach and intelligence were preserved by the PRT and picked up again by the TFU-4 staff, which had benefitted from pre-deployment training by TFU-2 as well as the official acknowledgement that the Dutch soldiers were conducting a counterinsurgency campaign. Although there remained differences in the way the various TFU rotations exactly executed their mission, the Uruzgan campaign henceforth essentially was a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign that fully subscribed to the importance of a proper understanding of the societal landscape in order to link legitimate local power-holders to the provincial administration.

Exploiting the pattern of legitimacy of the target society during this adaptation process was hampered by the not yet fully developed understanding of Uruzgan's societal landscape, unfamiliarity with co-option, and the variations in approach between different TFU staff rotations. This rendered the removal of Jan Mohammed largely unexploited as both DTF and TFU failed to seize this opportunity for containing the influence of his network while simultaneously empowering previously sidelined legitimate local power-holders. Furthermore, within the TFU there was a lack of unity of effort as initially BG, PRT, and civil staff were engaging various local power-holders independently. The coordination problems between BG and PRT were quickly solved when the staff of TFU-1 decided that the PRT should be leading in the engagement of local leaders with the BG in a supporting role. Synchronization of the civil and military effort proved more troublesome as the civilian 'Track 2' program was not communicated with the military TFU staff and was even considered 'a war within the war' (by the military staff). Although this improved after the introduction of dual civil-military command and the embedding of KLE at the task force level (as of TFU-5), it is remarkable that civil and military efforts could become so separated during the first years. This can be largely attributed to personalities such as for instance the OSTAD who did not share information in order to protect what he considered high value collaborators. Another problem that resulted from the not yet fully developed understanding of Uruzgan's human terrain and the search for a proper approach was a lack of consistence in co-option strategy. At first Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan became the TFU's main asset, but under influence of the incidents in Chora and an increasing awareness on the societal landscape Rozi Khan as the leader of the Barakzai and Achekzai power block became the main ally. Moreover, whereas Matiullah was initially informally engaged in order to contain his influence, he was later ignored, and then once more carefully approached by TFU-3 (as was Jan Mohammed). Ultimately the TFU developed a strategy that aimed at restoring Uruzgan's tribal balance by empowering the Barakzai, Achekzai, Ghilzai, (and the Nurzai and Babozai at the grassroots level in Deh Rawud), while curtailing the influence of Jan Mohammed's network by coldshouldering both Jan Mohammed and Matiullah. Thus, the implementation of co-option was hindered by a lacking exploitation of the removal of Jan Mohammed and subsequent problems with unity of effort and consistence of the strategy.

While the afore mentioned problems were internally dealt with as the TFU gained more experience in conducting a population-centric campaign in Uruzgan's highly fragmented societal landscape, there remained some more fundamental issues that troubled the Dutch task force's ability to exploit the local pattern of legitimacy. First there was the remaining difference in insight between the TFU on one hand and the locally operating US Special Forces (and to a lesser extent also the Australians) concerning the Popalzai-dominated network and the reach-out to the previously marginalized Ghilzai tribes. Despite the fact that US POLADs sometimes openly agreed with the Dutch course, the American operators favored collaboration with Jan Mohammed and especially with Matiullah, whom they considered a highly proficient Taliban-hunter. Moreover, the US Special Forces considered the Ghilzai as intimately related to the Taliban. As we have seen in the previous chapters this different appreciation of the societal landscape led to some fierce clashes between the TFU and US allies as the latter deliberately disobeyed orders from the Dutch commanders who nominally held authority over the whole of Uruzgan. Most of the times this concerned a ban on the use of Matiullah's fighters in Ghilzai or Panjpai areas. Although the first clashes during TFU-1 had invited an intervention by senior commanders at the RC-S level, such incidents occurred throughout the TFU campaign. However, they proved manageable as the US Special Forces reluctantly accepted the Dutch stance. Yet, with the end of the Dutch mission in sight the US made clear that it considered a more powerful position for both Popalzai strongmen essential for stability in Uruzgan. This, among others, made it extremely difficult for the Dutch to preserve the tribally balanced order that was successfully established during the TFU campaign. Thus, the differences in insight between the US and Dutch allies not only triggered incidents that interfered with the practice of cultural legitimation during the TFU campaign, they also severely affected the results of the Dutch intervention as the US opted not to continue the policy of tribal balance, but again favored Popalzai dominance.

This brings us to a second issue that fundamentally hampered the practice of cultural legitimation by Dutch forces, namely restrictions with regard to the engagement of both Popalzai strongmen. Of course, Jan Mohammed's removal was necessary to ameliorate the situation in Uruzgan as this predatory powerbroker was the very reason that the Taliban once again had become relevant in the province. However, as aforementioned, this move was rendered largely unexploited and *de facto* Jan Mohammed's network held considerable influence in the provincial political marketplace. While initially only Matiullah was carefully approached, TFU-3 decided to engage both Popalzai leaders as it was deemed necessary to gain some leverage over these dominant local power-holders in order to contain their spoiling influences. TFU-4 officials, however, received no further permission from The Hague to continue the engagement of Jan Mohammed and for the remainder of the TFU campaign the former governor was ignored by the Dutch. Matiullah was brushed aside in a similar way as the informal contact was ceased and never restored during the Dutch mission. This of course heavily contradicted the reality on the ground, where Jan Mohammed kept on trying to re-establish his position and Matiullah's commercial activities quickly turned him into the most

powerful actor in the province. Moreover, indirectly the TFU itself became largely dependent on Matiullah as the task force's logistical sub-contractors could not operate without his assistance -consequently Matiullah was unintentionally paid by the Dutch through their sub-contractors. Even with the benefit of hindsight it seems unintelligible why The Hague adopted this ostrichism as its official policy; a more active engagement aimed at containing the Popalzai strongmen's influence could have benefitted the tribal balance strategy as it would have captured the reality of remaining Popalzai power. This possibly could have led to a more durable result, and to speculate a bit further, it could have provided a better ground for finding concurrence with US and Australian allies (and successors). The only plausible explanation for the Dutch decision not to engage Jan Mohammed and Matiullah is a reluctance -mainly for domestic reasons- to be associated with such warlord-like characters, which corresponds with the political caveat that banned any form of cooperation with militias (which we will discuss in the next section). Thus, it can be concluded that while the TFU certainly practiced cultural legitimation, it did not fully embrace the concept as it had to deal with a lack of will to face the full consequences of implementing such a strategy in the murky reality of counterinsurgency warfare in Afghanistan's weblike society.

A last issue that added to the lack of will to fully embrace cultural legitimation is provided by the ambiguous attitude adopted by the Dutch government towards the Kabul government. While the TFU (assisted by the embassy in Kabul, and sometimes also by higher levels within the Dutch government) repeatedly found itself fighting the central government in order to guarantee an independent provincial administration capable of connecting to the legitimate local power-holders of Uruzgan's various societal segments, the Dutch government simultaneously strengthened the position of Hamid Karzai's government. It might be remembered that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spent €126 million on development aid, of which a significant part was channeled through the central government in Kabul (see Chapter Nine, section 9.2.2). Much to their dismay civilian officials and military officers at the grassroots levels in Uruzgan witnessed how on one side this policy enhanced Kabul's leverage over provincial matters, while on the other side they were struggling to limit the central government's interference and establish stable co-optive relationships with local power-holders. In the reality of the Uruzgan campaign this proved even more counterproductive as Jan Mohammed Khan as presidential advisor held influence over the central government's decisions on Uruzgan. An explanation for this ambivalent policy can be found in the fact that whereas the TFU adapted its strategy for establishing control at the local level in Uruzgan, the overarching development policy of the Dutch government remained focused on the ultimate goal of building a modern, centralized Afghan state.¹ The bulk of Dutch development aid was still provided according the top-down state-building rationale of the Bonn process and the ANDS, while the Afghan campaign at that time was predominantly fought at the local level and therefore focused on bottom-up state building of a more hybrid entity. Thus, on one hand the Dutch government through its TFU mission

1 See for instance Willem Vogelsang, 'Wat opmerkingen over de Nederlandse betrokkenheid in Uruzgan'.

was practicing cultural legitimation, while on the other hand its development policy still followed the logic of ‘the liberal project’ and sought to strengthen the position of the Kabul government. This fundamental contradiction in Dutch policy prevented a full acceptance of cultural legitimation and hampered its practical implementation in the field.

In the end we can conclude that the Dutch counterinsurgents of the TFU truly sought to practice cultural legitimation, but were severely hampered by the afore mentioned problems related to the adaptation process, international contradictions, and a lack of will to fully embrace the concept. Yet, we can speak of cultural legitimation as the predominant underpinning of the Dutch strategy for establishing control over the local populace in Uruzgan province. Co-option of legitimate local power-holders was the key to a tribally balanced political order that would function as a platform for a stable al-inclusive local government. It should also be mentioned here that the Afghan state’s rational/legal framework was either used to strengthen the position of co-optees (as was for instance the case with Rozi Khan’s election and the official appointment of Said Usman and Mohammed Daud as district chief), or was actively opposed in order to protect the interests of local allies (for instance the actions that led to the withdrawal of Haji Zaher Popalzai’s appointment as Deh Rawud district chief). A particular strong case in point for the importance adhered to cultural legitimation in the TFU campaign is provided by the fact that the Dutch proved willing to empower the legitimate local power-holders of the Barakzai, Achekzai, and Tokhi through non-official channels when renewed marginalization loomed as a consequence of their decision to withdraw. To sum up, the TFU campaign can be regarded as a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign that sought to obtain the people’s collaboration through cultural legitimation, albeit it encountered several difficulties and did not fully embrace the concept as the Dutch refused to engage dominant warlord-like local power-holders.

11.3 Mobilization

In modern counterinsurgency warfare the limited resources available to intervening counterinsurgents as well as the lack of competent host-nation security forces necessitate mobilization of means from within the target society. While the build up of military and police institutions -that ultimately should guarantee security on the long term- through top-down mobilization typically starts during the counterinsurgency phase, these incipient forces do not provide sufficient additional capacity for securing the population and fighting the insurgents. Consequently grass-roots mobilization that seeks to formalize existing local militias as part of the governmental security infrastructure in a specific locale has become a pivotal trait of contemporary counterinsurgency (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.2). The experiences in Iraq during the Anbar awakening and with the SOI program have revealed how the use of militias under command of legitimate local power-holders not only greatly

enhances security, but also adds to the government's legitimacy as this collaboration strengthens the ties between co-optees and the administration. In Afghanistan, however, warlord militias proved to be uncontrollable by the government, even when institutionalized as part of the official security forces. Furthermore such militias greatly contributed to 'dark side' activities of dominant local power-holders as they were regularly used for predatory actions or marginalization of competitors (and their societal segments). Therefore, contemporary counterinsurgency preferably seeks to mobilize militias at the lowest societal level, as these armed groups are more susceptible to state control. Hence the Afghan campaign after its revision emphasized the village level as the primary level for grassroots mobilization.

The TFU campaign coincided in time with the full embracement of co-option and mobilization in Iraq and the first attempts in Afghanistan to limit the influence of warlord militias and mobilize armed groups at lower societal levels. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the TFU's mobilization policy followed the pattern sketched afore and focused on sub-tribal militias, while Matiullah Khan's militia (also representing Jan Mohammed Khan) was sidelined because of its history of predatory actions and violent repression. While the Dutch were fully aware of the infamous reputation of Matiullah's Popalzai fighters and therefore soon started to reach out to less powerful sub-tribal factions, it has to be mentioned that not much was done to contain or demobilize this militia representing Uruzgan's dominant local power-holders. Attempts to limit Matiullah's involvement in the Ghilzai and Panjpai areas were thwarted by US Special Forces (as was for instance the case end 2007 in Deh Rawud) who sometimes acted against explicit Dutch orders. Furthermore Matiullah's fighters were formally institutionalized within the Afghan security apparatus and tasked with securing the Kandahar-Tirin Kot highway. Due to this position the Dutch unwillingly became dependent on 'the lord of the highway' as their logistical sub-contractors could not supply the TFU without Matiullah's support. In the end, however, it is highly unlikely whether something actually could have been done to contain this well organized and equipped local force as the task force's lack of influence was a direct consequence of the Dutch policy not to engage warlord-like local power-holders, which we have discussed already and to which we will also refer in the next section dealing with the issue of whom to co-opt. At this place we will first analyze the way the Dutch actually practiced mobilization and therefore we will focus on how the collaboration with sub-tribal militias materialized during the TFU campaign.

At first it has to be mentioned that cooperation between Dutch forces and sub-tribal militias seems a logical consequence of the sum of limited TFU troop numbers and the dynamics of the conflict in Uruzgan. The decision to make use of such armed factions, however, was not as obvious as it seems as the political strategic level in The Hague had imposed a caveat that banned any cooperation with such entities. While Western troops in the field had been learning about the perils of warlord militias and the benefits of working with lower-level militias, and most countries had accepted the necessity to work with locally armed groups as 'they are part of a strategy of local rule and state building', the Dutch government concluded

that in Afghanistan the use of militias was a formidable threat to stability on the longer term.² In The Hague's view militias could only be used when properly institutionalized (in order to minimize local influences) and subjected to 'democratic control', which once more stresses that 'the liberal project' still influenced the minds of Dutch politicians and decision-makers.³ Whereas the notion of democratic control in the 2006-2010 Afghan context seems ridiculous because of the nature of the Karzai government, the premise of institutionalization at least partly concurred with the -at that time still emerging- ideas and practice of grassroots mobilization in modern counterinsurgency campaigns, be it that the Dutch policy called for a more strict minimization of local influences. Yet, this principle of formalizing militias as part of the Afghan security apparatus offered an opportunity for the soldiers of the TFU to match the reality they encountered on the ground in Uruzgan with the reality of the honchos in The Hague, as they quickly adopted the practice of utilizing sub-tribal militias by nominally embedding them within the Afghan police forces. This explains why, despite a political caveat that prohibited cooperation with militias, Dutch soldiers cooperated with fighters of sub-tribal armed groups during the TFU campaign.

The practice of drafting militias as police auxiliaries (ANAP) commenced under TFU-1 when the first BG implemented its idea to build a local counter-organization capable of providing security to the people at the grassroots level. Assisted by Fazil, a militia commander from northern Tirin Kot district who held ties with Matiullah, the TFU quickly established a rapidly expanding self-defense force. When Fazil was killed (most probably by Matiullah as Fazil's position as a key TFU collaborator turned him into a powerful competitor) Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan became the most important local power-holder contributing to Uruzgan's auxiliary police force. Although the TFU had initially overestimated Mohammed Nabi's influence in the province, he proved a pivotal agent for reaching out to the previously marginalized Ghilzai tribes and remained a crucial participant of the ANAP program, much to the benefit of the security situation in his native area on the Deh Rafshan's west bank. Responsibility over the program itself was soon transferred to the PRT and members of the Dutch military police were deployed in order to provide the militiamen a short training in policing. In 2008 the ANAP ceased to exist and nation-wide local self-defense forces were integrated within locally operating ANP branches. This not only enhanced the connection between a significant part of Uruzgan's Ghilzai and the provincial administration, it also perfectly addressed -at least nominally- the Dutch government's prerequisite of proper institutionalization. The ANAP program, therefore, proved a valuable tool that allowed Dutch soldiers operating in the field to circumvent a rather unrealistic political caveat imposed by The Hague.

The need to mobilize local militias in order to protect the population became even more obvious as a consequence of the 2007 battle of Chora. The support of Rozi Khan's militia of Achekzai and Barakzai fighters was instrumental in defying the Taliban attack. In this

2 Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 107.

3 See, among others, Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925*, no. 221.

regard the TFU-2 and PRT staff and especially commander Van Griensven, who personally considered the use of sub-tribal militias acceptable because they were an essential part of local political culture, deserve to receive credit as they boldly acted against the caveat and joined forces with an *ad hoc* militia that was not part of the official government forces. The political and military leaders in The Hague took over Van Griensven's reasoning as they informed parliament that in order to protect Chora's population the TFU had cooperated with a militia that was an unorganized self-defense force consisting of 'home guards' operating according to 'ancient customs in (southern) Afghanistan' -one could argue that the honchos were practicing cultural legitimation in their own way.⁴ Yet, they also emphasized that there would be no structural cooperation with such informal armed groups, which indeed was the case as the Barakzai/Achekzai militia no longer was an 'informal armed group' when it was loosely institutionalized within the structure of the local government as a consequence of Rozi Khan's appointment as Chora district chief. Thereby the Barakzai and Achekzai became the TFU's key collaborators, which greatly increased Dutch influence over the populace, as this was Uruzgan's largest faction. This case demonstrates that the political caveat was less strict than it seemed, as Dutch politicians were willing to accept cooperation with militias in certain circumstances, as they were perceived to be a traditional form of self-defense.

During the remainder of the TFU campaign the militias of the Barakzai, Achekzai and Tokhi remained the most important local armed groups mobilized by the Dutch. They provided security in Chora and northern Tirin Kot district as part of the locally operating ANSF, and increased governmental control as this cooperation strengthened the connection between the respective sub-tribal leaders and the provincial administration. However, as we have seen the loss of leverage over the Afghan government at the end of the TFU campaign and the threat of a decline of the tribal balance in Uruzgan immediately after the withdrawal of their troops brought the Dutch to secure the support to their main allies through non-governmental channels; the militias of the Barakzai, Achekzai and Tokhi were awarded a contract for securing the construction of the Tirin Kot-Chora highway. With the end of the mission in sight the Dutch continued their cooperation with militias without placing them within the formal security structures of the Afghan government. Thus, the political caveat crumbled as the Dutch made an ultimate attempt to preserve the tribal balance they had so carefully restored and which was to serve as a platform for long-term stability in the province.

In the end we certainly can conclude that the TFU during its campaign successfully practiced mobilization of sub-tribal militias under the command of legitimate local power-holders and that this process not only enhanced security at the grassroots level, but also strengthened the connection between the involved societal segments and the provincial administration. Yet, just like with cultural legitimation, the full-fledged implementation of mobilization was hampered by restrictions; a political caveat that prohibited cooperation with militias unless under democratic control and strictly institutionalized rendered it seemingly impossible to establish ties with local armed groups capable of providing security

4 Tweede Kamer, *Dossier 27925, no. 272.*

at the grassroots level. Ingenuity, and a healthy dose of boldness to bend official policy, allowed the TFU's soldiers to circumvent this caveat and ultimately it was abandoned under pressure of the reality on the ground. It should again be mentioned here that whereas the Dutch task force deliberately opted not to cooperate with Matiullah's militia because of its ill reputation, it failed to take measures to contain the spoiling influence of Uruzgan's most powerful armed group. This, of course, can be linked to the lack of will to collaborate with warlord-like local power-holders as direct engagement of Matiullah was the only way to establish some influence over his well organized and equipped force. Thus, we also have to conclude at this place that while both fundamental underpinnings of a co-option strategy were successfully practiced by the TFU, the full implementation of these principles suffered from self-imposed political restrictions. If we also take into account that the most pivotal result of the TFU campaign, the restoration of Uruzgan's tribal balance, evaporated within four months after the Dutch withdrawal due to Matiullah's and Jan Mohammed's remaining influence, the application of co-option by the TFU raises serious questions about the feasibility of co-option strategy in modern counterinsurgency warfare conducted by Western countries. However, we should not forget that the TFU campaign in time coincided with the reinvention of co-option as the main tool for establishing control over the population in counterinsurgency warfare. In Afghanistan the use of co-option was only optimized after the revision of the Afghan campaign that took effect when the Dutch troops had already redeployed. Yet, it is important to obtain the insight from the TFU campaign that the implementation of co-option in order to provide an underpinning for long-term stability should not be hampered by unrealistic -from the perspective of the local situation- domestic political restrictions as this might prove counterproductive for the end goal. As fine-grained information on local circumstances is typically not available at the time political decisions on deployment of troops are made, this requires the will not only to adapt in the field, but also to adapt strategic guidelines to fit the reality at the grassroots level. Let us now delve further into the practical and political ramifications of the way the Dutch put cultural legitimation and mobilization into practice.

11.4 Whom to co-opt?

Naturally the answer to the question of whom exactly to co-opt heavily depends on the locale counterinsurgents find themselves operating in. Despite this need to tailor the choice of co-optees to local circumstances a general trend that involves a mix of dominant and lower-level local power-holders as well as governmental officials can be discerned in modern counterinsurgency warfare (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.3). Although lower-level local power-holders are the preferred agents of co-option because of their direct connection to (marginalized) societal segments, experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have revealed that it is impossible to engage such agents without also addressing dominant

local power-holders. Moreover, as such dominant agents in weblike societies typically negatively affect the state's ability to deploy an independent local administration capable of reconciling various factions, counterinsurgents should also take measures to foster this independence. Consequently, contemporary counterinsurgency typically seeks to co-opt and mitigate spoiler effects of dominant local power-holders, collaborate with local government officials in order to guarantee impartiality, and reach out to lower-level agents for appeasing alienated or marginalized societal segments. This latter group might include leaders linked to an insurgency who are ready to reconcile with the government -whether or not as a consequence of the counterinsurgent's actions. The exact composition of the mix of local power-holders and governmental officials singled out for co-option in a specific locale will typically follow from a thorough intelligence analysis of the local societal landscape and therefore contemporary counterinsurgency emphasizes the importance of gathering intelligence at the grassroots level. How do the TFU experiences correspond to this general trend?

Interestingly, the civil assessment's context analysis provided the Dutch with exactly the kind of fine-grained intelligence needed to select their co-optees. As aforementioned, however, this information, which was available to the Dutch embassy in Kabul as early as July 2006, did only percolate to the TFU after it's deployment, and even then it was difficult for military units to access. Moreover, as the TFU was gradually adapting to population-centric warfare, the importance of intelligence about the local population was at first not fully realized by most soldiers, despite the appointment of a dedicated tribal advisor. Consequently, the ties that were established with some key co-optees during the first part of the TFU campaign were not so much the result of a systematical analysis of Uruzgan's societal landscape, but resulted from incidents in which individual officers -sometimes unwittingly- took the initiative to engage legitimate local power-holders of previously marginalized or sidelined segments. Key allies such as Rozi Khan, Abdul Khaleq, and Mohammed Nabi Khan were co-opted far before the Dutch mission had gained momentum as a full-fledged counterinsurgency campaign with population-centric intelligence anchored at the task force level.

Since the start of the TFU campaign, however, it had been clear that Jan Mohammed Khan's spoiling influence had to be contained as much as possible -despite the faltering exploitation of his removal during the DTF period. If we take this as a starting point of our analysis of the TFU's choice of co-optees it is clear that while the emergence of the relationships with respectively Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan and the leaders of the Barakzai/Achekzai block might not have been the result of a systematic analysis of population-centric intelligence, those relationships were neither a coincidence as these men were Jan Mohammed's fiercest rivals in Uruzgan's political marketplace and therefore natural allies for the Dutch. Mohammed Nabi Khan, for instance, was first co-opted when BG-1 sought to establish a counter-organization, but his star within the TFU quickly rose when the staff realized that he was a leader of Uruzgan's heavily marginalized tribes of the Ghilzai

confederation who might be capable of realigning these tribesmen with the provincial government now Jan Mohammed had been sacked. Albeit the lack of proper intelligence initially led to an overestimation of Mohammed Nabi's influence, he certainly was a pivotal agent for reach out to the Ghilzai -Governor Munib (himself a Ghilzai) also deemed him the right person for this task- and in this capacity he would remain a key ally of the TFU for the rest of its campaign. With regard to the leaders of the Barakzai/Achekzai block a similar pattern -here cultural legitimation also initially followed mobilization- can be discerned as co-optive relationships with Rozi Khan and Abdul Khaleq (predominantly through his brother Malem Sadiq) emerged as a consequence of the Dutch need to rally local self-defense forces when the Taliban threatened to overrun Chora district in 2007. As the TFU suspected Jan Mohammed's involvement in the Taliban offensive in a guile attempt to increase his influence in the province, they refused to cooperate with Matiullah Khan's militia and thus ended up working with the Barakzai and Achekzai fighters under command of Rozi Khan. This paved the way for a durable connection between the TFU and Jan Mohammed's most formidable competitors, who enjoyed the respect of many people in Uruzgan and now also grew to prominence in the provincial administrative institutions. Furthermore it should be mentioned that when population-centric intelligence and KLE were embedded at the task force level after the full-fledged embracement of counterinsurgency as the TFU's campaign theme (unsuccessful) attempts were made to reach out to local power-holders still actively affiliated with the Taliban. Thus the TFU's policy to restore the tribal balance by propping up sub-tribal leaders representing previously marginalized or sidelined societal factions predominantly emerged as a consequence of the guideline to contain the influence of former governor and Popalzai powerbroker Jan Mohammed Khan. But as we have seen contemporary counterinsurgency experiences have revealed that the successful engagement of lower-level local power-holders is impossible without also addressing the dominant agents of a locale. For Uruzgan this meant that the Dutch had to answer the question of how to deal further with Jan Mohammed and his influential network.

As aforementioned the removal of Jan Mohammed Khan had certainly not ended his influence in the province. In fact his new position as presidential advisor combined with a Popalzai-dominated network of local henchmen, of which Matiullah Khan was the most prominent, rendered him sufficient options to maintain leverage over affairs at the grassroots level. Curtailing Jan Mohammed's remaining power, thus, required limiting his influence in Kabul and simultaneously addressing his allies in the province; but how to put this into practice? Although we will discuss the methods of co-option employed by the TFU in the next section, this matter deserves attention here as it touches a distinctive feature of the Dutch campaign, namely the issue of whom *not* to co-opt. Whereas it had been clear from the very beginning of the TFU campaign that Jan Mohammed's influence had to be contained in order to win the collaboration of the bulk of Uruzgan's population, it was less clear which attitude should be adopted *vis-à-vis* the former governor and his locally operating agents. This lack of clarity led to an oscillating policy of low-key engagement and disengagement

that was most visible in the case of Matiullah, but could also be observed with regard to Jan Mohammed himself. The former was initially carefully engaged by BG-1 to establish a co-optive relationship that would obtain the TFU some leverage over the commander of Uruzgan's most well-organized and equipped militia. During TFU-2 relations soured as a consequence of the Dutch refusal to support Matiullah's appointment as provincial chief of police only to be restored by TFU-3 commander Geerts who observed how US and Australian forces undermined the Dutch position by freely cooperating with him. In an effort to not only establish some influence over the most important man of the Popalzai-dominated network on the ground but also over Jan Mohammed himself, the latter was also carefully engaged on the initiative of TFU-3. With the benefit of hindsight we can state that this rapprochement was the TFU's closest attempt to establish a co-optive relationship with both Popalzai strongmen as soon afterwards it was decided not to continue this engagement; as of TFU-4 The Hague ordered that the position of Jan Mohammed and Matiullah should be weakened by isolating both strongmen which materialized in a policy of ignoring these dominant local power-holders. For the remainder of the campaign the TFU, thus, made no new attempt to establish ties with either Jan Mohammed or Matiullah as it was believed that co-optive relationships with these infamous warlord-like leaders would more harm the Dutch effort to enhance governmental control by establishing a tribally balanced political order than it would help them to contain the spoiling influences of both dominant local power-holders. As we have seen this decision not to co-opt the Popalzai leaders turned quite counter-productive as Matiullah only grew stronger, while Jan Mohammed's leverage in Kabul rendered him sufficient power to launch repeated attempts to re-establish his position by influencing the provincial administration.

With the removal of Jan Mohammed in February 2006 the Dutch launched their effort to increase the independence of Uruzgan's provincial administration even before the start of the TFU campaign. Albeit outsider Munib seemed the right person to establish an inclusive local administration by reaching out to Uruzgan's previously marginalized and sidelined factions, this new governor soon found himself caught in a precious balancing act between the local level and Kabul. While during the DTF period not much was undertaken to exploit Jan Mohammed's removal, the TFU at once began to empower Munib in order to increase his legitimacy with the local population. Yet, this was insufficient to guarantee impartiality as in 2007 it became clear that Munib had come under increased influence of Jan Mohammed in Kabul. When another outsider, Hamdam, was named as Munib's successor the TFU immediately started to closely nurture and guide this new governor. In combination with continuous Dutch support this delivered a huge boost to governmental impartiality, as the independent Hamdam by early 2010 had become a well-respected authority capable of reaching out to all factions of Uruzgan's political marketplace. A large part of this success can be attributed to the empowerment of district chiefs Mohammed Daud (and of course his father and predecessor Rozi Khan) and Said Usman. The former represented the previously sidelined Barakzai/Achekzai block and as a consequence of Dutch support and personal

actions also gained the respect of other factions, among which Mohammed Nabi Khan's *qawm*. Therefore this appointment hugely added to the inclusive character of the provincial administration. Outsider Usman fulfilled a similar role as finally managed to bridge the gap between the ill-represented Nurzai and Babozai sub-tribes of Deh Rawud district and the provincial government. Instrumental to this increase in governmental independence at the local level, however, was the effort to limit the interference of Kabul in provincial affairs. This became most evident during the fall of 2008 when an attempt by Jan Mohammed to re-establish his influence through official channels (predominantly the IDLG) was successfully thwarted through a combination of local empowerment and engagement of relevant actors in Kabul by the Dutch embassy and high-level governmental officials. Similarly, the loss of leverage over the central government in Kabul that resulted from the Dutch decision to withdraw ushered the decline of governmental independence in Uruzgan as Hamdam was suddenly recalled and replaced by Khudai Rahim, a relative of both Jan Mohammed and Matiullah. Thus, before the end of the TFU campaign the Popalzai-dominated network (which during this four years had retained considerable influence in governmental institutions, but no longer had the upper hand) again had started to dominate the local administration, spoiling the results of the Dutch effort to guarantee governmental impartiality.

In sum, it is clear that while the TFU succeeded in co-opting a mix of sub-tribal local power-holders and administrative officials capable of enhancing governmental independency, it failed to establish ties with the dominant local power-holders Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan. Although the Dutch course with regard to the former had been clear even before the start of the TFU mission, the policy concerning this warlord-like Popalzai strongman suffered from a lack of consistency as he was approached by TFU-3, only to be completely ignored for the remainder of the campaign as of TFU-4. The TFU's stance *vis-à-vis* Matiullah suffered from similar oscillations as at first Dutch soldiers took the initiative to carefully engage this local power-holder, then ignored him as a consequence of a souring relationship, consequently re-engaged him in order to mitigate his spoiling influences, and ultimately decided to ignore him despite his growing influence in the province and along the Tirin Kot-Kandahar highway. This coldshouldering of both Popalzai strongmen proved to be a fatal mistake as the campaign's overall goal of a balanced political order connected to an inclusive independent local government quickly faded when the Dutch lost their leverage in the spring of 2010 as a consequence of the announcement of the TFU's withdrawal as of August 1 that year. Ultimately the persons who were deliberately not co-opted, thus, mattered more for the results of the Dutch campaign than those who were actually co-opted.

11.5 The methods of co-option

Uruzgan's sub-tribal local leaders and governmental officials were predominantly co-opted through the use of persuasive methods. Furthermore soft coercion was used in order to

contain spoiling influences of local power-holders. The use of force, however, was restricted to irreconcilable, hostile actors, despite attempts to link targeting to the TFU's KLE program in order to allow for shifting between kinetic and non-kinetic engagement. Thus, in terms of our framework for understanding co-option, the task force's ability to shift between the full range of methods of the co-option continuum lacked the use of violent coercive methods. Consequently, the TFU's capability for co-option domination was only weakly developed, as it had to rely on soft coercion for this purpose. While this corresponds to our findings on the general trend of co-option methods in modern counterinsurgency warfare (Chapter Three, section 3.5.4), the combination of a hampering mechanism for co-option domination with the Dutch refusal to engage in co-optive relationships with Uruzgan's dominant local power-holders -as opposed to the general trend- ultimately proved disastrous for the establishment of an inclusive local administration that could serve as a platform for long-term stability. Yet, it should be noted that the TFU at least temporarily succeeded in restoring the tribal balance in the province and connecting this new political order to a more or less independent government under Governor Hamdam by use of the above mentioned co-optive methods that are typical of modern counterinsurgency warfare. In order to enhance our insight in the application of co-option in the reality of modern counterinsurgency warfare we will now analyze the way these methods were (complementary) used to establish co-optive ties with Uruzgan's sub-tribal leaders and governmental officials as well as to temporarily outmaneuver the province's dominant local power-holders.

On the coercive side of the co-option continuum the removal of local power-holders from official positions in order to curtail their access to state resources (such as money, development aid, weapons, governmental offices, *et cetera*) constituted the most direct measure employed by the Dutch. Although the sacking of Jan Mohammed Khan as provincial governor is the most notorious example of this method, it also is the least effective illustration of removal as a method for enforcing compliance; whereas this warlord-like power-holder suffered some decline of influence as a consequence of this action, his powerbase and distribution network, the Popalzai-dominated web of clients tied to him, was left unimpaired due to a lack of Dutch follow-up actions. Moreover, as aforementioned, Jan Mohammed hugely benefited from his new appointment in Kabul which, together with his personal bond with President Karzai, firmly secured his access to state resources. Only when the Dutch as part of their synchronized KLE effort took active measures to manipulate the local political marketplace and simultaneously thwarted Jan Mohammed's position as a tribal entrepreneur (which we will discuss below), he suffered a serious decline of influence and was effectively outmaneuvered for the moment. More successful was the utilization of removal *vis-à-vis* lower-level local power-holders whose power was to a huge degree connected to their official position that granted access to resources. A case in point is Barakzai sub-tribal commander and ANP officer Toor Jan who after repeated warnings was sacked as he had abused his official position to enrich himself at the expense of Mirabad's Hotak tribesmen. Negative empowerment through removal of individual lower-level local power-holders from

official positions, thus, was an effective measure that became a quintessential part of the TFU's KLE toolkit.

An indirect way of applying soft coercion was provided by manipulation of Uruzgan's political marketplace. While the Dutch policy to politically isolate Jan Mohammed and Matiullah Khan by ignoring them was as naïve as it was desperate, the afore mentioned effort to limit the spoiling interference of Kabul with Uruzgan's local affairs proved to be a rather strong tool for containing the influence of the Popalzai strongmen and their network of local supporters. With the benefit of hindsight we can even state that this feature brought the TFU temporarily co-option domination -without actually co-opting the dominant local power-holders- as both Jan Mohammed and Matiullah were pushed into the background of local politics -yet it has to be mentioned that Matiullah during this period succeeded in augmenting his powerbase due to his monopolization of access to foreign protection money. Moreover, the re-emergence of these dominant local power-holders was a direct consequence of the loss of leverage over Kabul following the Dutch decision to withdraw. As we have seen in the previous section the TFU's choice of co-optees predominantly unfolded as a consequence of the Dutch policy to disassociate themselves from the Popalzai establishment. Manipulation of the politico-societal landscape through empowerment of previously marginalized or sidelined rivals, consequently became a signature of the four-year TFU campaign. During the early stages of the campaign this led to alliances with Tokhi leader Mohammed Nabi Khan and with the Popalzai-dominated network's most formidable competitors, Rozi Khan and Abdul Khaleq of the Barakzai/Achekzai faction. However, it was only after the synchronization of all KLE efforts in 2008 that this method spawned its best results as since then it could benefit from the Dutch engagement of authorities in Kabul, which especially rendered Jan Mohammed's counter-actions ineffective. This allowed for the restoration of a tribally balanced political order connected to the provincial administration of independent Governor Hamdam during the second stage of the TFU campaign -whereas previously Governor Munib had increasingly come under Jan Mohammed's influence which thwarted the further exploitation of the TFU's alliances with the Popalzai strongmen's rivals. The combination of high level engagement of the government in Kabul with empowerment of competitors at the grassroots level in Kabul thus guaranteed effective manipulation of Uruzgan's political marketplace in order to temporarily break the dominance of the Popalzai faction and allow for the emergence of an inclusive provincial administration. As empowerment of local power-holders was a key element of this approach, we will now turn to the persuasive methods of co-option that were used to establish collaborative ties with these agents.

A first prerequisite for building stable co-optive relationships is the provision of security to co-optees (and their followers). This can be achieved through either bolstering an agent's capability for self-defense or military actions by the counterinsurgency force. In Uruzgan both methods were employed as the TFU typically allowed allied local power-holders to maintain their militias as formalized forces and even provided additional training, while

Dutch soldiers also provided protection to co-optees and the local population if the situation demanded so. Moreover, the task force's will to provide security to its allies was instrumental in establishing a foothold in Uruzgan's societal landscape as such actions during the initial phase of the campaign brought the Dutch credibility *vis-à-vis* local sub-tribal leaders. TFU-1 commander Vleugels' decision to extract Tokhi-leader and (at that time) key TFU-collaborator Mohammed Nabi Khan from the Baluchi valley in September 2006, therefore, was crucial as it immediately demonstrated the task force's commitment towards its co-optees. Of course the 2007 battle for Chora epitomized the Dutch will to stand and fight for the local population, and as such it served to establish a solid tie with the Barakzai and Achekzai majority in the province (it might be remembered that Rozi Khan afterwards confessed he had never expected that the Dutch would actually fight). Despite Rozi Khan's accidental death at the hands of Australian Special Forces in September 2008, the TFU generally succeeded in effectively securing its co-optees as for instance Mohammed Daud repeatedly echoed concerns over his personal security after the Dutch withdrawal -which would prove right. Thus, it can be concluded that the TFU successfully addressed the prerequisite of guaranteeing security in order to allow for the emergence and keeping of stable co-optive relationships with Uruzgan's sub-tribal local power-holders.

The allocation of resources such as development projects, money, military assistance and training was the most important method for forging and maintaining alliances with Uruzgan's local power-holders. This increased a sub-tribal leader's ability to address the strategies of survival of his faction's members and therefore strengthened his personal position. The necessary means were mostly provided through Dutch funds for civil-military cooperation or development aid. Yet, -as aforementioned- here a fundamental flaw of the overall Dutch policy reveal itself as the bulk of the 126 million Ministry of Foreign Affairs' budget was channeled through Kabul or used for murky 'Track 2' activities, which rendered the relatively small 4 million PRT budget the most important tool for establishing and maintaining co-optive relationships within the task force's ink spot. A better balance between those funds would have allowed for increased leverage at the grassroots level. Furthermore, there was a tremendous difference in accountability culture between the military and civilian officials; whereas the former had to overcome arduous, inflexible procedures in order to gain permission to spend money on development projects or other goods, the latter lacked such formal control. While it can be urged that the expense of government money should always be accounted for, the strict military control procedures were an unnecessary and frustrating obstacle that hampered the task force's ability to address urgent needs. Nevertheless, the TFU successfully empowered its most important allies as for instance Mohammed Nabi Khan's Surkh Murgab area and the zone of influence of the Barakzai/Achekzai block benefitted from increased access to Dutch resources. Additionally training and military support increased a local power-holder's capability to protect his people and thereby also enhanced his position. It should be mentioned that creativity of individual officials also played a large role as was for instance demonstrated by TFU-2 commander Van Griensven who, fully aware of the

local dynamics, even went as far as deliberately diverting a weapons supply from the Kabul government to Chora district. All in all, despite their internal problems, the Dutch certainly produced a credible capability for allocating resources that served to establish and maintain co-optive relationships as it provided a capability for bolstering the position of Uruzgan's sub-tribal leaders.

During the first two years of the TFU campaign the provision of security and allocation of resources were mainly used to enhance the position of the previously alienated and sidelined local power-holders of Uruzgan's Ghilzai, Achekzai and Barakzai sub-tribes. While this meant a return to prominence for the latter two communities, for the significant Ghilzai minority this finally brought some influence on Uruzgan's political marketplace. If this new tribal balance was to be consolidated and preserved, it had to be connected to an inclusive local administration that would ultimately take over from the Dutch and therefore had to be capable of maintaining co-optive ties with local power-holders representing Uruzgan's various societal factions. This materialized not only in the empowerment of co-optees in formal governmental positions such as for instance Rozi Khan's appointment as district chief, it also led to empowerment of independent governmental officials such as Governor Hamdam and Deh Rawud district chief Said Usman. In addition to immaterial support, which most importantly encompassed the Dutch lobby in Kabul, these latter cases also required establishing a capacity for dominating co-optive bargains with local power-holders in order to establish a durable level of control under authority of the local administration. TFU-5 commander Matthijssen clearly sketched the way the Dutch tackled this challenge when he explained Mirabad's Ghilzai leaders that the TFU would allocate development projects as a consequence of Governor Hamdam's decisions, and therefore the local leaders were urged to establish ties with the provincial administration. While at the provincial level this collaboration succeeded in augmenting governmental authority and control, probably the biggest success was achieved in Deh Rawud where under Said Usman an inclusive district government was established, which in addition to the old establishment, finally saw the previously ill-represented Panjpai Durrani represented in administrative affairs. The empowerment (with use of immaterial support and allocation of resources) of local power-holders and independent officials in formal government positions thusly was a pivotal method for establishing a durable connection between the new political order and the provincial administration that could serve as an underpinning for long-term stability. Yet, as already mentioned, the Dutch lost their crucial leverage when they announced their withdrawal and consequently they ended their interference with Uruzgan's socio-political environment by propping up their key allies through informal channels (i.e. the Tirin Kot-Chora road construction security contract).

This brings us to the last method employed, pure persuasion. Albeit that conducting talks with local power-holders was the essence of the daily practice of the TFU's co-option policy, the materialization of such talks in concrete actions contributing to governmental control was mostly the result of some kind of (im-)material incentive allotted during the

conversation. However, sometimes pure persuasion sufficed to make local leaders comply as it was obvious their self-interest was best served in doing so. This, for example, was the case when the TFU advised Mohammed Daud to overcome his faction's reluctance and embrace the US-Australian idea of a reconciliation dialogue with Matiullah Khan as this offered the best chance to consolidate his position. This example, however, also illustrates the limited use of pure persuasion as typically it could only be used to steer the behavior of an agent who was already subjected to a firm co-optive tie and thus it was of little relevance for establishing and maintaining a co-optive relationship.

To conclude, the temporarily success in Uruzgan was achieved by restoring the tribal balance and connecting it to an independent local administration by use of a mix of soft coercion and persuasive methods that functioned to establish co-optive relationships with Uruzgan's sub-tribal leaders, while simultaneously outmaneuvering the dominant local power-holders (for the moment). The methods used correspond with our earlier findings about the co-option continuum in modern counterinsurgency warfare, in which the use of force is excluded for establishing and maintaining co-optive relationships. Although a weak capacity to dominate co-optive bargains is inherent to this concept, the Dutch succeeded in provisionally achieving dominance when they started to manipulate the political marketplace and curtail the influence of the central government in Kabul. Surprisingly, this indirect method proved a stronger tool than removal, as it allowed the Dutch to contain spoiling influences of the dominant warlord-like local power-holders. Removal, however, was successfully used against lower-level leaders who were dependent on their official position for access to resources. Empowerment of previously marginalized and sidelined sub-tribal leaders through allocation of resources and immaterial support served to erode the power of the dominant local power-holders at the grassroots level and established a more balanced political order, while it also enhanced governmental control, as these co-optees were connected to the local administration. With regard to the latter the Dutch emphasized formal empowerment with immaterial support and through the allocation of resources as they sought to establish an inclusive government capable of maintaining co-optive relationships with local power-holders of all societal segments. However, when ultimately it became clear that the TFU's success was of an unsustainable nature, as it did not include the Popalzai strongmen, the Dutch did not refrain from informal empowerment outside governmental channels in an ultimate attempt to secure the position of their key co-optees after the task force's withdrawal. Thus, while the Dutch creatively and successfully had employed a mix of methods for co-opting sub-tribal leaders and independent governmental officials, this all appeared of a rather temporary nature due to a lack of will to fully embrace cultural legitimation which had triggered a policy not to engage in co-optive relationships with both warlord-like Popalzai strongmen Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the use of co-option during the Dutch TFU campaign in the light of our broader findings on co-option in contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns. The resulting analysis allows us to draw a final conclusion on the Uruzgan campaign as a case study of co-option in the reality of modern counterinsurgency warfare and thereby contributes to our understanding of the utility and applicability of co-option for establishing control over highly fragmented societies. In the next chapter we will combine the resulting insights with the findings of our theoretical analysis and the Aceh case in order to answer this book's central question of how counterinsurgents have co-opted local power-holders in order to attain control over the population in a weblike society. Let us now take the last step towards this answer by first formulating our definite conclusions on the Uruzgan case.

Although cultural legitimation and mobilization were originally not incorporated in the newly emerging neo-classical counterinsurgency concept, the reality on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan triggered the adoption of these two underlying principles of co-option in order to provide a stable underpinning for long-term development in these complicated weblike societies with use of limited resources (especially intervening forces) and within a reduced period of time. The first part of the Dutch Uruzgan campaign coincided in time with the groundbreaking Anbar awakening that still epitomizes the full-fledged embracement of co-option in modern counterinsurgency warfare. Moreover, in the overall Afghan campaign co-option as a tool for establishing control in counterinsurgency was only anchored after the redeployment of the TFU. Therefore, the Uruzgan case should be regarded as an early example of a co-option strategy in modern counterinsurgency. Albeit that there was an emerging awareness of the importance of local power-holders, previous experiences had revealed that the Afghan government was incapable of controlling warlord-like actors, who were often using their militias for predatory activities. Consequently, the Dutch government adopted a co-option policy that excluded such local leaders from collaboration and imposed an explicit caveat on cooperation with militias. With regard to the latter it can be stated that Dutch soldiers in the field circumvented the caveat by formalizing local armed groups as part of the official security apparatus and that Dutch politicians ultimately proved willing to accept mobilization of such groups as a means for self-defense if necessary. This not only enhanced security at the grass level, but also strengthened the connection between local power-holders and the provincial administration. Regarding cultural legitimation, the TFU mission certainly can be characterized as a population-centric campaign as, after suffering -inevitable- adaptation problems such as obtaining an appropriate intelligence picture of the societal landscape, it sought to establish control over the population by exploiting the local pattern of legitimacy and re-establishing the tribal balance. Yet, the Dutch lacked the will to fully embrace cultural legitimation as the ban on co-option with the two dominant warlord-like actors was maintained until the end of the campaign, mainly for domestic reasons. Furthermore the Dutch government adopted an ambiguous policy that on one side

emphasized a decentralized effort in Uruzgan, while on the other hand it also focused on establishing a strong central state according the agenda of ‘the liberal project’. The fact that the bulk of development aid was channeled through Kabul increased the Karzai government’s leverage and frustrated attempts to strengthen the local administration by linking it to legitimate sub-tribal leaders. Additionally, international differences thwarted the TFU’s co-option policy as US and Australian forces continued to work with the warlord-like dominant local power-holders and especially with Matiullah’s well-organized and equipped militia. In the end all these matters had a disastrous effect on the results of the TFU campaign when the Dutch as a consequence of their announced withdrawal lost their leverage over the government in Kabul, which quickly led to a re-emergence of the dominant warlord-like Popalzai strongmen with support of the US and Australian successors of the Dutch forces. Therefore, the key insight to be obtained from the way the TFU implemented cultural legitimation and mobilization is that in order to provide an underpinning for long-term stability a co-option strategy should not be hampered by unrealistic political restrictions -from the perspective of the local situation- as this might prove highly counterproductive for the end goal. This requires the will not only to adapt in the field, but also to adapt political-strategic guidelines in case the cultural legitimation and mobilization policies do not fit to local circumstance in the operational environment.

The shortcomings in the way the Dutch fulfilled the underlying principles echoed in the practical issues of co-option, especially in the matter of whom to co-opt. While the TFU succeeded in co-opting a mix of sub-tribal local power-holders and independent administrative officials, it failed to establish ties with Uruzgan’s dominant local power-holders. After an initially inconsistent course the Dutch even decided to coldshoulder these powerful players, which left them no direct influence over both warlord-like strongmen. Albeit compensated by indirect influence when the Dutch successfully managed to curtail the influence of Kabul -the Karzai government preferred to rule through personalized ties with warlord-like strongmen-, the re-emergence of both Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan after the Dutch withdrawal was inevitable. It should also be noted that the latter actor’s power saw a tremendous increase as a consequence of his monopoly on securing the TFU’s logistical supply route. *De facto* the Dutch task force thus depended on a warlord-like actor over whom they held no direct influence. With the benefit of hindsight we can conclude that it does not come as a surprise that this all rendered the so carefully constructed tribal balance unsustainable. Ultimately, therefore, in the TFU case it were not so much the successfully co-opted (and previously sidelined or marginalized) sub-tribal leaders or governmental officials who were relevant to the campaign’s outcome; what mattered more was the deliberate decision not to co-opt Uruzgan’s dominant local power-holders.

Is the Uruzgan case after all, then, a successful example of the application of co-option in order to establish control over the population in a counterinsurgency campaign? If we adopt the view that the shortcomings -most notably the lack of sustainability- of the co-option strategy can be mainly attributed to the lack of will to fully embrace cultural legitimation,

we have to conclude that despite this fundamental flaw the TFU at least temporarily managed to establish control over the population living within the task force's oil spot. This seemingly contradictory short-term success can be fully explained by the effective use of a mix of soft coercion and persuasive methods for co-opting Uruzgan's sub-tribal leaders and governmental officials and mitigating the spoiling influences of the dominant local power-holders. On the coercive side of the co-option continuum removal was effectively used against lower-level leaders whose powerbase depended on their official position. Of course removal was also used to sack Jan Mohammed, but the most effective method to curtail the influence of both Popalzai tribal entrepreneurs was provided by manipulating the local political marketplace and simultaneously containing Kabul's interference. Empowerment of before sidelined and marginalized sub-tribal leaders -notably those of the Barakzai, Achekzai, and Ghilzai- through the allocation of resources and immaterial support brought about a more balanced political order that was connected to the provincial administration. For that purpose independent governmental officials such as Governor Hamdam were empowered, and members of previously ill-represented factions were also appointed in governmental offices. While the Dutch emphasized the formalization of local power-structures by strengthening the connection between the local administration and the various sub-tribal leaders, they were also quick to convert to informal empowerment when it became clear that their attempt to establish an inclusive provincial government was doomed. Consequently, the TFU ended its campaign with an ultimate attempt to preserve the carefully established tribal balance by empowering its allies outside governmental channels. Thus, the TFU achieved its temporarily success thanks to the deployment of a mix of soft coercive and persuasive methods that effectively established co-optive ties with sub-tribal leaders and independent governmental officials, while also mitigating the influence of the dominant Popalzai strongmen for a considerable part of its campaign. Albeit successful on the short term, this created a problem for the long term, as any durable solution for stabilizing Uruzgan's societal landscape needed to incorporate both dominant local power-holders and their network. More immediately, the return of the Popalzai strongmen not only led to a loss of governmental independence, and a return to intra-factional feuding, but also triggered a violent re-emergence of the Taliban in the province. In this insecure situation former TFU co-optees who now were left without Dutch protection were vulnerable to assassination attempts by rival factions or the Taliban, as was demonstrated by the untimely death of Mohammed Daud and Malem Sadiq. Thus, the temporarily Dutch success came at a heavy prize in terms of stability, security, and even lives of former allies.

In terms of this book's framework for understanding co-option the Uruzgan campaign predominantly addressed lower-level local power-holders through an approach that emphasized persuasion (see figure 6). The sub-tribal leaders and local administrators are positioned in the lower middle of the co-option spectrum as they were well-respected authorities at the local level, but only held limited influence over larger segments of the target society and never exceeded the provincial level -contrary to tribal entrepreneurs Jan

Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan who were capable of exerting influence at the regional and even national level. The co-option continuum of the TFU ranged from soft coercion to pure persuasion, but mainly encompassed empowerment through allocation of (im-) material resources such as development aid, money, official positions, and military assistance and training. It should be mentioned, however, that one of the drivers beyond this approach was the objective to curtail the influence of the dominant local power-holders by strengthening the position of the lower-level leaders. This manipulation of the local political marketplace indeed succeeded when the Dutch started to limit Kabul's interference, which for the moment gave them a capability to mitigate the spoiling influences of the Popalzai strongmen without actually co-opting them. Yet, in the daily practice of co-option at the grassroots level empowerment constituted the main tool of the TFU's co-optive toolkit and therefore the overall emphasize clearly lies with persuasive side of the co-option continuum.

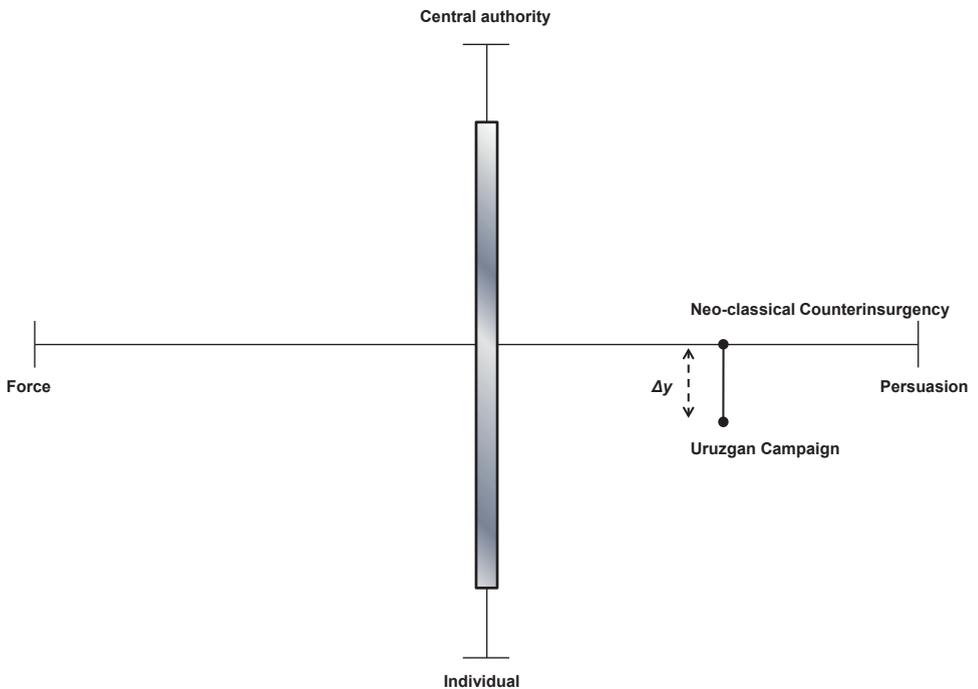


Figure 6: The Uruzgan campaign depicted in the analytical framework of co-option in weblike societies

Compared to the general trend in neo-classical counterinsurgency the Uruzgan campaign deviates in its choice of co-optees (depicted as Δy in figure 6). Whereas modern counterinsurgency warfare aims at co-opting a mix of dominant and lower-level local

power-holders as well as independent governmental officials at the grassroots level, the TFU excluded Uruzgan's dominant local power-holders. As explained this was the consequence of a political decision not to engage in co-optive relationships with warlord-like agents, which prevented a full-fledged embracement of cultural legitimation. Considering the problems with warlords in the Afghan state-building project and the fact that the Taliban in Uruzgan had once again become relevant because of Jan Mohammed's and Matiullah's misbehavior this ban on co-option with dominant local power-holders might be understandable, but simultaneously the increased awareness on the societal landscape should have triggered an adaptation of this policy as it became clear that both men still held considerable influence and *de facto* the TFU even was totally dependent on Matiullah for its logistical supplies. With the benefit of hindsight, therefore, we have concluded that it would have been better if the TFU had launched an attempt to establish direct influence over the Popalzai strongmen, but how to tackle this problem; how can modern counterinsurgents establish and control co-optive relationships with warlord-like dominant local power-holders?

Interestingly this problem touches upon the two propositions formulated at the end of part I (Chapter Three, section 3.6), namely that neo-classical counterinsurgents cannot co-opt a mix of dominant and lower local power-holders in a locale as they lack the resources for such an approach and that the limited (soft) coercive capability is insufficient for controlling co-optive relationships. The Uruzgan case has revealed that it is rather unwise to exclude dominant local power-holders from co-option as a consequence of domestic political considerations. Yet, the provisional dominance that resulted from the synchronized effort to manipulate the local political marketplace and to contain the interference of the strongmen through the Kabul government demonstrates that at least *temporarily* success can be achieved without actually co-opting dominant local power-holders and with limited (coercive) resources only. This hints at a solution as the issue at stake is how to consolidate such *temporarily* success in order to translate it into *durable* success. Therefore, the key insight that can be obtained from the Dutch Uruzgan campaign is not only that dominant local power-holders should be incorporated in any attempt to reshape the local balance of power, but even more important, that manipulation of the local political marketplace, while simultaneously diminishing a dominant local power-holder's access to state resources at the national level, requires sufficient commitment to persevere this dominance until a self-sustainable, and therefore viable political order has emerged. The Uruzgan case easily demonstrates the lack of such commitment since in the first place the Dutch withdrew before the sub-tribal leaders were capable of autonomously maintaining their position *vis-à-vis* the dominant tribal entrepreneurs, while the task force's US and Australian successors opted for a policy that favored the strongmen. Furthermore, Dutch informal empowerment beyond the TFU campaign was of a rather limited nature and with their protection gone, former co-optees were prone to assassination. Dutch interference with Uruzgan's local politics effectively ceased in October 2011 when the construction of the Tirin Kot-Chora road was completed and the road security contract of the Barakzai, Achekzai, and Ghilzai terminated;

the main Dutch co-optee, Mohammed Daud Khan, was killed before the end of that very month. Thus, in addition to lower-level local power-holders even warlord-like dominant local power-holders might be co-opted with limited means as the resources available in modern counterinsurgency campaigns suffice for establishing provisional dominance. In order to achieve a sustainable result, however, this requires either the will to extend the intervener's commitment until a sufficiently stable political order is established, or a continuation of the adopted co-option strategy by succeeding forces of a coalition partner.

Seemingly modern counterinsurgency addresses these matters as it calls for an additional long-term stabilization effort once the initial counterinsurgency campaign has provided a stable underpinning for such wider development activities. This case has illustrated that both are hard to realize in the reality of modern counterinsurgency warfare. Whereas our analysis of the Uruzgan campaign concerns an early example of co-option in modern counterinsurgency and mainly has focused on the difficulties of establishing a sufficiently stable political order at the grassroots level, the current situation in Iraq epitomizes the disastrous macro level ramifications of a faltering long-term follow-up; after a successful counterinsurgency phase the country has destabilized triggering the emergence of the Islamic State. If intervention in states with weblike societies is to succeed, Western decision makers should not only show sufficient will to establish an acceptable level of control in the various locales of such a society during the counterinsurgency phase, but also prepare for the long run -the wider stabilization phase- in order to forge a hybrid state capable of effectively controlling the grassroots level through the previously created local political orders. Only when such commitment is adopted modern counterinsurgents can successfully establish a local political order that consecutively will function as a sufficiently stable underpinning for long-term development with use of limited resources only.