

REPORT FROM KANDAHAR

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(January-2008)

Who walks around on Kandahar airfield (KAF) encounters some places with an awesome history such as 'The Last Stand' (TLS) , a large building where the last resistant Taliban after they denied an offer to surrender were blast away with a 500 pounds bomb intruding their shelter. After this, KAF was taken by the USMC in late 2001. Not far from this is the Silver Hangar located, where during Taliban regime quite a large group of educated and developed women were hanged. Taliban collected Kandahar's inhabitants by force, and showed the hanged woman to the public to create fear. The message: 'This is where you end up when you are not submitting to your husband, just stay at home and be underdeveloped. This was unconvertible for the free world. Such extreme behaviour from the past makes you think, and you want to try and understand the situation, but this is far too complex to summarize in a simple thought. A visit to Kandahar and information of task forces, especially the Dutch because of their 'Dutch Approach' gives a good picture

Heritage from recent past

After Nine-Eleven World Trade Centre attack, the Bush administration decided to hunt the responsible terrorists and they started the global war on terrorism by Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), not to strike only the terrorists but also those who were cooperative and supported them. This is exactly how it comes that NATO countries are involved in today's UN mission forming the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The world has seen how the Taliban regime welcomed and hosted the Al Qaida terrorists to form training camps from where terrorist attacks were planned in the Western world. The people were easy to recruit for support, simply because they were tired from years of wars and wanted only a stable life to survive in their daily struggles. International terrorists from Al Qaida can walk in any Arabic country but will definitely meet sooner or later the national security forces of that country which can be very much an obstacle. This is why they have a preference for places without authority such as anarchic countries, suffering from civil wars, or corrupt regimes without democratic principles as an easy goal to win them for their philosophy. For anybody to know; 'that is why we are there' to take away the soil for the radicals.

This is what sometimes is forgotten in the Western world when the people are not confronted anymore with major terrorists attacks but with casualties from their soldiers instead. Voices in society are recalling the ISAF countries in their attempts and ask for reconsidering their presence in Afghanistan. People at home should be proud of their heroes because they have a mission, you could say of high importance and this is not only the fulfilling of the Bush administration's visualisation. Within the UN mandate ISAF has other objectives; how to restore the democratic authorities, the infrastructure, the economy and to win the population for their approach. In the same time, ISAF proceeds to minimize radical elements of the Taliban who are called Opposing Military Forces (OMF) in battle. To provide a safe environment is the only thing in common between Operation Enduring Freedom, a purely US operation which is still running, and the work of ISAF. Probably this difference in approach caused the criticism of the minister Baker to the European Allies not to know how to deal lethally with the Taliban and still give them too much space.

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ISAF

ISAF is there primarily for reconstruction of the society. The life is tough in Afghanistan with hot summers and cold winters, recently hundreds of people froze to death, in a very short period 11.000 sheep were frozen to death (a disaster for the people who depend on these sheep) and people are not aware of the comfortable, sheltered life in the Western world with its morals and ethics described as civilized. In their part of the world they are strong followers of Mohammed, that is what counts and secondly those who provide them the means to make life easier will get their attention. The winner of the people's hearts will be those who compete successfully with the Taliban. Within ISAF there are Provincial Reconstructing Teams (PRT's) running development programs to meet the peoples needs in civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, bridges, roads, schools etc. Those PRT's are close operating with the fighting elements of ISAF for their own safety and those of the Afghan people. One major project is that as well as in 2007 this year 100.000 trees will be planted, and irrigation will be started up. Also large numbers saffron will be planted, a very delicate spice, to replace the growing of papaver which is used for drugs.

Since the Taliban regime were dislodged to Pakistan and in isolated mountain area during the early stage of Enduring Freedom they dare more and more to come back to torment the ISAF and the people of Afghanistan especially in the dangerous southern regions such as Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand. One must not forget that the Taliban are Pathans who are a leading majority in southeast Afghanistan and western Pakistan. You simply cannot remove all Taliban and Taliban related elements but the key to success is to let the non-radicals recognize that there is another way instead of war and commitment to the radicals and another world where peace can bring them more advantages than war. You can see that already in the North more and more local Taliban are willing to negotiate with ISAF since even them feel reluctance because of the very cruel retaliation actions on those civilians who were cooperative with the Westerners. The past learned that this concept can be very tricky also. The authority of the town Musa Qala in the province Helmand was left in the hands of local tribal chiefs after an agreement with the British troops. It turned in a Taliban/OMF town again after some time and Musa Qala had to be recaptured. When this happened, this was a glorious moment when 6-7 Chinooks accompanied by coalition Apaches and medevac Blackhawks conducted the biggest airmobile action with airborne troops since ISAF came in power. Besides NATO soldiers there was an absolute primarily role for the Afghan National Army (ANA) who recaptured the city with the purpose to stay this time !

Kandahar Air Field as a life source

Today KAF is a major base in Southern Afghanistan and a life source to all military units of ISAF in the South region with nearly 15000 people of many nationalities between its fences on an area of 40 square kilometers. Not only is KAF giving all the supplies to the camps in the outposts of Helmand and Uruzgan but is it also responsible for air coverage of the ground units to ensure their safety. In early stage of the operation some of the fighters were based at Kabul (Dutch F-16's) or Dushanbe, Tajikistan (French Mirages) but since the centre of resistance is in provinces around Kandahar the Dutch (October 2006) and French (September 2007) fighters were relocated on this airfield avoiding some 30/50 minutes transit time. Initially the Dutch F-16's could not take their forward operating location at Kandahar due to poor condition of the KAF's Soviet-era-runway. At that moment when NATO joined US Forces with the establishing of ISAF, the RAF filled the gap by stationing six and later up to seven Harriers Gr.7/9. Dutch F-16's and RAF Harriers are on Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) for 24 hours while attack helicopters are far more located to areas of tension. ISAF is organized in Regional Command North (HQ Mazar-I- Sharif), East (HQ Bagram), West (HQ Herat),

South (HQ Kandahar) and Capital (Kabul) with totally 24 PRT's operating in the first four regions to organize and carry out the reconstruction work. Aircraft in the area are practically tasked and controlled by Regional Command (RC) South while the higher authority for the whole of Afghanistan is the Combined Joint Operations Centre (CJOC) in Kabul. The combined area of Afghanistan and Iraq with supply routes and the use of naval aircraft from airplane carriers and shared assets like tanker or AEW aircraft is authorized by the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) at Al Udeid in Qatar. Today's supreme commander of ISAF is the U.S. Army General Dan K. McNeill since February 2007, he will be followed up later on in 2008 in June.

Flying units

Next to Kandahar, there are other bases housing NATO aircraft but to understand the picture better some summarize will do. The American USAF/US Army, the British RAF/AAC and the Dutch Royal Airforce are key players in Afghanistan in the air and on the ground with an additional moderate role in the air for the French and German Air Force, Italian Army and Spanish Air Force/Army. In the north from Mazar-I-Sharif the Luftwaffe is using six Tornado's for reconnaissance only, while in the west from Herat three Cougars are deployed from the Spanish Army and two air force CSAR Super Pumas. The biggest air base in Afghanistan is Bagram in the northeast and home of RC East, which acts also in support of OEF and is the main USAF supply airfield. If necessary the based F-15E of the 492nd Expeditionary Fighter Squadron (home base Lakenheath) or A-10A attack aircraft from 354th (Davis Monthan) or 442nd (Whiteman) Expeditionary Fighter Squadron will supply assistance for units in the field. At Bagram there are located a lot of helicopters from the US Army in changing quantities while switching from air base but could sometimes, depend the needs up to around 50 examples comprising CH-47, AH-64, AH-1 and UH-60 helicopters. Special aircraft have seen operation in Afghanistan such as MC-130 aircraft or AC-130 Spectre gunships. An expeditionary USAF transport force of C-17, C-5 and C-130 from different units are flying frequently on Bagram, but also flights are conducted regularly to Kabul airfield (KAIA) and frequently to Kandahar (KAF).

To assist the heavy lift needs, civilian companies are under contract to operate Antonov An-124 or IL-76 heavy freighters in the area. In the first stage Kabul is an important airfield, but coalition forces were concentrated away from Kabul and relocated at other locations in the country, leaving Kabul a civilian airport and home base of the Afghanistan Air Force. The latter was helped to re-establish and was treated with new acquisitions partly funded by US. These comprising six refurbished ex-Czech Mi-17 transports and six refurbished ex-Czech Mi-35 gunships while four An-32 transports were acquired from the Ukraine. The base saw action of many countries in the first stages of operation Enduring Freedom in the European Participating Air Forces Expeditionary Air Wing (EEAW) including Belgian, Norwegian and Danish F-16's, Turkish Black Hawk helicopters and additional Hercules aircraft for supplies, but all of these have left the country and were on temporary assignment. On the base are currently still three Italian Air Force Chinooks but the Italians are reconsidering the location and might be interested to base them on Kandahar. However the Italian Parliament issued a mandate that Italian forces can only operate from RC West. Bagram is located north of Kabul and far more suitable for U.S. operations. In support of the ISAF units are based in the Gulf like six B-1B Lancers operating from Al Udeid in Qatar and six more from Diego Garcia, the latter in use for B-52 bombers too. From Andersen AFB, Guam, B52 Stratofortress and B2 Spirit bombers can reach both Iraq and Afghanistan when this is required. Sometimes special aircraft for intelligence purpose are deploying from Bagram and U.S. Navy aircraft such as EA-6B Prowlers are based temporarily on this airfield while aircraft, which cannot return directly to their carrier in the ocean, will find a safe haven at Bagram. On Al Udeid the

366th Air Expeditionary Wing is stationed with an rapid reaction force comprising F-16's, B-1B's and two dozen KC-135 or KC-10A tankers Other aircraft operating from Al Udeid are a RAF Tristar tanker and a Nimrod AEW aircraft while sometimes an E-8C JSTARS is present for intelligence missions. Hercules aircraft from the RAF and USAF or other coalition members (the Netherlands, Australia and Canada) are flying people and load into Afghanistan from amongst others Al Udeid, also a large Canadian support base is in use. Sometimes creative solutions must be found for wide body planes such as the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) KDC-10 which is restricted to fly above Afghanistan due to lack of self defence provisions and serves in carrier role only. The RAF Tristar serves also as personnel carrier, while strategic airlift in the theatre is provide by RAF C-17's just as the USAF is providing this with the C-17 for their units. The most interesting part however is KAF itself.

Home based at KAF

KAF is housing the Dutch deployment of six F-16's and seven Harriers Gr.7 for direct close air support in improvised shelters. Recently they were supplemented by the French Air Force, bringing with them three of their Mirage F-1 and three Mirage 2000D. Two C-135F tankers are still operating in their support but not from dangerous area inside Afghanistan. On KAF also USAF aircraft are based with the 33rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron having a combined mission of Medevac and Combat Search and Rescue. Its Sikorsky HH-60G Pave Hawks are frequently involved in actions outside KAF. On the base there are some RQ/MQ-1 Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for reconnaissance missions. These UAV's can be exposed to dangerous area's for longer time providing continuously live video and even respond with two Hellfire rockets while the pilots are operating the Predator on 12000 km. distance in the U.S. The U.S. Army is deploying some 100 helicopters in Afghanistan including 50 UH-60 Medevac, 25 CH-47D Chinooks and 24 AH-64 Apache but many of them are assigned to RC East were most of the 15000 US troops are based. The U.S. Army operates also a rotation system for units on the ground but the helicopters will be replaced only on technical aspects since flying in helicopters is very expensive.

The helicopters are for normal tactical air mobility assigned to bigger units such as 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell or 18th Aviation Brigade, Fort Bragg or smaller units with special tasks like the MH-47E assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (160th SOAR), Fort Campbell. The types operating from KAF are UH-60L medevac, OH-58D Kiowa Warriors with longbow provisions, CH-47D Chinooks and AH-64 Apaches, which are in the field operating alongside RAF and Royal Netherlands Air Force Chinooks and Apaches. The Chinooks will ferry persons and cargo to the camps in the province and provide tactical air mobility, while the Apaches are most of the time based in support of the ground forces in the camp areas using these as forward locations to provide direct strike support. Within the Joint Helicopter Force Afghanistan (JHFA) eight Royal Air force Chinook HC-2 and HC-3 either from 18 (B) squadron or 27 Squadron from Odiham facilitate the air mobility task and reconnaissance together with eight examples 3 & 9 regiment Army Air Corps WAH-64 Apache Mk1's and five Lynx MK.7's. They are between Kandahar and Camp Bastion in Helmand were most of the attack helicopters are located. Together they provide an aircraft ability of 24 hours a day. The WAH-64 is unlike the American counterparts deployed with its AN/APG-78 longbow wave fire control radar (FCR) installed in a dome over the main rotor which can track up to 256 different targets at once . While the U.S. Army decided not to operate them because of lack of multiple armoured threats the British say that the longbows enables the pilot to better manage traffic in his airspace and while acting as aerial coordinators they can sweep large areas of desert terrain.

A radio modem integrated with the sensor suite allows the D-variant Apache to share targeting data with other AH-64's that do not have a line-of-sight to the target. The Royal Netherlands Air Force AH-64A Apaches, do not have Long Bow provisions but nevertheless they are a primary choice to ask for aerial support in battle conditions because the Dutch are far more experienced with the type than the British and have proved to scare the Taliban away when appearing. Six Royal Netherlands Air Force Apaches of 301 Squadron are located at Tarin Kowt in Uruzgan with two on QRA. Some five Dutch AS532U2 Cougars of 300 Squadron or 3 to 4 Chinooks from 298 Squadron deployed in a rotation system will take care of the transport work. At times, Australia contributes a couple of Chinooks to RC-South and sometimes some Mi-8 of the Afghan National Special Forces (ANSF) are seen on the ramp. The Harrier Gr. 7's belongs to the RAF joint force Harrier detachment (1 & 4 Squadron) from Cottesmore but could be manned by 800 Naval Air Squadron pilots also while support flights to KAF are mainly conducted by C-130/C-130J from 24/30/47/70 Squadron/Lyneham Transport Wing. To supplement the fixed wing fighter force three Mirage F.1 and three Mirage 2000D from 2/3 Champagne Squadron, French Expeditionary Air Group joining the UK/NL fighter force and shorten their transit time to the surroundings of KAF from 50 to 10 minutes compared with their formal deployment in Tajikistan. Support flights with tactical transports is besides the coalition Chinooks possible with a civilian hired Mi-26T and Camp Bastion or Camp Holland (Tarin Kowt) can receive the C-130H/J and even the C-17 on the desert landing strip, mind that this strip is desert-sand.....

RC South

RC-South comprises approximately 11.600 people. The command operates on the ground Task Force Kandahar (TFK) with a royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group and support elements, Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) including a Dutch mechanized battle group, Special Forces Task Group (SFTG) and an Australian reconstruction task force, Task Force Helmand (TFH) with the UK 12th mechanized brigade and a PRT including companies from Denmark and Estonia. The fourth Task Force Zabul is a battle sized combined force of Romanian infantry Battalion and American elements supporting the American PRT at Qalat. The Romanians are tasked to guard the provincial highway 1 and when hostilities occur on this route, the Americans will take care of this. The Dutch are located besides the Uruzgan provincial capital Tarin Kowt also in Dea Rawod (Camp Hadrian), the Canadian in Camp Mirage (Not far from Kandahar) while the British have Camp Bastion in the middle of the desert with thousands of troops the biggest UK military camp to be constructed since the second world war. ISAF is formed by 37 nations and in 2003 NATO assumed command of ISAF. Stage one and two saw expansion moves into the north and west of Afghanistan and while this area are now under control stage three saw expansion in Southern Afghanistan in 2006. By far this is the most difficult area to establish control because the Taliban receive support and back-up from Waziristan in Pakistan and have escape routes to that area, which are a primary subjects to locate for Apache reconnaissance missions. With these network they try to infiltrate in not controlled area in Afghanistan and extort and retaliate on villagers who insubordinate with the coalition.

This is also one of the complains of the United States that the ISAF and its European part of it do not conduct counter insurgency (COIN) to eliminate the Taliban and only stay with the tactic of dislodging the enemy while concentrating on diplomacy with the people. In the Face of the stronger growing opposing Taliban forces, this choice might be not enough sufficient. This option allows the Taliban to have area to control and so you may say the coalition is creating their life existence. This is one of the major problems and yet under discussion what to do with them since a recovery of local towns means more Taliban in the fields and mountains waiting for a new chance. Secondary problems are the supplementary foreign

warriors like Chechens, Bosnians or Jordanians related to Al Qaida, who are there to frustrate the coalition and introduced resistant techniques from out Iraq including the suicide bomber. The area is also a major supplier of papaver a flower from which opium can be derive resulting in massive drugs production, a good manner to earn money for weapons. The Taliban is controlling this market and when possible the Afghan National Army together with the coalition is destroying papaver fields but cannot do this to much without loosing the support of the people. Important is how you give the local people another source to live from and however attempts to create production of saffron when the papaver has a ten times value this will be a difficult process. Recently there has been an announcement that the production of opium from papaver has reached a record and the production is especially coming from the provinces Helmand and Uruzgan under British and Dutch authority. This indicates that outside controlled areas the Taliban are strongly in control however farmers who could be in neutral position has no other way to go, to earn there income to trade the goods in Taliban network. Mr. Jaap the Hoop Scheffer as Secretary General of NATO claims this is not a defeat due to local circumstances but simply as a result of having not enough soldiers in the area. This is waking up the ever during discussion that the allies should sent more troops.

Today all NATO countries have soldiers in Afghanistan but some big countries have soldiers in low proportions. Diplomatic offensives and the announcement than Canada will retreat when back up will not appear caused some movement. Not strange , looking at the fact that when we left Afghanistan the second week of januari, the Canadians had already lost 78 soldiers and one civilian. In this matter, France recently promised to send troops partly from other areas in Afghanistan to supplement the Canadians and Germany responds that they might consider sending land forces in South Afghanistan, but that consideration still rests on the politicians desks up til now. In the meanwhile, the United States is besides criticizing the European approach also doing attempts under OEF mandatory to frustrate Taliban infrastructure in northwest Pakistan. At this moment, KAF and RC-South are preparing for Taliban offensive actions during spring and this will lead to an increasing activity of ISAF patrolling operations.

F-16 detachment reports

Back to Kandahar are Dutch F-16's are on Ground-alert Close Air Support (G-CAS). Harry van den Dries is functioning as media officer and is happy to give us information. When air cover is required, the Dutch Air Task Force (ATF) has F-16 fighter jest on alert which can respond in a short amount of time. This coverage is up to 24 hours duty, which forces the crews to night shifts and not only the pilots but the ground crews too. Air Task Force (ATF) is in immediately coordination for these operations. Assets are dedicated to QRA or pre-planned missions, the latter can ask for continuous presence of F-16's in the air. They can be called for assistance in the whole theatre of Afghanistan and do sometimes need two or three aerial refuelling operations. For this purpose, there is continuously tanker capacity in the area. Fighters are 4-5 times faster than Apaches and can reach the whole theatre but do need refuelling and are dependable of tanker aircraft. They can carry heavier weapons than the Hellfire rockets of the Apaches like 500 pound bombs and are les vulnerable than Apaches simply because they are faster and operates from high positions.

Then they are also out of reach of small armament, which are a potent threat to operating helicopters on low altitudes. Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPAD) such as Stinger rockets or the SAM-7 are still not encountered in the area. It is believed that it is almost impossible to retain operation condition on the warheads of these rockets without sufficient technical support on the sensitive parts. The coalition tried to buy them from the people

when possible as a prevention method. With too many friendly troops in the area and the chance that fragmentation can hit the own forces the fighter pilot will choose for the 20 mm cannon but only when he is sure that there is no friendly force in target position. He will depend on the straight information of a Forward Air Controller (FAC) or Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) who is very near the target site. Targets pointed by the FAC and cleared from own forces or civilians have to be confirmed by the fighter pilot with his sensors (TV and IR) before attack. Information will be given by radio in crypto or when talking English in code terms in such a way that the man on the ground will understand. The chance the Taliban can listen by radio is very little, and when he should hear it, what can he do with this 'scrambled' before any action already took place. The crypto by the way is very frequently changed. Fighters usually operate in two-ship formation and it is possible to use 'buddy leasing' as a concept, means your fellow aircraft will point the target for you while you deliver 'the goodies'. The targeting pod enables the fighter pilot to do some Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) after 30 seconds when the dust has fallen to the ground. In long period pre-planned missions it can be hard to stay concentrated, especially at night when it is more quiet but also more demanding to do everything on NVG. Crews use to fly 1,5 hour missions in the Netherlands but in Afghanistan the missions are normally up to 3-4 hours.

The Commander Air Task Force (C-ATF) at Kandahar with verification of the Combined Joint Operations Centre in Kabul decides if the requests for operations on the ground will be shared with pre-planned air coverage and this will be given only in specific time pads. When operations become in danger and do need more back-up this will be a job to the QRA. Four F-16's are operational and two are in reserve. According Richard 'Hiker' a Dutch F-16 pilot; "we do what is necessary and this means daily sorties". An important task is the control of the road between Kandahar and Tarin Kowt which is guarded by Romanian ground-forces, and F-16's are controlling frequently on random chosen moments. Richard explains about the 'Dutch Approach' which is appreciated very much by the local inhabitants. When there is a 'troop in contact' (TIC) the aircraft will first do 'a show of presence' which implicates they try to scare the OMF away, and many times this works because OMF know what will follow. When showing presence will not help they will continue with 'show of force' by flying very low with much noise (afterburners) and even 'popping flares'. When this is not going to work to scare OMF off, the ultimate action is the use either the canon or bombs after a 'clear hot' of the JTAC. The Taliban mostly do respect air power whether this is from F-16's or Apaches. It is very thoroughly checked if friendly troops are close to the enemy, because this can indeed sometimes be just meters from eachother. In that case F-16 or Apache have to act with their cannons, effectively but carefully. In other scenario's when friendly troops are not within reach of bombs, and for instance the armoured artillery (PHZ22000) cannot do their job, bombs will be used as ultimate measure. As Richard explains about the Dutch approach, 'We come here to build up the nation, not to destroy it.'

Ground forces in the field

The Dutch Apaches were originally based on Kandahar but were relocated to Camp Holland in Tarin Kowt being Uruzgan's provincial capital to stay close to the ground forces. Patrol missions are frequently done in surrounding area, and lots of work is waiting for the PRT's. At this moment, they are in a stage to share their experience with local authorities and efforts are already made but this will be more significant to the world about some time when buildings are established. When a class is situated on a square it will not be impressive to those who expects progress in infrastructure but the class is working and un-educated are getting education. To protect new infrastructure from harm the PRT's are working closely with combat troops. More and more ISAF tries to delegate responsibilities to the Afghan National Army (ANA) because it is their country and people and they will have to do de job in

future. The army is more reliable than the police force which has been under influence of Taliban sometimes. To give the ANA soldiers more tactical know how there are special teams embedded in ANA battalions (Kandaks) called Operational Mentor And Liaison Teams (OMLT) or Embedded Training Teams (ETT) composed of 12-19 ISAF personnel depending on the type of partner unit. Minister Baker of the United States declared that the 50 OMLT's are not sufficient and warned the allies that the ANA would not be fast enough in operational position when the coalition members don't sent supplementary teams. France announced they will sent 50 trainers more to Uruzgan. Some members including Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain the UK and the US have full teams while other countries participate with a few advisors. At this very moment ISAF is needed with heavy equipment because of Taliban movements but also to start operations with the aim to secure whole territories by controlling strategic positions which was the case in the Baluchi valley. Sometimes efforts must be made because Taliban opposing forces are too prominent in the area. Such was the case in the battle of Chora, which was a major combat action between the Dutch troops from TFU and Taliban.

The battle asked for major offensive actions from the air including Dutch F-16's and Apaches but also U.S. A-10's and B-1B Lancers. Finally, the Dutch succeeded together with ANA forces leaving many Taliban casualties while others retreated in the mountains. Such encounters with positive outcome are of important psychological value to both ISAF and ANA. Nevertheless, some collateral damage occurred with lost of civilian lives by using the armoured artillery. The question exists if the Rule of Engagement (ROE) provides enough security for this. The same problem occurs when friendly fire causes casualties, which is called blue-on-blue. In fact it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish Taliban from civilians while ISAF soldiers try to use visual identification by their uniforms and by radio they are also not always out of danger. It happened before that a soldier made a mistake and put its own coordinates on the radio of the Attack plane with lethal result. What to say about 'battle stress' when fierce fighting is going on for a longer time? Saving civilians will be a first goal but when civilians are not reacting in the way they should and battle techniques do not provide cover on unforeseen reactions the situation can be quite delicate. One of the most scary aspects is that Taliban opposing forces try to disguise themselves as civilians. For instance videotapes showed that Taliban were wearing burka's to simulate they are women. In the face of such games the danger can come from everywhere. This is just one good reason not to allow Taliban enemy forces in controlled area. This controlled area must not only be the camps of ISAF and ANA but also the villages.

Apaches

Interviewing Apache pilot 'Wit-nie' learns us a lot about this highly sophisticated machine. The Apache is a mighty weapon and feared by the Taliban/OMF who are used to take the danger from the air seriously since Soviet occupation. Three nations are operating them in South Afghanistan (the US, the U.K. and the Netherlands). The Dutch supplied some information. The Apache is a heavy computerized battle helicopter with a very potent attack capability but also with very capable sensor equipment. Thanks to its 30 mm canon and rockets it is a very unwelcome appearance to an opponent. The rockets can be either four Hellfire's or two AWS pods (Area Weapon System) with 19 small rockets each. The AWS can contain two types rockets, one with point detonation and the other are Flechettes which explodes in the air and deliver 118 sub-munitions each. Normally the Apache contains 1200 shells but the Dutch have an enlargement of the fuel tank and carry only 900 shells with them. Operations in safe mode enables the Apache to stay in the air for 2.5 hours easily. To protect itself from incoming IR homing rockets it has the Apache Modular Aircraft Survivability Equipment (AMASE) providing and envelope of 360 degrees coverage around

the helicopter and uses 4 boxes to shoot flares in four directions completely automatically by sensor receiving of threats. The system is very sensitive and sometimes reflections from out of the desert cause a launch of a flare. The other sensors are and IR jammer, and Radar Warning Receiver (RWR) and Laser Warning Receiver (LWR) and there is a very capable communications suite and radar equipment. To collect information and to aim the weapons the Apache uses a Day Television (DTV) recording everything and a Forward Looking Infra Red (FLIR) for night operations. The cockpit is compatible to Night Vision Goggles. The sensors are very accurate and can look side wards enabling the helicopter to fly parallel on the target on distance and collect information with DTV or FLIR, which can be zoomed in for 130 x daytime and 50 x for FLIR. It is possible to share the data by a sort of data-link to other Apaches in the area. Apaches can FARP (Forward Armament and Refuelling Point) with UK or US sites too and are quickly to reload so operations in the area could be continued quickly and last sometimes 7 hours. The crews are trained to do this in the dark and about 40 % of the missions are conducted during night time.

Beside reconnaissance and combat assistance, there is also the work of escort transport helicopters, which are most of the time pre-planned missions. To prevent from sand the engines have an Inlet Particle Separated (IPS) which produce mini-tornadoes and blowing sand away from the engines. The engines stay remarkable good in condition, probably because of the very low humidity and can serve for 1000 hours. Also the sand do not harm the Fighter engines to much and they stay in the same way in good condition. On Kandahar there is a big Clam Shelter for fist line maintenance on fighters or helicopters. Teams are working in 12 hours shifts to stay ready whenever needed. Direct maintenance is also possible in a Sprung tent on Tareen the airfield of Tarin Kowt/Camp Holland. Apaches do provide Close Air Support (CAS) missions for the Dutch units from Tarin Kowt or Deh Rawod but also for others, for example the Canadians were helped very much in the Pashmul/Panjawi valley to free the area from OMF during operation Medusa. When Apaches operate they usually go with a buddy in a twoship formation and when OMF are in an engagement they go on the run, that is for sure.

Tactical Air Mobility

Both Cougar and Chinooks have integrated self protection systems and night vision capability. In the doors there are NATO standard FN MAG 7.62 mm guns for use in self defence. Cougars and Chinooks are on rotation but do have an important task. They are regularly active in the dark and work together with Special Forces Task Groups (SFTG) of Dutch commandoes and marines. This can be in difficult terrain and one of the dangers is the 'brown out' condition which is caused by the rotor whirling up a cloud of sand and heavily disturbs the reference for about some minutes and especially with dual landings or more pilots must be aware of what is going to happen. Mass landings were undertaken in Musa Qala when a big group of helicopters landed in a dry river escorted by Apaches and Black Hawk helicopters. They brought 400 airborne troops of the coalition and ANA to the city with US, British and Dutch Chinooks. Within the Dutch forces there is a 'can do' mentality. They won't do when it is impossible and in other cases they will try first.

Future prospects

The Dutch will stay until 2010 with the coalition. The Canadian recall for more troops will bring more forces to Kandahar and probably other NATO air forces. Taliban OMF can somehow operate strategically and were concentrating on the Canadians in Kandahar first, and then on the British in Helmand and later on the Dutch in Chora, Uruzgan. In South Afghanistan the Taliban OMF are estimated about 5000 warriors including foreign terrorists,

which cannot defeat ISAF, but neither can the coalition eliminate them without hunting them which is a difficult task in the caves and holes in the mountains. Since this is a choice not to do and concentrating on the reconstruction task it will be a task for the ANA in future. In the field are results and the process must be continued until the ANA is strong enough to control Afghanistan by itself. In Mazar-I-Sharif only 8 % of the children went to school but now more than 50 % receives education. Other progress was reached by creating substantial more health aid in Afghanistan. This is important progress but local authorities lead by President Hamid Karzai's government must regain control all over the country again. Much of the effort to success will be reached by avoiding collateral damage and holding the goodwill of the population and provide directly means to live a normal life. On the other hand, the goodwill of the people at home is also important enough to continue. When two Dutch guys were killed, the bodies could not be transported due to bad weather which was the same reason why during hostilities air coverage was not possible. In Dutch papers it was presented that there was 'no air coverage' instead of 'no air coverage possible'. This kind of journalism will do no good to the families at home. Some journalists launched the critics that ISAF has failed but this might be an understatement with wrong perception.

It's time to face some facts. NATO's chief Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer recently warned for the fact that too many troops leaving Afghanistan is a treath for any chance on success in this country. Also the American minister of Defense Robert Gates warnes during a summit in Munich that the threat of violent Islamitic extremism is real and permanent. If we do not draw a line, and contribute as neccessary, Canada will retreat 2500 soldiers for the reason that other countries do not or not enough contribute. Some countries refuse to send troops to the dangerous south-, and the east Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The extremists must be defeated in the area of the Pakistan border. But that's a very large and dangerous area. We can only be succesfull if we provide the means to do so, but not by just some countries, where others decide it might be too dangerous or do not decide at all. That would be a major threat for the existance of NATO, more or less implicating a wildcard for the terrorists.

There is no winner in Afghanistan yet but maybe tactics are to be reconsidered and special operations on Taliban OMF are needed for sure. We experienced In Afghanistan an oiled organisation with good objectives and success can come when the military- and means are there.

Kees Otten & Wim Das
